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CONSERVATION ASSESSMENT

Identification

Object: Mural, Santa Fe, NM
Identification: Joseph F. Halpin Records Center (listed in records as from plaque)
Artists: 1. Zara Kriegstein, John Sandford, Rosemary Stearns, Frederico M. Vigil, Gilbert Guzman, Cassandra Harris and David Bradley;
2. Gilbert Guzman and Frederico M. Vigil, and likely others
Subject: "This mural is intended to bridge the gap between art and people"
Description of Image: A mix of figures, landscape and objects of regional cultural and historic importance
Date: 1. 1980
2. 1990
Plaque: none on east wall
Signature: none noted
Structure: paint/stucco, on exterior masonry wall with infilled windows (plywood sub structure) and steel (est.) door

Location of Painting/Address: 404 Montezuma Avenue, eastern wall
Guadalupe Street and Montezuma Avenue, Railyard District, Santa Fe

Owner of Painting: State of New Mexico (?)
Agent: New Mexico State Museum Foundation (?)
Details of Agreement / Responsibility if known: unknown
Custodian of Painting/Community Organization: unknown

Maintenance Program: no regular program/funding or maintenance schedule apparent
Last Examined: Mark MacKenzie, Director of Conservation, New Mexico State Museums
Date and nature of repair / intervention:
removal of unstable portion of mural covering window

Location

Location details: the painted wall is located several feet from the parallel road; a parking lot is located several feet from the south edge of the painting
the southern portion of the painting is approximately 3' above ground level, with landscape rock at base, and no nearby vegetation at time of present examination;
the northern portion's bottom edge meets a raised concrete walk/platform

Security Measures: no site-specific lighting or security system noted

Potential Hazards: direct public access is possible
snow build-up and slow draining water at base of wall are possible
no protection from falling rain or snow
drip from brick coping along top edge of wall/roof is possible
splash-back from cars is unlikely

Surface coating:	None (est.)
Description:	
Condition:	minor to moderate surface dirt and grime accumulation (est.); no graffiti noted
Retouching / Repairs:	possible repairs made post second mural image application, in addition to repairs made between executions of 1980 and 1990 murals
Description:	evidence of stucco filled holes, unretouched; evidence of apparent newer paint application along bottom edge of mural where it meets with the raised concrete platform, in tan, white, and burnt sienna, not related to surrounding compositional elements

General Condition Statement

The mural as it appears at the time of examination is in poor condition, with evidence of numerous areas instability (and risk of continued loss of image layers), as well as apparent significant fading and current loss of image layers.

Records indicate that the present mural, as the image appears today, was painted in 1990 (est.), and covers a 1980 (est.) mural of a similar, but far from identical, image. No documentation has been found to indicate that the 1980 mural was ever conserved or restored prior to 1990. While there was likely fading and loss of image layers prior to the 1990 mural re-painting campaign, it is unclear whether additional portions of the image layers or underlying stucco were intentionally removed prior to application of the present-day image, such as: 1. Removal, rather than consolidation, of unstable paint and stucco layers prior to application of the smoother stucco "patches" noted above; or 2. Removal of image layers during "preparation" of the 1980 surface for application of the new (1990) painting, such as from sanding, scraping, or pressure washing. At the time of examination, nor later using stereo-binocular magnification of the mural, was there clear evidence of two distinct paint layers comprising the mural layers, a clear 1990 image layer over a 1980 image layer. For this reason, it does not appear possible to separate the 1990 image from the 1980 image and then conserve the 1980 image in situ and remove or move the 1990 image to a new primary support that could be located in another setting, such as indoors. On-site examination also indicated that the 1990 mural painting campaign, including the changes made to the 1980 compositional elements, were not confined to the stucco repairs, and may entirely (or nearly entirely) cover over an remaining 1980 mural, rather than the present mural image being comprised of a pastiche of the two painting campaigns. Based on examination, it appears clear that the 1990 work on the Halpin Building was not sufficiently limited in scope to be considered simply a repair, or restoration, of the 1980 mural.

The primary preservation concern for the present painting is the long-term weathering of the mural image and support layers. Weathering/environmental conditions appear to have caused (and will continue to cause) cracks to form in the paint and stucco layers. Apparent moisture ingress where cracks have formed is resulting in the uppermost stucco layers losing cohesion in those areas. At the same time, the paint layers have expanded and contracted in response to the environmental conditions, and ultimately have failed/cracked in response to the environmental changes (temperature and humidity). It appears that because the paint layers are tough and plastic, having strong intralayer cohesion as well as strong adhesion to the immediately underlying stucco, the paint has pulled away friable stucco beneath and curled out of plane as it contracts, in response to changing environmental conditions. Where the planar deformation has put sufficient localized stress on the paint and stucco, both layers have broken through and those pieces have fallen away (note that there were some pieces of mural stuck to the concrete platform at the time of examination). The issue of moisture appears to come from changes in relative humidity as well as from direct moisture in the form of rain and snow hitting the mural surface, and may possibly include water ingress from the roof and brick coping above, and rising damp from the ground and platform below. Weathering also appears to have caused variable movement between the infilled window structures and the surrounding masonry wall, resulting in cracking and separation around the window perimeters. Additionally, there is evidence of extensive (though somewhat uneven) fading of the paint, in response to high levels of light (visible and ultra-violet); and moderate damage and loss of paint, along mostly the lower portion of the mural which appears caused by abrasion, scratches, mechanical blows, and structural modifications. There was no evidence of interlayer flaking of paint layers noted at the time of the examination.

Guidelines for Consideration and Expectations for Future

CONSERVATION TREATMENT

If conservation of the mural is undertaken, the main goal and expectation for in-situ treatment would be for local stabilization of present insecurities in the mural as it appears today. It is probable that treatment of the weakened areas of stucco and lifting paint and stucco along existing cracks could be successfully stabilized and existing planar deformations along crack edges could be reduced significantly. In terms of aesthetic issues, loss of image layers could be filled and inpainted, to match the present condition of the surrounding paint. Furthermore, it is likely the paint layers could be coated with a resin that would saturate the paint layers, and that would incorporate a U.V. inhibitor, to provide minor protection from immediate further fading of the paint layers. The missing portion of the center window could be repaired and re-installed, or a reproduction or digital image on an appropriate support could be made and installed in its place.

However, it should be noted that the above conservation treatment is unlikely to provide long-term effectiveness, either in terms of stabilization or aesthetic presentation. Furthermore, conservation treatment would not prevent future weathering that will continue to form cracks and related instability, planar deformations, and loss; nor can conservation address the vast majority of the existing fading of the image. Also, inpainting may not continue to match the surrounding original image, as there would likely be differential fading of the various materials involved. And the results of any stable and reversible coating that would be applied to saturate paint layers and provide some U.V. protection would likely be short-term as well. Therefore, if aesthetic compromises are accepted and continued stabilization of the mural is desired, a conservation treatment plan should include both the initial treatment, as well as a long-term commitment towards preservation of the mural, with work being carried out repeatedly at regular intervals, such as on a yearly maintenance-type program.

An alternative to conservation treatment of the mural in its present location and structure, would be to remove the paint and uppermost stucco layers and window inserts (in appropriately sized portions), from the present wall support, with the goal of adhering the image to another wall (such as an interior wall) for exhibit. This treatment poses considerable risk to the mural, and would likely necessitate considerable conservation treatment after relocation as well as before. It would likely be an extremely time consuming and costly endeavor, necessitating a team of architectural and paintings conservators, architects, and engineers, as well as provisions for the alternative site for installation of the mural.

It should be clearly noted that neither of these conservation approaches can fully address important preservation issues for the mural, including the integrity of either original image or artist's aesthetic intent (such as color hues and intensities, and even readability of the image), or the originally intended location for the mural and its possible meaning and importance to the community.

In an effort to better address preservation of the mural relating to original aesthetic and location issues, other options may include approaches that combine conservation with other elements of repair, modification, or revitalization:

1. A restoration/revitalization approach, for example, could involve a collaborative team of conservators, original artists (as possible), and relevant public art care-takers and/or contemporary artists, who in addition to stabilizing insecurities and dealing with all other conservation issues, would also re-paint faded image, under the guidance of original artists and existing early images of the mural, with the goal of re-creating a mural as close to the original image as possible.
2. A long-term in-situ stabilization approach for the mural could be undertaken with or without the "restoration" described above, employing architectural conservators and engineers to create enhanced protection of the mural from environmental elements, adding an over-hanging roof or portal, for example, with or without the addition of a transparent/translucent façade, such as widows or screening a few (or several) feet from the mural face, providing much more protection from environmental elements but allowing for viewing from passersby on the street and sidewalk.

NON-CONSERVATION TREATMENT

According to national organizations such as The Getty Conservation Institute, The Canadian Association for Conservation, and local programs including the Albuquerque Public Art Program and the City of Los Angeles mural ordinance, several factors may also be considered when determining the best course of action for public outdoor murals (note that some of the information below are direct excerpts from the mentioned organizations' documents), and that it may be determined that the mural can no longer be preserved:

Expected lifetime can be a finite determination, made by many public art advocates, owners, and municipalities. Many public art programs, from the start, consider murals to be temporary, with a lifetime of approximately 10 or 20 years (though some murals have lasted in relatively good condition for well over 20 years). And while their communities may want them to last even longer, their appearance may have changed greatly from the original, causing them to lose significance to the community, or even being deemed eyesores.

The harsh outdoor environment and the changing use of public space may necessitate an approach to the preservation of murals that is different from that for a traditional artwork. Inspection, ongoing maintenance, and periodic treatment are essential to keep a mural in good condition. In cases of extremely poor condition, relocation, repainting, or deaccession of the artwork may be considered. While the longevity of a mural is largely determined by the decisions made during its planning and creation, existing murals also depend on maintaining community awareness and support. Cities with major mural programs have learned that once a mural loses its significance to a community, it may become a target for vandalism and graffiti. Unrepaired graffiti, vandalism, and damage will often attract more of the same, leading to a cycle of increasing loss.

The approach to making treatment decisions should be outlined for the mural or a city-wide conservation policy drawn up for new and existing historic public art. If such a document is made, it can provide a "roadmap" for making treatment decisions. For example, it would indicate who should be contacted (a conservator and/or artist), whether or not a committee (i.e. program administrator, artist, conservator, community members, and/or funding body) will discuss the proposed treatment options, and who will approve any proposed treatment, moving, or removal of the mural. The final decision regarding course of action to be undertaken should include input from all the various stakeholders - the owner/municipality, the community, and the original artist.

If conservation treatment is determined the desired course of action, a professional conservator should be hired to prepare a formal conservation treatment proposal and cost estimate, to include treatment steps options and an outline of the materials and procedures to be used. Any treatments carried out should be carefully documented. The treatment decisions should be recorded, and a detailed record kept of the work undertaken, the materials used, the person(s) doing the work, and the date. Before, during, and after treatment photographs should also be taken

The original artist should also be consulted prior to major treatment or alteration of the work or its context, both as a moral right and because he/she can provide detailed information on the materials, techniques, and visual characteristics of the original surface.

If it is determined that a mural is no longer viable as an artwork and that its reasonable "lifespan" or "service life" has passed, and that the preservation needs of the mural (including the integrity of the artists' intent, concept and purpose of the mural), cannot be realistically met, either practically or financially, the owner may choose to commission a new mural. Possible benefits of a new mural may include:

- Murals are an important public art form in the history of New Mexico. For centuries murals have been made by both Native Americans and Hispanics;
- Nationally and globally, and across many cultures, mural making and "street art" have become popular forms of community and self-expression;
- Appropriate murals can be large and colorful, and a valuable way to enhance the built environment, often providing a significant, positive impact with modest public investment;
- The public benefits of murals can be derived from the very process of creating them; when planned properly, the mural making process can be a valuable social/educational experience by involving young people, the disadvantaged, students, and others from the Albuquerque community, and beyond;
- Murals which deal with social, cultural and political issues are a valuable form of public education;

- Art education in local schools needs to be supported. The mural making process has many facets which lend it to a variety of educational experiences, including math, measurement, color schemes, design styles, historical and cultural exploration, and self-expression.

If a new mural is proposed, it is suggested that guidelines be made and agreed upon by all parties involved, to reflect appropriate standards for surface preparation, base coats, paint materials, U.V. shielding and weather proofing in the form of physical building elements or coatings to be used. Additionally, establishment of a regular condition assessment and maintenance program should be instituted, and a determination made pertaining to the rights responsibilities of all parties involved.



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