



CITY OF  
**PALO  
ALTO**

## City of Palo Alto Staff Report to Public Art Commission

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**November 16, 2017**

Agenda Item 3

### **Recommendation:**

Staff recommends that the Public Art Commission approves deaccession of *Go Mama* by Marta Thoma, located at the corner of California Avenue and Ash street.

### **Summary:**

Staff recommends that the Public Art Commission approves deaccession for Marta Thoma's *Go Mama*, located on California Avenue and Ash, based on the findings of the evaluation process and on the process and conditions outlined in the City's Deaccession of Artwork Policy 1-59/CSD (Attachment 1) adopted in December 2016.

### **Background:**

In 1999 Marta Thoma was commissioned by the City to prepare, construct and install a sculpture titled *Go Mama* for \$15,000. This commission funding included generous donations from California Avenue merchants. Among the contributors to the sculpture were Leaf & Petal, Country Sun, Language Pacifica, Alhouse King Realty, Hotel California, Alhouse-Denton, and Keeble and Shuchat. The California Avenue business group known as CAADA at the time participated in the artwork selection process and supported the transformation of California Avenue into the "Avenue of the Arts".

The artwork on California Avenue and Ash street was sited on a former planter that the Public Art Program filled with concrete to make the foundation for the artwork. At the time that the artwork was installed, there were low bushes and plants around the base that prevented visitors from accessing the base of the sculpture and touching it. When the new California Avenue streetscape project was completed in 2015 and the pedestrian sidewalk widened, the sidewalk area was shifted to surround the artwork, removing the plantings and making the sculpture more accessible to the public.

Marta Thoma (now Marta Thoma Hall) has several other public artworks on long term display. Thoma's "Brain Works," a 30-foot tall sculpture at Bestor Art Park in San Jose was installed in 2014. Thoma Hall's "Brain Works" is only one of her works that uses recycled materials. Other Thoma Hall installations include: "Cosmos Clock" for Florida State University, "Water Source" for the Water Park in Goodyear, Arizona, "Inside Out," at Vertigo Gallery in London, "Stretch" at the Costa Rica Museum of Art, and "Journey of a Bottle" in the Walnut Creek Main Library. The artist was in residence at Recology 1994 and

was part of the Cubberley Artist Studio Program. She has had two temporary installations in Palo Alto and has one other permanently sited artwork, *Rrrun*, which was installed in 2005. Thoma Hall served on the Public Art Commission in 2001-2002. Staff has requested an updated biography from the artist.

### **Maintenance History:**

The artwork has received fairly regular waxing treatments over the years. However, the increased physical interaction from the public touching and pushing the piece has deteriorated the surface quite a bit and the artwork is in need of another cleaning and wax protective coating. The base has constant food stains on it due to people eating on the base, especially during the farmer's market. The small cast leaves have detached from the base. Staff has received calls of concern from the public regarding the stability of the piece once every six to nine months. Because the piece has only one attachment point and has the bulk of the weight and massing up high, the piece has always wiggled. Staff has sent art handlers out there to fill in the material around the base of the foot to help stabilize her, but it has not done as much to stabilize the piece.

2000 – Installation of Footing (concrete base and rebar) for the sculpture: \$1,050

2001 – Fabrication and installation of a plaque - \$220

2006 - Wax and general cleaning by the art crew

2011 – Hired Marta Thoma to treat and repaint the face \$500

2013 – Wax and general cleaning by the art crew

2015 - Wax and general cleaning by the art crew

### **Discussion:**

ARG evaluated the artwork in 2015 and identified it as one of the high priority artworks for the Public Art Program to address. Their report (Attachment 2) calls out a lot of staining and discoloration, with a treatment estimate of \$3,250 to stabilize the surface of the sculpture, but that will not address the overall stability of the sculpture. During farmers markets in particular, there are groups of people seated on the base, and frequently children are standing on the base and interacting with the sculpture. The artwork is not stable enough in the current location to withstand so much physical contact. In conversations with ARG, they asked if fencing the sculpture might be an option to keep the public away from it.

Our Public Art Master Planning consultants had the following to write about “Go Mama”:

*Go Mama:* This artwork is a figure balanced on one foot. Artworks of this type should not be displayed in an outdoor location because of their structural vulnerability. This specific artwork is top-heavy and balanced on one point on a low pedestal. Its condition has been assessed by ARG, which has proposed conservation and fencing surrounding the sculpture. Because fencing

the sculpture will compromise both the streetscape and the work; and because the artwork is poorly fabricated, it should be considered for deaccession.

Of the considerations for deaccession outlined in the policy, staff recommends deaccession for the following considerations:

- The condition of the artwork cannot be reasonably guaranteed.
- The artwork's structural condition may pose a threat to public safety.
- The artwork has faults in the design and repair may be impractical or unfeasible.
- Significant changes to the design of the site have occurred which affect the integrity of the artwork.
- No suitable site is available for relocation or exhibition.

Staff would like to highlight that *Go Mama* is one of the most often discussed works of art in the collection, both with positive and negative comments. Reasons for deaccession do not include aesthetic taste or public opinion.

#### **Updates since the PAC August 2017 Meeting:**

In August 2017, acting in accordance with the guidelines and procedures of the City's Deaccession of Artwork Policy 1-59/CSD, staff submitted a Deaccession Request Report (Attachment 4) to the PAC. The staff report provided the background information for *Go Mama*, description of maintenance and repairs and associated costs, condition reports provided by ARG and Public Art Master Plan consultants, and a list of considerations for deaccessioning. Public Art Commission unanimously approved that staff proceed with a deaccession evaluation process.

Guided by the process specified in the Deaccession of Artwork Policy, staff reached out to artist Marta Thoma Hall about the Commission's decision and asked the artist to provide further information on the footing details to further evaluate the structural integrity of *Go Mama* in order to identify potential retrofitting options which would inform Commission's decision to either retrofit the sculpture to withstand the amount of physical interaction it receives, or remove the artwork from its current site on California Avenue.

Thoma Hall contacted staff with a proposal to refurbish the sculpture and enhance its stability (Attachment 5). In the initial proposal, submitted in October 2017, the artist made preliminary suggestions to "add one or more steel bars, drilled and welded to the foot and base, to buttress the sculpture and prevent side to side motion" and, once the sculpture is bolstered, pave the "pedestal surface with a river rock treatment". As provided in the initial proposal, the artist is in the process of preparing a final report and recommendations in consultation with Berkeley-based Artworks Foundry where the artwork had been created in 2000. Staff reviewed the submitted proposal in consultation with the City's structural engineering team. It was, however, determined that further structural details are needed in order to fully evaluate the current structural condition of the piece and identify a feasible

solution to reinforce the footing of the sculpture. In particular, the foundry was unable to provide further information on the structural stability and vulnerabilities of *Go Mama's* back leg, a plan and cost estimates for the potential stabilization of the piece, as well as an estimate on the value of the bronze. These details are necessary to understand the cost implications and feasibility of potential retrofitting work for the sculpture. The foundry also informed staff that no original structural plans or details are retained on file.

Staff and Public Art Commissioners made public announcements inviting the members of the public to submit input regarding the City's consideration to deaccession the artwork.

#### **Updated Timeline and Considerations:**

Should the Public Art Commission vote to approve the deaccession of *Go Mama*, staff will coordinate the removal of the artwork, in accordance with the City policy. There are no formal appraisals for the artwork and staff could not locate any auction records for the artist. Should the artist choose to take the artwork back, the policy states that the artwork may be returned to the artist at their expense. Otherwise, the Public Art Program may sell the artwork or need to allocate funds for the removal of the artwork in accordance with the policy.

#### **Attachments:**

- 1- Deaccession policy
- 2- ARG report on Go Mama
- 3- Marta Thoma's CV
- 4- Deaccession Request Report
- 5- Refurbishing proposal by Marta Thoma Hall
- 6- Minutes chart with records –PAC meetings 1999 - 2017



## **CITY OF PALO ALTO PUBLIC ART PROGRAM DEACCESSION OF ARTWORK POLICY**

### **PUBLIC ART PROGRAM VISION**

Public art reflects Palo Alto's people, diverse neighborhoods, the innovative and global character of its businesses and academic institutions, and the beauty of its natural environment.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Public Art Program (PAP) maintains the City of Palo Alto's (City) collection of Artwork for the benefit of Palo Alto citizens. Removing an Artwork from the collection (deaccessioning) is a sensitive matter and should be managed according to clear criteria. The policies outlined below are subject to periodic review by the PAP; from time to time, with the input of the Public Art Commission (PAC), the PAP may update this policy to include additional guidelines or procedures as it deems appropriate. Except in the case of a safety emergency, no Artwork in the collection will be deaccessioned until the policies set forth below have been observed. This policy applies to permanent Artworks in the City's collection; it is not intended to apply to "Temporary Artworks," which are the subject of a separate policy. This policy shall govern removal, disposal and destruction of Artworks; the City's Surplus Property Disposal & Destruction Policy (Policy and Procedure 1-49/ASD) shall not apply.

### **POLICY**

1. Any proposal for removal or destruction of an Artwork shall be submitted to PAP staff and reviewed by the PAC according to the policies and procedures contained herein; review shall be deliberate and independent of political pressures, fluctuations in artistic taste, popularity, and public opinion.
2. Deaccession shall be a seldom-employed action that is taken only after issues such as Artists' rights, public benefit, censorship, copyrights, and legal obligations have been carefully considered. The final decision with respect to deaccession of Artworks owned by the City shall rest with the PAP Director upon approval by the PAC.
3. At regular intervals, the City's Artwork collection shall be evaluated by the PAP and reported to the PAC to determine the condition of each Artwork and determine whether there is Artwork recommended for deaccession.

### **DEFINITIONS**

For purposes of this Policy, the following definitions apply.

**ARTIST:** An individual generally recognized by critics and peers as a professional practitioner of the visual arts as judged by the quality of the professional practitioner's body of work, educational background and experience, past public commissions, sale of works, exhibition record, publications, and production of Artwork.

**ARTWORK:** Works in any style, expression, genre and media created by an Artist and owned by the City of Palo Alto in the permanent collection, whether functional or non-functional. Artwork may be stand-alone and integrated into the architecture, landscaping, or other site development if such are designed by an Artist as defined herein.

The following are not considered Artwork:

1. Reproductions, by mechanical or other means of original Artwork, except in cases of Film, video, photography, printmaking, theater, or other media arts;
2. Art objects that are mass produced (excluding artist-created, signed limited-edition works), ordered from a catalog, or of a standard design, such as playground sculpture or fountains; and
3. Directional or other functional elements such as signage, supergraphics, color coding, or maps unless specifically designed as artworks.

**DEACCESSION:** The procedure for the removal of an Artwork owned by the City and the determination of its future disposition.

**DEACCESSION NOTIFICATION:** A written letter to the artist or donor referencing the applicable condition(s) of the Artwork and describing reasons why the deaccession review needs to be undertaken.

## **GUIDELINES**

Any Artwork owned by the City shall be eligible for deaccession with the exception of an Artwork that is accompanied by verified legal stipulations that the Artwork may not be deaccessioned. During the review process, the Artwork shall remain accessible to the public in its existing location unless it poses a threat to public safety.

Artwork may be considered for review toward deaccession if one or more of the following conditions apply:

1. The condition or security of the Artwork cannot be reasonably guaranteed;
2. The Artwork requires excessive maintenance or has faults of design, materials or workmanship, and repair or remedy is impractical or unfeasible;
3. The Artwork has been damaged or has deteriorated, and repair or remedy is impractical or unfeasible;
4. The Artwork's physical or structural condition poses a threat to public safety;
5. The Artwork is proved to be inauthentic or in violation of existing copyright laws;
6. The Artwork is not, or is only rarely, on display because the City lacks a location for its display;
7. The Artwork has exceeded its expected lifespan;
8. No suitable site is available for relocation or exhibition, or significant changes in the use, character, or design of the site have occurred which affect the integrity of the Artwork;
9. Changes to the site have significantly limited or prevented the public's access to the Artwork;
10. The site where the work is located is undergoing privatization;
11. Deaccession is requested by the Artist;
12. If there are more than six works (excluding editions of prints) by the same artist in the portable collection, or more than three permanently installed works on public display in the City or in Private Development, PAP staff may recommend to PAC that the City retain only a representative selection of that artist's work.
13. If the Artwork has been lost, stolen, or is missing, the PAC may approve formally deaccessioning it from the collection while retaining a record in the collection database showing that the work has been deaccessioned.

Artwork may be reviewed for deaccession at any time at the initiative of PAP staff or PAC members. Review also may be initiated by the Artist regarding the Artwork she/he created, by that Artist's designated heir(s), or by legally recognized representative(s).

## PROCEDURES

Deaccession shall begin with a formal Deaccession Request which can be initiated by the PAC, by PAP staff, the Artist, the Artist's designated heirs or legally-appointed representative. The Deaccession Request shall be submitted to PAP staff and shall describe the applicable condition(s) outlined in the Guidelines above, and the reasons why the deaccession review should be undertaken. A Deaccession Request must also contain information about the requestor's relationship to the Artwork and stake in deaccessioning the Artwork.

Deaccession Requests shall be reviewed by PAP staff, who shall make every reasonable effort to contact the Artist who created the Artwork named in the Deaccession Request, and any other known parties with a vested interest in the artwork, and shall comply with any applicable state or federal notice requirements. When Artworks are proposed for deaccession, staff shall place the matter on the PAC agenda for an initial review of the reasons deaccessioning is being considered and to gather comments on the deaccession proposal. At a subsequent PAC meeting, staff shall then present a deaccession recommendation to the PAC.

In presenting the Deaccession Request, PAP staff will provide all available relevant corresponding materials to the PAC, including, but not limited to:

1. Artist's name, biographical information, samples of past artwork, and resume.
2. A written description and images of the Artwork.
3. Artist's statement about the Artwork named in the Deaccession Request.
4. A description of the selection/acquisition process and related costs that was implemented at the time the Artwork was selected.
5. If available, a formal appraisal of the Artwork provided by a qualified art appraiser.
6. Information about the origin, derivation, history, and past ownership of the Artwork.
7. A warranty of originality of the Artwork.
8. Information about the condition of the Artwork and the estimated cost of its conservation provided by a qualified visual arts conservator.
9. Information about and images of the Artwork's site.
10. For permanently-sited Artwork: information about how community feedback about the Artwork was collected and the outcome of that feedback.
11. Feedback from the Director of the City department responsible for operating and maintaining the Artwork site.
12. A detailed budget for all aspects of conservation, maintenance, repair, installation, operation, insurance, storage, and City staff support.
13. The Artist's contract with Donor or comparable legally binding document with Proof of Title.
14. Deed of gift restrictions, if any.

The PAC shall approve, with or without conditions, or reject the Deaccession Request based on the Deaccession Criteria described in this policy.

## DEACCESSION CRITERIA

In addition to the condition and security of the Artwork as stated above, the review criteria for Deaccession Requests include, but are not limited to:

1. **ARTISTIC EXCELLENCE:** Qualifications and professional reputation of the Artist; craftsmanship, conceptual content, style, form.
2. **VALUE OF ARTWORK** as determined by a professional appraiser, if available.

3. **RELATIONSHIP TO EXISTING COLLECTION OF ARTWORK:** Style, form, scale, diversity, quantity, quality, longevity, and compatibility with the existing collection of Artwork and goals of the Public Art Program.
4. **AVAILABILITY OF CITY SUPPORT:** The availability of necessary funding for conservation, maintenance, and/or repair; exhibition and storage space; real property for siting Artwork; and staff support.
5. **RELATIONSHIP TO SITE:** Accessibility, public safety, and social, cultural, historical, ecological, physical, and functional context of the Artwork in relation to the site, both existing and planned.
6. **LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS:** Issues related to liability, insurance, copyright, warranties, ownership, theft, vandalism, loss, indemnification, and public safety. The City Attorney shall review the recommendation of the PAP staff and PAC to determine whether there are any known legal restrictions that would prevent deaccessioning the object. The City Attorney's approval must be obtained prior to deaccessioning an object.
7. **TIMING:** Safety or hazard emergencies, relevant construction schedules, and the allowance of sufficient time for a normal review process.
8. **ACQUISITION PROCESS:** Method by which the Artwork was acquired and accessioned into the collection of artwork (i.e. donation, loan, commission).
9. **COMMUNITY FEEDBACK:** Community feedback about the Artwork, its site, and its condition solicited via a publicly-noticed meeting or placed on the agenda of the Public Art Commission.
10. **RESTRICTIONS:** Any recognized restrictions associated with the Artwork.

## IMPLEMENTATION

The deaccessioned Artwork shall be removed from the collection of Artwork through methods administered by the PAP. In all cases, the Artist or the Artist's designated heir(s), or legally recognized representative(s) shall be given, when possible and within a reasonable time frame, the opportunity to purchase the Artwork for the fair market value (as determined by a qualified art appraiser), or, if the Artwork is determined to be of negligible value, the Artist shall be given the opportunity to claim the Artwork at the Artist's own cost.

When the Artist does not purchase or claim the deaccessioned Artwork, the City, at its discretion, may use any of the following methods to remove the Artwork:

1. **Sale.** Proceeds from the sale shall be deposited into the Public Art CIP Budget. Written acknowledgement by Budget to place revenues from the sale of deaccessioned Artwork into the Public Art CIP Budget, must be obtained. Public notice regarding the sale shall be provided on the City website, at a publicly-noticed meeting and in any other manner required by law.
  - a. The Artist/donor shall be given the right of first refusal to reacquire the work at fair market value, original price, or nominal value, depending on the recommendation of the PAC. The cost of removal of the work may be reflected in the amount set.
  - b. Sell the work through a dealer.
  - c. Sell the work through sealed bidding or public auction.
2. **Trade or exchange** of a deaccessioned Artwork for another by the same Artist.
3. **Donation** of deaccessioned Artwork to a non-profit organization, institution, or agency.
4. **Destruction.** This method is appropriate in the following instances:
  - a. The entire Artwork has been damaged or has deteriorated, and repair or remedy is impractical or unfeasible.



- b. Most of the Artwork has been damaged or has deteriorated, and repair or remedy is impractical or unfeasible, and any remaining intact parts of the Artwork are deemed to have negligible value, and the Artist is not willing to claim the remaining parts at the Artist's own cost.
- c. Public safety considerations support destroying the Artwork.
- d. Every effort to locate the Artist, kin, or donor has failed.
- e. The City determines that no other method of implementation is feasible.

When possible, the method for removing the Artwork from the collection of Artwork shall be selected to ensure that the highest reasonable price is received. Any profits received by the City through the sale, trade, or auction of a deaccessioned Artwork shall be deposited into the Public Art CIP Budget administered by the PAP.

If a deaccessioned work is sold or exchanged, PAP staff will implement any legal requirements for compensating the artist, including but not limited to the California Resale Royalties Act.

PAP staff shall remove acquisition numbers and labels from the Artwork and coordinate its physical removal from the City's collection.

PAP staff shall report on the sale or exchange of Artwork at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the PAC, following receipt of all funds or the completion of the sale, exchange, or donation.

PAP staff shall transmit a report informing City Council of the removal of the Artwork from the City's collection.

Staff shall maintain a Deaccession File that includes individual files on each deaccessioned Artwork. These files shall include all documentation regarding the Artwork.

Artworks may not be sold, traded, or donated to current employees of the City of Palo Alto, their business partners, or their immediate family members. Current elected officials, PAC members, their business partners, and their immediate family members may not buy, receive or own any Artwork which has been deaccessioned from the collection of Artwork.

Nothing in these guidelines shall limit the City's ability to take appropriate action to protect public health and safety in the event of an emergency.

Recommended:

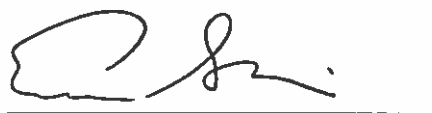


Director

2-3-17

Date

Approved:



City Manager

2/10/17

Date



**Title:** *Go Mama*

**Artist:** Marta Thoma

**Year:** 1999

**Accession No:** S.2000.01

**Dimensions:** 42" x 72" x 54", 84" dia. base

**Location:** California Avenue at Ash Street

**Material:** Bronze, paint, concrete

### Description

Surrealistic figural sculpture of a child's doll, running in place, with the depiction of a child's face on the doll's stomach. The sculpture is cast bronze with some areas overpainted, such as the doll's face and feet. The sculpture is anchored to a large round concrete base, most likely with a concealed support within the leg. The concrete base has exposed aggregate sides, and a smooth finish top surface. The top features bronze leaf ornaments and inscribed bilingual lettering: "Go, Mama! / Andale, Mama! / Mylostoryourstoryherstory / Mi cuento esta saliendo en tu corazon."

### Existing Conditions

#### *Sculpture*

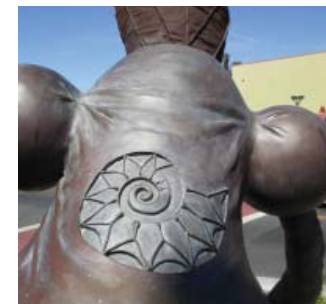
- Unstable structural condition when horizontal force is applied.
  - Concrete splatter at planted foot, outstretched foot and leg, and back of skirt. Reportedly recent damage from sidewalk construction.
  - Fine scratches at back of skirt.
  - Bronze surfaces soiled throughout; water stains/ drip marks at arms.
  - Grease marks/ fingerprints at skirt and foot.
  - Wax coating is blached and deteriorated.
- Possible color shift to patina (see artist's photo on following page.)
- Irregular color/ imperfections in patina at top of proper left shoulder.
  - Localized paint flaking at back of head and proper left eye.

#### *Base*

- Built-up mortar around foot anchored to base; hairline cracks, separations, and water stains.
- One of two leaf ornaments loose at base; removed and given to Palo Alto Art Center for safekeeping until it can be reinstalled.
- Concrete surfaces soiled throughout; stains at top surface.
- Minor localized biological growth.
- Top surface relatively flat, no slope for drainage.

#### *Comments on Location*

- Sited in an open area at a public sidewalk.
- No spotlights observed; street lighting.



Detail of doll's back. Note blached wax coating.



Detail of concrete splatter at doll's proper left foot.





Photo courtesy artist's website. Note overall bright golden patina color at doll's face and dress. Also note differences in paint color at doll's face (duller/more subtle hues), and lack of inscriptions or leaf ornament at base. Photo taken in process of installation? Was the face repainted?

**Title:** *Go Mama*

**Artist:** Marta Thoma

**Treatment Priority:**  
**HIGH**

**References**

- Artist's website, [www.mthoma.com/gomama3.html](http://www.mthoma.com/gomama3.html)



ARG Conservation Services Inc.  
Project No. CS15021

**Treatment History**

No information provided.

**Treatment Recommendations**

*Sculpture*

- Consult the artist regarding original/intended paint colors and patina finishes.
- Mechanical removal of concrete splatter.
- Test solubility of paint coatings.
- Clean surfaces with a pH neutral conservation-grade detergent.
- Stabilize flaking paint with appropriate adhesive based on conservator testing.
- As needed, perform in-painting to visually integrate losses.
- Apply protective hot wax coating at bronze surfaces.
- Visually integrate irregularities in patina with pigmented wax (reversible).
- Test effectiveness and apply cold wax coating at painted surfaces.

*Base*

- Overall cleaning with low-pressure water spray.
- Localized cleaning to remove stains.
- Reinforce mortar mound at foot for increased structural stability.
- Reset removed bronze leaf ornament in epoxy.
- Clean bronze ornament surfaces with a pH neutral conservation-grade detergent.
- Apply protective hot wax coating at bronze ornament surfaces.

**Treatment Cost Estimate**

Labor (two conservators x 12 hours x rate of \$125/hr):	\$3,000
Materials:	\$250
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$3,250</b>

**Maintenance Recommendations**

Routine maintenance after initial treatment to include the following:

- Perform overall cleaning with conservation-grade detergent, and reapply wax coating on annual basis.
- Monitor for further paint loss or damage.



Detail of doll's skirt. Note fingerprints and blached wax.



Detail of irregular patina at proper left shoulder.

**Marta Thoma Hall**

EDUCATION: University of California, Berkeley, B.A. M.A. Fine Arts

**SOLO FINE ART EXHIBITIONS, AWARDS, and INSTALLATIONS**

2010 City of Goodyear, Arizona, Public Art Commission Sculpture installed  
City of Miami, FL, Public Art Installation for City Center  
City of Blaine, WA, Public Art Commission Award Sculpture Installed  
City of Santa Cruz, CA, National Finalist, Mural Wall 15' x 75'  
City of Walnut Creek, CA, Public Art Commission Award Sculpture Installed

2009 Kimberly Saari Gallery, Steamboat, Colorado, solo exhibition  
City of Santa Cruz, CA, National Finalist, Traffic Roundabout

2008 Metropolitan Museum of Art Fresno, "Two Tears,"  
Convention Center 3rd Street Plaza, Double Wave, San Francisco  
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Gallery Solo Exhibition  
William Havu Gallery, solo sculpture exhibition, Denver, Colorado

2007 Anita Seipp Gallery, solo sculpture exhibition, Palo Alto, CA  
Brick Tear RFP Award to Team Thoma installed for SPUR,  
San Francisco, CA

2006 City of Palo Alto and the Arts Commission: Installation: Rrrun, Palo Alto  
California Regional Center for the Arts: "Childhood Revisited," Walnut Creek

2005 Vertigo Gallery: "Inside Out," London, United Kingdom  
Lowe Gallery, "New Work by Marta Thoma," Los Angeles, CA

2004 Triton Museum of Art, Award Exhibition, Santa Clara, CA  
Lowe Gallery, Stretch , Atlanta Georgia

2003 Oakland Museum of California, Stretch, Oakland City Center, Oakland, CA.  
Peninsula Community Foundation Grant: "Portraits of Youth," Palo Alto

2000 A.I.R. Gallery, New York, NY

1999 National Museum of Costa Rica, Installations in San Jose, Costa Rica

1998 San Francisco Museum of Art Gallery, San Francisco, CA

1995 Earth Tear Installation, South San Francisco, CA



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## City of Palo Alto Staff Report to Public Art Commission

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**August 17, 2019**

Agenda Item 4

### **Recommendation:**

Staff Recommends that the Public Art Commission initiate deaccession proceedings as outlined in the City's Deaccession of Artwork Policy for *Go Mama* by Marta Thoma, located at the corner of California Avenue and Ash street.

### **Summary:**

Staff recommends that the Public Art Commission initiate deaccession process for Marta Thoma's *Go Mama*, located on California Avenue and Ash, based on the process and conditions outlined in the City's Deaccession of Artwork Policy 1-59/CSD (Attachment 1) adopted in December 2016.

### **Background:**

In 1999 Marta Thoma was commissioned by the City to prepare, construct and install a sculpture titled *Go Mama* for \$15,000. This commission funding included generous donations from California Avenue merchants. Among the contributors to the sculpture were Leaf & Petal, Country Sun, Language Pacifica, Alhouse King Realty, Hotel California, Alhouse-Denton, and Keeble and Shuchat. The California Avenue business group known as CAADA at the time participated in the artwork selection process and supported the transformation of California Avenue into the "Avenue of the Arts".

The artwork on California Avenue and Ash street was sited on a former planter that the Public Art Program filled with concrete to make the foundation for the artwork. At the time that the artwork was installed, there were low bushes and plants around the base that prevented visitors from accessing the base of the sculpture and touching it. When the new California Avenue streetscape project was completed in 2015 and the pedestrian sidewalk widened, the sidewalk area was shifted to surround the artwork, removing the plantings and making the sculpture more accessible to the public.

Marta Thoma (now Marta Thoma Hall) has several other public artworks on long term display. Thoma's "Brain Works," a 30-foot tall sculpture at Bestor Art Park in San Jose was installed in 2014. Thoma Hall's "Brain Works" is only one of her works that uses recycled materials. Other Thoma Hall installations include: "Cosmos Clock" for Florida State University, "Water Source" for the Water Park in Goodyear, Arizona, "Inside Out," at Vertigo Gallery in London, "Stretch" at the Costa Rica Museum of Art, and "Journey of a Bottle" in the Walnut Creek Main Library. The artist was in residence at Recology 1994 and

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The artwork has received fairly regular waxing treatments over the years. However, the increased physical interaction from the public touching and pushing the piece has deteriorated the surface quite a bit and the artwork is in need of another cleaning and wax protective coating. The base has constant food stains on it due to people eating on the base, especially during the farmer's market. The small cast leaves have detached from the base. Staff has received calls of concern from the public regarding the stability of the piece once every six to nine months. Because the piece has only one attachment point and has the bulk of the weight and massing up high, the piece has always wiggled. Staff has sent art handlers out there to fill in the material around the base of the foot to help stabilize her, but it has not done as much to stabilize the piece.

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### **Discussion:**

ARG evaluated the artwork in 2015 and identified it as one of the high priority artworks for the Public Art Program to address. Their report (Attachment 2) calls out a lot of staining and discoloration, with a treatment estimate of \$3,250 to stabilize the surface of the sculpture, but that will not address the overall stability of the sculpture. During farmers markets in particular, there are groups of people seated on the base, and frequently children are standing on the base and interacting with the sculpture. The artwork is not stable enough in the current location to withstand so much physical contact. In conversations with ARG, they asked if fencing the sculpture might be an option to keep the public away from it.

Our Public Art Master Planning consultants had the following to write about “Go Mama”:

*Go Mama:* This artwork is a figure balanced on one foot. Artworks of this type should not be displayed in an outdoor location because of their structural vulnerability. This specific artwork is top-heavy and balanced on one point on a low pedestal. Its condition has been assessed by ARG, which has proposed conservation and fencing surrounding the sculpture. Because fencing the sculpture will compromise both the streetscape and the work; and because the artwork is poorly fabricated, it should be considered for deaccession.



Of the considerations for deaccession outlined in the policy, staff recommends deaccession for the following considerations:

- The condition of the artwork cannot be reasonably guaranteed.
- The artwork's structural condition may pose a threat to public safety.
- The artwork has faults in the design and repair may be impractical or unfeasible.
- Significant changes to the design of the site have occurred which affect the integrity of the artwork.
- No suitable site is available for relocation or exhibition.

While we expect to gather a lot of public comment on the artwork, staff would like to highlight that Go Mama is one of the most often discussed works of art in the collection, both with positive and negative comments. Reasons for deaccession do not include aesthetic taste or public opinion. There are no formal appraisals for the artwork and staff could not locate any auction records for the artist.

**Attachments:**

- 1- Deaccession policy
- 2- ARG report on Go Mama
- 3- Marta Thoma's CV

Refurbishing of the sculpture, Go Mama, for enhanced safety and aesthetic considerations.

Submitted by the Artist, Marta Thoma Hall, Oct 2, 2017

Given the update of the California Avenue shopping street, Go Mama needs attention to address safety concerns which includes frequent climbing on the sculpture and attempt to sit and bend the sculpture, causing lateral and horizontal motion.

At this time, Artworks Foundry is finalizing a report and recommendation. Here are preliminary findings.

- 1) Original installation was contracted and completed by Artworks Foundry in Berkeley. Pierro Mussi, Owner and Manager, installed the sculpture and will now make specific recommendations for an upgrade.
- 2) The original installation included 1 ¼" diameter steel bar into the cement pedestal, welded into the body of the sculpture. The steel was inserted after drilling into the cement, 12" deep, and epoxied into place.
- 3) Likely suggestion will be to add one or more steel bars, drilled and welded to the foot and base, to buttress the sculpture and prevent side to side motion. See drawing of proposal.
- 4) After the sculpture is bolstered, it is recommended that the pedestal surface be paved with a river rock treatment which:
  - It has a natural, beautiful surface, evening out the current discolored pedestal
  - This treatment is uncomfortable to sit on, due to its bumpy surface, discouraging sitting and climbing on the sculpture
- 5) A new bronze sign with the poetry, artist, date, and title should be fabricated and mounted on the side of the sculpture pedestal. Currently, it is flat, on the base.









new  
steel

(original)

12" Steel  
bar

Solid rod  
1.5"  
diameter





Go Mama - Public Record			
Date	PAC Meeting	Minutes	Discussion
1/22/1999	PAC Regular Meeting		<p>CALIFORNIA AVENUE PROPOSAL</p> <p>The scale and project dollar amount of the Marta Thoma sculpture, Go Mama, was discussed by the Commission. Three sizes and prices were discussed: 5' - \$10,700; 5'6" - \$12,500; and 6' - \$15,000. Brett withdrew 6' option. Commission decided to focus on 5'6" sculpture for \$12,500. Commission not certain that scale of work would be appropriate to site. Brett proposed that Commission contribute one-half funds of 5'6" work. Commission not convinced that 50/50 split is appropriate here. Motion: To approve the 5'6" work on a 50/50 split between CAADA and PAC.</p> <p>Brett: Moved;</p> <p>Amendment by Dunlevie: Reserve the right to increase the scale and the Public Art Commission's financial commitment.</p> <p>Brett accepted amendment. Motion restated by Levin: To approve the 5'6" work and a split of \$6,200/\$5,800, preserving the right to increase the scale and PAC commitment financially.</p> <p>Moved: Brett; Wasserman seconded: Ayes: Unanimous.</p>
2/18/99	PAC Regular Meeting		<p><u>Report on Marta Thoma sculpture</u> - Dunlevie reported that Thoma wants a six-foot sculpture. Because of the added cost this item to be agendized for the March meeting.</p>
3/18/1999	PAC Regular Meeting		<p>CALIFORNIA AVENUE PROPOSAL</p> <p>Brett reported that Dunlevie and artist, Marta Thoma, conducted a site visit to determine appropriate scale of artwork. Artist recommends the largest scale of this sculpture for this site. Commission asked to increase dollar amount of work from \$6,250.00 to \$8,750.00. Total work will cost \$15,000.</p> <p>Recommendation: A 50/50 split should be baseline for Commission in future projects.</p> <p>Motion: Commission to add \$2,500.00 for a total of \$8,750.00 to commission a six-foot artwork by artist Marta Thoma to be installed on California Avenue.</p> <p>Moved: Wasserman/Wells: Ayes: Unanimous.</p>
7/15/1999	PAC Regular Meeting		<p>CALIFORNIA AVE - Levin reported that artist Marta Thoma has not yet received City funds. Staff pointed out that Thoma has not met the City's insurance requirements, and City funds cannot be released until requirements are met. Dunlevie volunteered to call Thoma.</p>
10/13/99	PAC Regular Meeting		<p>ANNOUNCEMENTS - Dunlevie has visited Marta Thoma's studio. Thoma is making progress on Go Mama.</p>
11/18/1999	PAC Regular Meeting		<p>MARTA THOMA PROPOSAL - Artist Marta Thoma is moving ahead on this project. Marta Thoma has spent time lately at the foundry.</p>
1/20/2000	PAC Regular Meeting		<p>CALIFORNIA AVENUE PROJECTS - Recommendation: Commission is concerned that additional artwork on base for sculpture be related thematically tied in with Go Mama. Motion: To approve this addition as long as the bronze and wording on base are related thematically with the sculpture.</p> <p>MOVED: Eppstein; Seconded: Barton: Ayes: Unanimous.</p>

2/17/2000	PAC Regular Meeting		Marta Thoma – Kaplan suggested that Thoma return to Commission with text for base.
3/16/2000	PAC Regular Meeting		CALIFORNIA AVENUE PROJECT - Marta Thoma installation – Brett reported on his fundraising efforts. To date he has raised \$5500 towards the goal of \$6200 for Go Mama. Brett asked Commission to contribute the remaining \$700 that is short. Recommendation: Increase the Commission’s funds for this project from \$8,800.00 to \$9,500.00. Motion: Move that the Commission increase the increase the Go Mama budget by \$700.00. MOVED: Barton; seconded: Wasserman: Ayes: Unanimous. Thoma arrived at 9:10 p.m. to speak to this item. Thoma clarified the origins of the text.
4/20/2000	PAC Regular Meeting		CALIFORNIA AVENUE PROJECT - Marta Thoma Installation – Concrete base needs to be poured
2/27/2001	PAC Regular Meeting		SPECIAL ORDER OF THE DAY - Commission welcomed new Commissioner, Marta Thoma. *Thoma left the commission in early 2002
9/23/2003	PAC Regular Meeting		ANNOUNCEMENTS Frankel announced that Marta Thoma’s reception for her installation of <i>Rrun</i> is scheduled for September 25.
3/15/2006	PAC Regular Meeting		MAINTENANCE OF PERMANENT COLLECTION - Kirkeby reported that the sculpture Go Mama by Marta Thoma needs polishing.
2/18/2010	PAC Regular Meeting		CALIFORNIA AVENUE TREES – Elizabeth Ames, Public Works Department, and Barbara Lundburg with Royston Hanamoto Alley & Abey gave a presentation on Phase 2 and the overall tree planting plans for California Avenue. Commissioner DeMarzo reported on behalf of Morariu that Morariu has contacted and spoken with three of the four artists whose artworks are impacted by the proposed tree planting plan. Morariu has received permission from artists Wang Po Shu for Ropepole and Marta Thoma for Go Mama to move ahead with the tree planting plans.
11/17/2011	PAC Regular Meeting		MAINTENANCE OF COLLECTION – DeMarzo reported on sculpture maintenance. The final item is \$500 for Marta Thoma to refurbish the Go Mama sculpture on California Avenue.
4.16.2015	PAC Regular Meeting		<u>Permanent Collection Condition Survey</u> - Staff outlined the history of maintenance efforts for the collection and the plan to evaluate the condition of the outdoor collection in order to formulate a long range plan and schedule for the care and keeping of the collection. Staff outlined the scope of work for the evaluation of fifteen permanently sited artworks in the collection. Five conservators were contacted to submit qualifications and proposals for the evaluation. Staff recommended the approval of ARG Conservation for a contract up to \$7,200 for the evaluation reports on fifteen of the artworks.
9.15.2016	PAC Regular Meeting		<u>Adoption of Two Year Work Plan</u> – Staff presented a list of project priorities identified by the Public Art Commissioners at the PAC Annual Retreat: Addressing artworks identified as high priority for conservation (conservation or deaccession).

5.18.2017	PAC Regular Meeting	<p><u>Collection Maintenance/Deaccession</u> – Staff led a discussion regarding the seven artworks identified by ARG Conservation Report as most in need of restoration or de-accession. Staff provided a detailed update on the current condition of each artwork including Digital DNA, Go Mama, California Avenue, California Native, Greg Brown’s murals Lady Watering and Boy Fishing, and a mural by Christopher Johanson. Staff will return to the Commission later in 2017 with specific de-accession or conservation recommendations for each artwork.</p>
8/21/2017	PAC Regular Meeting	<p><u>De-Accession of Artworks</u> - Staff recommended that the PAC initiates deaccession evaluation process for Go Mama by artist Marta Thoma currently sited on California Avenue and Ash, based on the process and conditions outlined in the City’s Deaccession of Artwork Policy. Staff provided a detailed overview of the artwork commissioning and maintenance history and presented considerations for the deaccession of Go Mama. Based on the condition reports provided by ARG and PAMP consultants, calling attention to the artwork not being stable enough to withstand physical contact and expressing concerns about public safety, staff recommended deaccession for the following considerations: The condition of the artwork cannot be reasonably guaranteed; The artwork’s structural condition may pose a threat to public safety; The artwork has faults in the design and repair may be impractical or unfeasible; Significant changes to the design of the site have occurred which affect the integrity of the artwork; No suitable site is available for relocation or exhibition. Staff recommended that PAC proceed with the deaccession process and open the public comment period, notify the artist officially of the deaccession, and agendaize the final vote for November. Commission clarified the ways for public input and welcomed the opportunity for public discussion about the future of the artwork. Moved: Commissioner Taylor moved to initiate deaccession evaluation process for Go Mama. Second: Chair Migdal. All in Favor.</p>