

# CITY OF SANTA MONICA

## MURAL CONSERVATION POLICY

### **POLICY**

Murals are intrinsically a community based art form developed by artists with the active participation of area residents. Many murals are painted by artists as a gift to their neighborhood. In Santa Monica, murals enhance blank walls and help celebrate the history and unique characteristics of the City. With regard to the conservation of these works, it is the policy of the City of Santa Monica to consult the original artist whenever possible and to favor that artist's participation in the conservation process.

### **A. Inventory**

Periodically, or at least every ten years, the Cultural Affairs Division (CAD) will update the inventory of murals in Santa Monica. The inventory will include at a minimum all murals located on City owned property or sponsored by the City. These murals will be deemed to be a part of the City's public art collection. Murals located on all public property within Santa Monica (schools, state and federal right of way, etc.), and privately owned may be included in the inventory. Signage and advertisements<sup>1</sup> may also be included.

The inventory will consist of a detailed file for each mural. The file will contain photographic documentation, information on the artist, information on the sponsor or community group (if applicable), and technical information (such as paint type, protective coatings).

### **B. Condition Report**

Upon completion of the inventory, the CAD will hire a conservator with specific expertise in assessing murals to develop a comprehensive condition report and conservation estimate for each of the murals in the City's collection.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) categorizes mural as follows: a. public murals (city sponsored, Olympic, WPA, artist initiated), b. private murals (corporate, private residence), c. school murals, d. 'pulquería' murals (ornamentation of small business), e. commercial murals (advertisements).

## C. Evaluation

Each time the inventory and condition report are updated, the Public Art Committee will hold a public hearing to review the inventory and re-evaluate all of the murals in the City Collection. Neighborhood stakeholders will be invited to the meeting and the conservator will be present to provide expert opinion to the Committee.

### 1. Criteria

The Committee will review each of the murals included in the City Collection and rank them using the criteria such as the following:

- Artistic excellence – is this mural an outstanding work of art? Was it painted by an artist of local, regional or national significance?
- Community ownership – is there an active community group interested in the conservation of the mural? Has the mural been vandalized? Has the nature and composition of the community significantly changed?
- Historical significance – is the mural an important work by a significant artist? Is it representative of specific style or period? Does the mural portray an important event?
- Appropriateness of the wall and site– is the wall currently a good candidate for a mural, one that has good visibility and that will weather well?
- Condition of the mural – is the mural in urgent need of conservation?

### 2. Conservation Recommendations

Once the Public Art Committee has ranked the murals, it is the policy of the City to care for the works in the City Collection. Each year the PAC will evaluate what level of funding is available for mural conservation projects. This will take place during the development of the Annual Work Plan.

Based upon funding availability the PAC will then review the list of murals and may recommend one or more high priority conservation projects. In developing recommendations, the PAC will take into account each mural's overall ranking, as well as the urgency of the need and the estimated cost (per the condition report).

Funding for the conservation of a mural may not become available prior to the mural reaching an extreme state of disrepair. If CAD staff estimate that a mural has become a blight on the City's Collection, they will submit it to the PAC in accordance with the deaccession process described in the Collection Maintenance Procedures.

## E. Conservation/Restoration Process

### 1. Protocol

In order to help ensure the longevity of new murals developed for the City's Collection, as well as to optimize the conservation process, CAD staff will establish a protocol for the creation of new murals as well as a standard mural conservation protocol. The protocol will be developed working with a professional conservator familiar with the specific needs of murals. The protocol for new murals will cover, at a minimum, the following:

- required wall preparation
- approved paint types
- approved protective coatings.

The conservation protocol will also address:

- notification of the artist and sponsor/community group
- cleaning
- stabilization
- restoration (the repainting of damaged or significantly faded areas)
- the application of protective coatings

### 2. Murals by Living Artists

#### a. Participation

Living artists will always be invited to participate in the project in an advisory capacity. They will also be given the option of bidding on the entire conservation project or simply a portion of project (i.e. repainting).

Once a mural has been selected as a conservation project and the budget approved, staff will contact the artist and ascertain interest in participating in the conservation project. Staff will then develop a request for proposals for the conservation project that will reflect the artist's desired level of participation in the project. The original artist will be given priority if the bid is comparable to that of other qualified respondents.

#### b. Replacement Murals

If it is determined that a mural is to be deaccessioned, the PAC may issue a request for proposals for a replacement mural on the site. The artist of the original mural will be invited to submit along with other artists interested in working at the site. An artist will be

selected to paint a new mural in accordance with the standard approval process as described in the Artist Selection Procedures.

3. Historical Murals

If the artist is no longer living or has declined to participate in the project, the City will issue a request for proposals for the project to qualified conservators. All proposals will comply with the City's adopted protocol for mural conservation.

**F. Maintenance**

1. Protocol

Working with experts familiar with the ongoing maintenance needs of murals, CAD staff will develop a standard maintenance protocol that will specify:

- how often murals in the City Collection are cleaned
- the appropriate methods of cleaning
- recommended protective coatings and application frequency

2. Partnerships

On occasion, CAD staff may seek to identify sponsors or community groups interested in maintaining specific murals according to the City's adopted protocol.

*Approved by the Santa Monica Arts Commission – 11/17/03*