

# SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS

## NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS

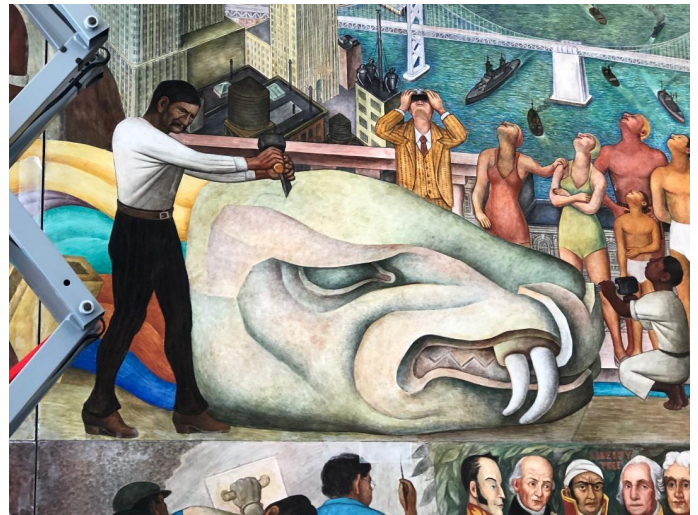
VOLUME 24, NUMBER 2

Fall 2021

### NCCSAH Returns to the Circuit with Planned Fall Tour of New Deal Murals in San Francisco

After a pandemic hiatus of almost two years, the NCCSAH has planned an exciting Fall, 2021 tour of San Francisco's splendid New Deal Era (1930s) murals. We will offer the tour on two dates – September 23 and October 14 – to accommodate the expected interest in this event.

Robert Cherny, professor emeritus of history at San Francisco State will lead the all-day bus tour. Professor Cherny has published extensively on the subject of the city's New Deal murals, including a praised biography, *Victor Arnautoff and the Politics of Art*, in addition to other notable works on San Francisco history. The murals from this era were highly controversial in their day and continue to be (for different reasons) in contemporary San Francisco.



We will begin the tour at 9:30 am at the Presidio Chapel which has a famous Arnautoff mural. There is plenty of reasonably priced all-day parking in the area of the chapel, where we will board a bus for the balance of our program.

The next stop on the tour is the famous 1931 Diego Rivera mural "The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City" at the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI). We will also view the six painted over, so called "hidden" but recently restored 1930s murals at the SFAI – and hear a fascinating story about these murals!

A short hop takes us to The Aquatic Park Bathhouse (now the San Francisco Maritime Museum). Sculptor Benny Bufano, African American artist Sargent Johnson and muralist Hilaire Hiler (who was also a jazz musician and a psychoanalyst) all contributed outstanding artworks to the building's interior. Our lunch stop will be at the nearby Hotel Argonaut's lovely courtyard. —continued on page 7

*Detail of Diego Rivera mural "Pan American Unity". Photo: Ian Berke*



Photo: San Francisco Art Institute

## San Francisco Offers a Rich Experience for Fans of New Deal Murals

San Francisco has an extraordinarily rich collection of public murals created during the 1930s, most of them funded by federal agencies as part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. Two federal programs, the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP, December 1933-April 1934) and the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration (FAP/WPA, 1935-1943) provided work-relief for unemployed artists.

Between April 1934 and mid-1935, the State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA), a state work-relief agency with federal funding, also funded work-relief for unemployed artists. The Treasury Department's Section of Sculpture and Painting, later Section of Fine Arts (Section, 1934-1943), commissioned artists through a competitive process to produce art for the many new federal buildings, especially post offices, created by other New Deal agencies, as well as some older federal buildings. Murals in public buildings were, and remain, the most visible New Deal art.

*Presidio Chapel* — The largest art project funded by SERA is the mural by Victor Arnautoff at the Presidio Chapel. The mural, 13 x 34 feet, presents the history and then-present uses of the Presidio of San Francisco, with history on the left and current Army activities on the right, divided by a statue of St. Francis in the center.

*Maritime Museum* — The building that built with city and WPA funds as part of Aquatic Cove, was originally intended as a bath-house for swimmers. Sargent Johnson carved bas relief sculptures around the main entrance on Beach Street and also created other murals here are the most abstract works of New Deal funding. Soon after the bathhouse opened, the city leased the upper part of the building to an exclusive restaurant, angering some of the WPA artists, who walked off the job. Sargent Johnson left his veranda mosaic unfinished. The Army took over the building during World War II and didn't leave until 1948. The building then became the San Francisco Maritime Museum and a Senior Center. It was transferred to the National Park Service in 1978, and underwent a major restoration about ten years ago.



now houses the Maritime Museum was Aquatic Park. The ground floor, facing as a bath-house for swimmers. Sculptures around the main entrance on Beach Street and also created other murals here are the most abstract works of New Deal funding. Soon after the bathhouse opened, the city leased the upper part of the building to an exclusive restaurant, angering some of the WPA artists, who walked off the job.

**Diego Rivera Mural** — One of the most ambitious undertakings by the city, in partnership with several New Deal agencies, was Treasure Island, created on shoals north of Yerba Buena Island. Treasure Island was intended to become the city's airport, but first it was the site of the Golden Gate International Exposition, designed in part to demonstrate that San Francisco was poised to be America's gateway to the Pacific. FAP/WPA paid many city artists to create art work on the buildings and grounds. Today we call their style "Art Deco," but at the time it was described as a fusion of Mayan, Cambodian, and other Pacific cultural influences. The Exposition had the bad fortune to open in 1939, when Europe went to war. That year proved financially disappointing, so the organizers decided to try again in 1940 with new features. A leading planner for the exposition was Timothy Pflueger, one of San Francisco's most prominent architects, lead designer for the campus then being planned for San Francisco Junior College (now City College). Pflueger took the lead in creating "Art in Action" for the 1940 exposition, in which FAP/WPA funded artists to create art in public view. The hope was that members of the public would pay to return to the exposition again and again to see the artists' progress on their works.



Section of Hilaire Hiler's lobby mural, Aquatic Park bathhouse.  
Photo SF Maritime Museum, NHP, Living New Deal web site

## The Influence of Diego Rivera

Diego Rivera, was perhaps the best known muralist in the world in the late 1920s and 1930s, based on his dramatic murals in Mexico. He produced three major works in San Francisco, two in 1930-31



and one in 1940. The works from 1930-1931 are at what was then the Stock Exchange annex, now the City Club, entitled *The Allegory of California*, and at what was then the California School of Fine Arts, now the San Francisco Art Institute, entitled *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City*. In 1940, as part of "Art in Action," Rivera created a huge mural, 22 feet high and 74 feet long, entitled *The Marriage of the Artistic Expression of the North and of the South on This Continent*, and commonly known as *Pan American Unity*. Intended for permanent installation at City College, the mural is temporarily on display at SFMOMA.

Rivera's influence can be seen in many of the murals funded by New-Deal agencies and also in a few other works created in the 1930s, notably two murals (c.1934 but recently recovered) at the San Francisco Art Institute by Frederick Olmstead and Suzanne Scheuer, both veterans of Coit Tower. There are also twelve lunettes in the SFAI library done in 1936, one each by Gordon Langdon and Fred Olmsted, two each by Ralph Stackpole, Ray Boynton, and William Hesthal, and three by Victor Arnautoff.

*Photo: Diego Rivera at work on "Pan American Unity" at GGIE. Living New Deal*


To draw the maximum attention, Pflueger recruited Diego Rivera to create a huge fresco mural--22 feet high and 74 feet long. Rivera set out to create a sweeping synthesis of the art, religion, history, politics, and technology of the Americas. He depicted himself painting what he called, "portraits of the great liberators--Washington, Jefferson, Hidalgo, Morelos, Bolivar, Lincoln, and John Brown." He included a portrait of Frida Kahlo, his wife. He commented on international politics using *grisaille* (as Arnautoff did at Washington High) to depict Stalin, Hitler, and Mussolini as three villains.

Rivera told Dorothy Puccinelli in 1940, "In the center of my mural there is a large figure--on one side it has the neck of Quetzalcoatl [and] elements from the Mexican Goddess of Earth and the God of Water. On the other side the figure is made of machinery . . . On one side of this figure there is the northern culture, on the other the southern art, the art of the emotions. . . . From the South comes the plumed serpent, from the North the conveyor belt."

Pflueger planned that Rivera's mural would be placed in the library he envisioned for City College. Other works from Art in Action were also intended for that campus and are there now. At the end of the exposition, however, Rivera's mural was put in storage. The war intervened, Pflueger died, and the library he had envisioned was never built. The mural remained in storage until 1961, when it was placed in the lobby of the City College theater. Recently restored, it is now, temporarily, at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (*see photo by Ian Berke this page*). Eventually it is to be installed in a new building at City College.

*Rincon Center* — What had been the Rincon Annex Post Office houses the largest New Deal art project by a single artist anywhere in the nation. Like all New Deal art projects in federal buildings, the Rincon Annex post office murals were commissioned by the Treasury Department. PWAP and WPA art projects had provided work relief for local artists, but



art projects for new federal buildings were assigned based on nationwide competitions. New York artist Anton Refregier spent five months preparing his proposal for the Rincon Annex. His designs suggest that he read, among other works, Ira Cross's *History of the Labor Movement in California* (1935) and the WPA Writers' Program's guide book to San Francisco (1940). World War II interrupted construction, and Refregier left the city. He returned after the war and completed the murals in 1948, making them the last New Deal art project. His murals present the history of northern California, especially San Francisco. They line the entire lobby, comprising 27 separate murals over a total of 2,574 square feet. 

—Robert Cherny, professor emeritus of history,  
San Francisco State

—Our thanks to Professor Cherny for generously providing this article for the NCCSAH newsletter and for agreeing to lead our mural tour.

For a list of significant murals in San Francisco not covered in this text, and for a guide to additional information on the subject, turn to page 5.

Additional photos, including two not on the tour, appear on page 6.

## Other Significant Murals in San Francisco

### Public Works of Art Project (December 1933-April 1934):

- »» *Coit Tower*: Twenty-five lead artists and nearly as many assistant artists depicted life in contemporary California. SERA funding (1934) permitted a few artists to complete their works. San Francisco City Guides offers regular tours of these murals. Sign up for a tour at <https://sfcityguides.org/tour/coit-tower-murals/>
- »» *John Muir Elementary School*: Three murals by David Park, entitled *Art*, *Civilization*, and *Nature*.
- »» *Laguna Honda hospital*: Four murals by Glenn Wessels, entitled *Air*, *Earth*, *Water*, and *The Professions*.
- »» *Mothers Building, San Francisco Zoo*: Two mosaic murals outside by the Bruton sisters, Esther, Helen, and Margaret; large murals depicting Noah's Ark, inside, by Dorothy Puccinelli and Helen Forbes, begun with PWAP funds and completed in 1936 with FAP/WPA funding.
- »» *Theodore Roosevelt Middle School*: Two pastoral scenes by Nelson Poole, completed in 1934 with SERA funding, and one depiction of school by George Wilson Walker.

### State Emergency Relief Administration (1934):

- »» *Alemany Health Center*: Two murals by Bernard Zakheim, *Community Spirit* and *Growth*.

### Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration (1935-1943):

- »» *Beach Chalet* (1936-1937): Large murals on city life and mosaics by Lucien Labaudt; carvings in wood of under sea life by Michael von Meyer. NCCSAH toured the Beach Chalet murals in April 2019.
- »» *City College* (1940): several works created by various artists during the 1940 "Art in Action" program of the Golden Gate International Exposition, in which WPA funds supported artists creating works in public view.
- »» *City Hall* (1938): a photo mural by William Abbenseth and Ben Cunningham, *The Modern City Framed by Architectural Elements of the Pre-Fire Era*.
- »» *George Washington High School* (1935-1936, 1940-1942): Library murals by Lucien Labaudt, Gordon Langdon, and Ralph Stackpole; thirteen murals at the primary entrance by Victor Arnautoff, on the life and times of George Washington: bas relief sculptures on the exterior by Robert Boardman Howard (all 1935-1936); bas relief frieze on the athletic field by Sargent Johnson (1940-1942). An NCCSAH tour visited the GWHS murals in April 2019.
- »» *Mission High School* (1936-1937): two large murals on Mission Dolores by Edith Hamlin; a third mural by Hamlin was removed in the 1970s.
- »» *Former San Francisco State College Campus/former UC Extension Campus* (1937): works by five artists, including a mosaic mural by Maxine Albro, murals by Hebe Daum Stackpole, John Gerrity, Jack Moxom, and Reuben Kadish; only one over a door by Moxom and the complete mural by Kadish survive.
- »» *UCSF*: Two sets of murals by Bernard Zakheim, one consisting of two murals depicting *Rational Medicine* and *Superstitious Medicine* (1935), the other consisting of ten murals depicting *The History of Medicine in California* (1936-1939).

## For more information

### Websites:

Chris VerPlanck and Donna Graves, *San Francisco New Deal Historical Context Statement: Rebuilding the City, 1933-1943* (forthcoming on the SF Planning Department website).  
*The Living New Deal*, <http://livingnewdeal.org> (317 sites in San Francisco—all projects, not just art).  
*The New Deal Art Registry*, <http://www.newdealartregistry.org> (26 sites in San Francisco).

### Publications:

Living New Deal Project, *Guide to the Art and Architecture of the New Deal: San Francisco* (2015).  
Nicholas A. Veronica et al., *Depression-Era Murals of the Bay Area* (2014).  
Robert W. Cherny, *Victor Arnautoff and the Politics of Art* (2017).  
\_\_\_\_\_, "The Controversy at Coit Tower, 1934," *The Argonaut*, vol. 28 (2017).  
\_\_\_\_\_, "San Francisco's New-Deal Murals in Long-term Perspective: Controversy, Neglect, and Restoration," *California History*, vol. 97 (2020).  
Sharon Anderson, "San Francisco Art Institute awarded grant to restore lost frescoes", *Marina Times*, January 2020

## Photo Gallery: Selected Images of New Deal Era Murals, San Francisco



Mural depicting marble workers, by Frederick Olmstead, Jr., found in 2019 under a layer of whitewash at the SF Art Institute and recently restored. Photo: Jeff Gunderson, sfai librarian and archivist



Noah and His Ark, Dorothy Puccinelli. Mother's Building, S.F. Zoo. Photo (detail): John Tibbetts. [newdealartregistry.org](http://newdealartregistry.org)



History of Medicine in California, Bernard Zakheim. Toland Hall/ UCSF Medical Center. Photo: Barbara Bernstein. [newdealartregistry.org](http://newdealartregistry.org)



Peacetime Activities of the Army, lead artist Victor Arnautoff. Presidio Chapel. Photo (detail): John Tibbetts. [newdealartregistry.org](http://newdealartregistry.org)

## Mural Tour Schedule for September 23 or October 14

### 9:30 - 10:00 Presidio Chapel \*

10:00 - 10:15 - Travel to SFAI

### 10:15 - 11:15 SFAI tour

11:15 - 11:30 - Travel to Maritime Museum

### 11:30 - 12:00 Maritime Museum

15 minutes - Travel to lunch location

**12:15 - 1:15 Lunch** A place we could have lunch is the Argonaut Hotel. One block from the Maritime Museum. We had a lunch event there a number of years ago and it was very nice

1:15 - 1:30 - Travel to SF MOMA (Howard Street entrance opens directly to the mural)

### 1:30 - 2:15 SF MOMA

2:15 - 2:30 - Travel to Rincon Center

### 2:30 - 3:30 Rincon Center

**Here is an afternoon itinerary if we get behind schedule (probably likely)**

12:15 - 1:30 Lunch

1:30 - 1:45 - Travel to SF MOMA

### 1:45 - 2:30 SF MOMA

5 - 10 minutes - Travel to Rincon Center

### 2:45 - 3:45 Rincon Center

**\* Important—Please arrive at the Presidio Chapel by 9:15 in order to allow sufficient time to verify proof of vaccination of each person on the tour against Covid-19.**

—Continued from page 1

After lunch we head downtown to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, temporary home of the world-famous “Pan Pacific Unity” by Diego Rivera. At seventy-four feet long, this truly monumental 1940 mural is considered one of the greatest works of art ever created in San Francisco. It was recently moved to the museum from San Francisco City College.

The day concludes with the fascinating murals at Rincon Annex, the largest New Deal era art project by a single artist. The bus will return to the Presidio Chapel by approximately 4 pm. The tour fee (including lunch at the Argonaut Hotel) is \$50 for NCCSAH members and \$80 for non-members (includes annual NCCSAH membership).

### Safety Protocols

Everyone on the tour will need to be fully vaccinated and wear a mask. Proof of vaccination (second shot at least two weeks before the tour) will be checked before we have access to the San Francisco Art Institute. Lunch will be in an outdoor courtyard at the Argonaut Hotel.

## San Francisco's Burial Grounds

An article in the fall 2019 issue of this newsletter, “Digging into the Past: San Francisco Cemeteries on the Move,” made brief reference to the relocation, in 1871, of remains from the Yerba Buena Cemetery (bounded by Market, McAllister and Larkin streets) to the Golden Gate Cemetery (today's Lincoln Park).

The current issue of SF Heritage's newsletter (July/September 2021), gives a much more detailed account of the “new” City Cemetery in announcing an effort to designate the site, now enjoyed by golfers, as San Francisco's first archaeological landmark.

Have a look, at [sfheritage.org](http://sfheritage.org).

## Events Calendar

### California Historical Society

Exhibit: *San Francisco Photographs by Minor White*.  
Reserve tickets online: <https://www.californiahistoricalsociety.org>

### San Francisco Heritage

Docent-led tours: Haas-Lilienthal House, every Saturday and Sunday at 12 noon 1:00 pm & 2:00 pm. Reservations not required except for groups of 10 or more. Masks required. For more information: [plarson@sfheritage.org](mailto:plarson@sfheritage.org). More information: [sfheritage.org](http://sfheritage.org).

### Oakland Heritage Alliance

For schedule of walking tours and online lectures, go to [oaklandheritage.org](http://oaklandheritage.org)

### Berkeley Historical Society

Exhibit both on site and online, through October 10: *African Americans in Berkeley's History and Legacy*. Schedule of Fall 2021 Walking Tours [berkeleyhistoricalsociety.org](http://berkeleyhistoricalsociety.org)

### National Trust for Historic Preservation

Virtual National Preservation Conference: *PastForward 2021*. November 2 - 5, 2021. Register now: [support.savingplaces.org](http://support.savingplaces.org)

### 16th International Docomomo Conference

**Tokyo Japan 2020+1 Inheritable Resilience: Sharing Values of Global Modernities,** *a virtual event*. August 29-September 02, 2021. For updates on events: [docomomo-us.org/events](http://docomomo-us.org/events)

### San Francisco Historical Society

Walking tours, free but reservations required. For information go to [sfhistory.org](http://sfhistory.org)

### Joe Goode Performance Group & SF Heritage

September 1 - 12, 2021. World Premiere performance of "Time of Change", a site-specific work featuring Doolan-Larson Residence and Storefronts at Haight & Ashbury. Tickets: [joegoode.org](http://joegoode.org)

### AIASF & Center for Architecture + Design

September 10 - 30, 2021. 18th Annual Architecture + the City Festival. Registration now open. [archandcity.org](http://archandcity.org)

## Registration: Tour of New Deal Murals

[please print]

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Select one date: September 23 \_\_\_\_\_  
October 14 \_\_\_\_\_

Number of places on the tour:

\_\_\_\_\_ Members @ \$50 = \$\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Non-members @ \$80 = \$\_\_\_\_\_

Cost includes lunch. Price for non-members includes one-year NCCSAH membership

Total enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to NCCSAH and mail to:

Ward Hill  
NCCSAH New Deal Murals Tour  
3124 Octavia Street, #102  
San Francisco, CA 94123

For more information please contact  
Ward Hill at [whill@pacbell.net](mailto:whill@pacbell.net)

**Each tour group is limited to 15 people, and all participants will be required to show proof of vaccination before reservation is confirmed and wear masks during the program.**

## SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS

The mission of the NCCSAH is to promote the study and discussion of our region's architectural history and its related fields, visit significant works of architecture, and increase public awareness and appreciation of our historic built environment. Membership is open to anyone interested in architectural history and its related fields.

### NCCCSAH Officers

President, Richard Brandi  
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**To become a member of the Northern California  
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or to renew your membership return this form  
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Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

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City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_

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NCCSAH is a 501(c)(3) organization

### Membership Dues

Is your membership current?  
At \$30 per year,  
NCCSAH membership is still a great deal.

### NCCSAH Web Site

*To view back issues of the newsletter, go to  
[nccsah.org](http://nccsah.org)*