

PARK LABREA NEWS BEVERLY PRESS

Citywide Funds to Provide Art Showcase

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Beverly Press says:

A Citywide Mural Program is set to brighten the streets of Los Angeles and boost community pride and engagement through public art. The city's department of cultural affairs (DCA) has received \$750,000 to restore city-sponsored fine art murals and produce new murals through June 2016.



Many of the murals in Los Angeles sat dormant and unkempt for 10 years due to a moratorium on billboards and advertisements. According to Felicia Filer, director of public art at DCA, murals got caught up in the legislation and their permits were frozen along with sign permits. In 2013, a citywide mural ordinance passed, allowing murals on private property to be registered with the city. The DCA

created a budget, guidelines, process and an expenditure plan to establish the Citywide Mural Program.

“There are certain parts of history that aren’t told in text books or films, and some murals are a place to talk about the history that happened in a particular community, which is important,” Filer said. “Murals represent cultural presence in communities that don’t have a deeply developed art infrastructure.”

Eleven non-city sponsored murals deemed important to local communities in Los Angeles will be restored, thanks to \$400,000 earmarked for the conservation process. After meeting with 10 mural advocacy organizations to determine which murals have historic priority, the DCA came up with a list of recommendations to propose to Los Angeles City Council. The murals were selected from a range of multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-faith communities in an effort to tell the stories of the people who live there.

The Mural Conservancy of Los Angeles is one of DCA’s award recipients, and will preserve two historically significant murals. The Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), which specializes in community mural production, received funding from DCA to preserve nine murals in the area.

“As part of SPARC’s mural conservation process, they look for ways to reengage artwork

existing in the community to educate new generations about the history they represent,” Filer said. One of the murals that SPARC has already restored thanks to the Citywide Mural Program is “Not Somewhere Else, But Here,” located on the side of the National Council of Jewish Women building at 543 N. Fairfax Ave. In 1993, young artist Daryl Wells was commissioned by the National Council of Jewish Women to paint the mural, which depicts influential and prominent women of varied ethnic backgrounds sharing struggles through the act of breaking bread together.

By 2014, “Not Somewhere Else, But Here” was beginning to show signs of oxidation from extreme weather, causing a white, powder-like film to blot out bright red and purple paint. The National Council of Jewish Women contacted SPARC for assistance in preserving the mural. SPARC representatives were able use solvents to restore the pigment, and Wells, with the help of graduate students from UCLA, updated the details of her artwork.

“It is moving to see artists [at different times in their lives] come back to work on these public art pieces and get a new, vibrant sense of life seeing their work restored. They provide the general public with these amazing gifts that show history and symbols of inspiration,” said Carlos Rogel, project manager of Citywide Mural Program at SPARC.

In addition to restoring weather-damaged murals, the program also focuses on removing tags from any public artworks that have been defaced. In several instances, they are able to cover the murals with a wax-like substance that can be melted away and reapplied if the mural is defaced.

The Citywide Mural Program is also dividing \$300,000 in one-time funding to each of the 15 city council offices to either conserve historic fine art murals or commission new murals. In either option, the council district will be responsible for incorporating detailed documentation and educational initiatives to engage the public.

“The council wanted the option to be able to identify different priorities in each council district – whether it would benefit their community to fund mural tours, restorations that children could be involved in, or creating documentation of existing murals through film,” Filer said. “It will be kind of like field research for us and will provide a range of information that will inform our next iteration of the program.”

DCA will meet with all council districts throughout the next month to discuss possible historic murals to conserve, or to propose new projects that are tailored to the demographic of each community.

Councilman Paul Koretz, 5th District, said in addition to “Not Somewhere Else, But Here,” he is interested in discussing the preservation of murals on the sides of Workmen’s Circle Cultural Center on South Robertson Boulevard and Canter’s Deli on North Fairfax Avenue.

“The murals in commercial areas that have a significant tie into the neighborhood are important for us to preserve,” Koretz said. “They emphasize history.” The Citywide Mural Program will utilize the remaining \$50,000 to fund initiative costs including development, execution and project-related expenditures.