



**February 13, 2020**

**RE: Agenda Item 5**

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends that the Public Art Commission allocate funding for the conservation project in the amount of \$8,810 for the mural titled *Boy Fishing* by artist Greg Brown.

**DISCUSSION:**

Artist Greg Brown painted this whimsical trompe-l'oeil mural on the exterior wall of the US Post Office located at 380 Hamilton Avenue in Palo Alto in 1975. This site-specific artwork depicts a boy holding a fishing pole, with the line caught on a window grate. The window and grate painted by Brown are identical to actual window grates on the building. The historic Birge Clark-designed building was erected in 1932 and is owned by the US Postal Service.

The artist, Greg Brown, was hired by the Public Art Program to refresh the mural in 2002. However, over the course of the past several years the façade of the aging building began gradually deteriorating due to poor conditions of the roof drainage system saturating the wall, which in turn contributed to deterioration of the mural. The condition report previously provided in 2015 by San Francisco-based ARG Art Conservation listed the mural as one of the artworks on the priority list for conservation and called out a need for rehabilitation of the building's exterior wall and drainage system. In early 2020 the USPS building underwent a comprehensive repainting project and its roof drainage system also is in the process of being replaced. The Public Art Program staff reached out to the painting contractor to ensure they would not paint over or "touch up" the artwork. Staff also contacted a fine art conservation firm with a request to evaluate the current condition of the post office mural and provide a conservation treatment proposal (ATTACHMENT B).

**BACKGROUND:**

Artist Greg Brown was born in Pittsburgh, PA, but was still a child when he moved to Palo Alto, California. He went to Palo Alto High School, and graduated in 1969. As a teenager, he studied with Italian artist Roberto Lupetti. In 1975, funded by a CETA grant Brown was hired by

the City of Palo Alto as the City's first artist-in-residence to create a series of nine murals across various locations in downtown Palo Alto. Brown's trompe l'oeil murals known as the "Pedestrian Series" featured whimsical depictions of everyday people in uncanny situations. Out of nine artworks, six remain and are part of the City's collection of public art. The artist passed away in 2014. His works are a significant part of Palo Alto's downtown public art collection and are treasured by the City, Public Art Commission, and the community.

**TIMELINE AND BUDGET IMPLICATIONS:**

The fine art conservators are looking forward to commencing the conservation treatment as early as March 2020. The proposed treatment should take 3-4 days to complete. The funds for the conservation project will be allocated from the Public Art Program Maintenance budget.

**ATTACHMENT A: Artwork Images**



*Boy Fishing, 1975 by Greg Brown*

Overall view of the mural and exterior wall after the building was repainted in January 2020.



Mural details depicting cracking and lifting paint and paint loss.

Additional detailed images are provided in Conservation Treatment Proposal (Exhibit B).



FINE ART CONSERVATION

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## TREATMENT PROPOSAL

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**DATE:** January 27th, 2020  
**CLIENT:** City of Palo Alto, Attn: Nadya Chuprina  
**JOB #:** 2020/029  
**OBJECT:** *Boy Fishing*, by Greg Brown. Acrylic on stucco, n.d. (repainted 2002-2003)



## DESCRIPTION AND MATERIALS:

The artwork is a trompe l'oeil style mural by Greg Brown (1951-2014) located on the exterior wall of the US Post Office at 380 Hamilton Avenue in Palo Alto and accessible via Gilman Street. The mural is acrylic on painted stucco. The mural was repainted by the artist around 2002-2003. There is no coating present on the mural; it is unknown if the mural was coated before being repainted.

## CONDITION REPORT:

### MURAL:

#### *Support:*

- The building is in the process of undergoing repairs to address water ingress behind the mural.
- There are surface cracks in the stucco likely caused by water damage. The stucco itself appears to be stable and in good condition.

#### *Paint Layers:*

- There are at least two layers of paint present: the original underlying layer, and the newer, upper layer applied by the artist. There is delamination and loss of the upper paint layer from the original paint layer.
- There is lifting paint and paint loss associated with the surface cracks.
- There are numerous scattered losses to the paint.
- There is minor water staining which only appears to be affecting the light brown shadow color of the window.
- The wall was recently repainted up to the edges of the mural, but there are a few small bare spots along the edges which need to be retouched.

#### *Surface:*

- There does not appear to be an appreciable amount of surface dirt present.
- The paint is well-bound and does not appear to have faded appreciably despite being about 17 years old. A reversible, conservation-grade coating could be applied to protect the mural from light damage, ingrained surface dirt, and minor vandalism, but the benefits of taking this step should be weighed against the artist's intention to leave the mural uncoated.

## TREATMENT PROPOSAL:

- Consolidation of lifting and unstable paint using a stable, conservation-grade adhesive.
- Fine stucco fills along cracks and deeper areas of paint loss.
- Inpainting fills and losses to the uppermost layer of paint with stable, sympathetic paint media. Retouching of bare paint spots along edges of mural using the provided wall paint.
- Photography before, during, and after treatment and treatment report.

Treatment (2 people, 3-4 days): 48-64 hours x \$135/hr = \$6,480-\$8,640.00

Mileage: 288 miles x \$0.50/mi + \$6 toll x 4 days = \$168.00

Total: \$6,648-\$8,808

PHOTOGRAPHS:



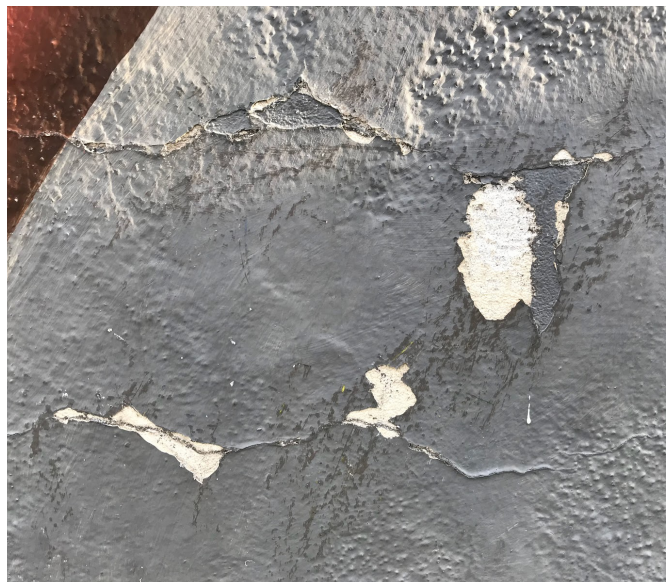
*Overall Of Mural*



*Detail of Window (Left) and Boy (Right)*



*Details of Cracking and Lifting Paint and Paint Loss*



*Details of Cracking and Lifting Paint and Paint Loss*



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