Balancing Past and Present: Reevaluating Community Murals and Existing Practices

Sang Weon Bae
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Abstract
In the late 1960s, mural painting was adopted as a channel of social expression for those who felt that they did not possess the agency to establish their own cultural representation and identity. These people, usually from ethnic enclaves and disenfranchised urban areas, painted on walls combining imageries adopted from their cultural roots with contemporary styles and inspiration to visually communicate their concerns, hopes, and culture as a collective community. This practice of community muralism has continued in various areas to present. However, these community murals are quickly and consistently disappearing from the built environment today, despite the conservation efforts by various organizations and professionals. Within this context, this study reevaluates the murals as a cultural resource and the existing practices in which they are addressed to reveal the challenges at the root of the problem. Introducing the often neglected concept of ephemerality to the discussion of these murals, this study determines that the resource is more complicated than is regarded by the preservation field. It then offers a comprehensive approach to treating these murals, not only as images from the past but as a continuing social practice.

Keywords
community murals, mural conservation, social process, ephemeral art, democratic art

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For my beloved family and friends.

In loving memory of Grandpa and J.
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Chapter 1: Introduction – A Call for Reevaluation

A few years ago in a small used bookstore in San Francisco, I came across a coffee table book of San Francisco murals. To my surprise, the majority of the beautifully photographed murals no longer existed in the built environment of the city. The Fillmore District, once the glamorous jazz district of the city in the 1940s and 50s, had also been a colorful mural district in the succeeding era of the 1960s and 70s. However, while the annual San Francisco Jazz Festival held in the district still eluded to its heyday as the “Harlem of the West,” the downtrodden, heavily graffiti-tagged walls of the neighborhood did not speak at all to its past as structures that donned vibrant, powerful images similar to those of the Mission District today.¹ The present-day Fillmore District, though undergoing a process of development and revitalization, still often presents itself as “that area to avoid at night,” the streets crowded with loiterers and the small mini park next to the McDonalds usually a site of suspicious activities. As a child of the city and with dark impressions of the Fillmore, it is no surprise that, despite the photographic evidence of the vibrant murals that once decorated those walls, I found its past as a mural corridor/district difficult to believe. How could they disappear without a trace?

In light of the rapid disappearance of such murals from urban areas and the concerned voices of mural and material conservation scholars such as Will Shank, Hess Norris, and Jon Pounds, this study addresses the topic of mural conservation in an urban context. Specifically focusing on community murals, the product of a fascinating social movement in American history, I approach the subject from a holistic, cultural landscape perspective to identify and analyze the difficulties in mural preservation. This study extends the focus from the images on the walls to the relationship between the existing community members and the murals.

¹ Elizabeth Pepin and Lewis Watts, Harlem of the West – The San Francisco Fillmore Jazz Era (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2005).
Community murals is a type of murals that represent a specific community’s values, concerns, and identity as defined by the members as a collective. It is an urban form of social expression for disenfranchised communities including largely Black and Brown lower working-class residents. These murals converge each community’s respective traditional, cultural imagery: Black communities trace back to their African roots; Brown communities find ties to their ancient ancestry. They combine mythical imagery and traditional patterns with significant figures; they express the community’s concerns of racism and violence; at the same time, they brighten the walls with richness of ethnic culture and celebrate their community. As mural scholars Timothy Drescher and Alan Barnett describe, the community murals represent a social process, not just imagery on walls. It is a means of claiming agency over a people’s own respective cultural representation, a protest against the images imposed on them by the white majority. These community-based murals employ art as a medium of expression of and for the community. It is a democratic art—art of, by, and for the people.²

These murals present a unique resource for consideration of preservation as they are both a social product and a process. The physical murals are social products of a people’s struggle for agency and empowerment, while the practice of community muralism is the process of attaining this sense of identity and representation. This art form and its community setting, then, fit the definition of a cultural landscape: “a geographic area, including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein, associated with a historic event, activity, or person or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values.”³ The community murals are

the physical manifestations of a people’s use of and interaction with their urban environment. These murals create an urban cultural landscape, a unit of study within the field of preservation.

While various aspects of community murals are eligible targets for the preservation field, the continued loss of these murals as a historical and cultural entity as a whole is undeniable. Given the continuously diminishing resource despite various organizations’ conservation efforts, perhaps it is time that we accept that the problem may lie in the way community mural conservation is approached. As the literature review in the following discussion will reveal, mural conservation is centered on chemically protecting the physical materials and restoring images. Is this really the primary element of community murals that require preservation focus and efforts?

The existing literature on community murals does not expand on the variability of functions and values of the resource in a comprehensive manner. A majority of exiting works provide general historical overviews of the concept of community murals, often tracing from the Mexican Mural Movement and the New Deal Era through the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement. These works are set within a broad geographic context and time period, providing corresponding photographs and other illustrations to help orient the reader in the variations of style, message, and culture. Subsets of such literature are region- or city-specific community murals where the authors explore the visual evolution of murals, the social process of community muralism in its heyday, and the historical and social contexts for different eras of imagery. These too, are accompanied by extensive photographic documentation.

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Another dominant sector of mural literature centers on the Chicano Movement and the resulting murals. The Chicano Movement stems from the educated Latino population protesting the second-class image imposed on them by the white majority. They denied the traditional solution of assimilation and instead reversed the ideology to reclaim their ethnic heritage. The murals of this movement were a means of nonviolent expression of their claim over their own cultural and ethnic identity as well as their discontent with the social circumstances of the Latinos in the US.6 Despite the inherently similar social origins of these murals compared to that of the community murals at large, Chicano scholars ascribe to them the distinct title of Chicano murals, as representative of the culturally-specific driving factor of these artworks.7 Though the community murals and these Chicano murals serve the same function as forms of social and political expression, and as a medium of protest against cultural oppression, Chicano mural studies are carried out distinctly from other mural types and in close relation to Latino history and heritage. While the connections between community murals and Chicano murals are easily observed, the literature on the latter does not explicitly acknowledge that these murals constitute a subset of community murals. Types of community murals are needlessly subdivided into different scholarly literature.

In addition to the divide within the community mural types, different scholars attribute different historical events as the trigger for the Community Mural Movement of the late 1960s. The scholars whose work revolve around the murals of the West identify the Mexican Mural

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7 Guisela Latorre, Walls of Empowerment: Chicana/o Indigenist Murals of California, (Austin: University of Texas, 2008); Braun-Reinitz and Weissman, On the Wall: Four Decades of Community Murals in New York City.
Movement and the murals of Los Tres Grandes (Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros) as the seed of the community mural movement. On the other hand, other scholars generally attribute a variety of historical events—Civil Rights, Black Power, Bohemian Culture, New Deal Era murals, Labor Movement, in addition to the Mexican Mural Movement—as the underlying cause of the Community Mural Movement. The Civil Rights and Black Power Movement and the related protests are of particular interest in tracing the origins of the Chicago and New York City’s community murals. However, all such literature draw an end to their narrative of community murals around the 1980s and early 1990s, with the institutionalization of murals, the retirement of the revolutionary generation, and the fizzling passion for the cause of the 1960s and 70s.

Scholars across the community mural field identify the democratic nature of expression as the fundamental element of community murals. They are channels of social expression by communities for communities; they are not works that talk at people. They are deemed socially significant in their ability to construct a collective identity as established through a sense of agency within communities. The images, ever present in their physical environment, sink into the community consciousness—the messages of protest, empowerment, and pride are internalized by the residents. Further, artists carefully control the use of obvious cultural cues, the knowns and unknowns, cues differently perceived by in-group and out-group members, and combine positive and disturbing imagery to explicitly target a specific audience. The open

8 Drescher, San Francisco Murals; Latorre, Walls of Empowerment; Eva Sperling Cockcroft and Holly Barnet-Sanchez, ed., Signs from the Heart: California Chicano Murals, (New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1993); Jacoby, Street Art San Francisco.
9 Barnett, Community Murals; Cockcroft et al., Toward a People’s Art; Braun-Reinitz and Weissman, On the Wall.
10 Barnett, Community Murals; Cockcroft et al., Toward a People’s Art.
access to the physical murals and the control of familiar and unfamiliar cultural cues all contribute to the sense of agency, social representation, and action. The scholars that provide the historical overviews of community murals, such as Barnett and Cockcroft, only discuss these functions and attributes of the murals within the historical context of the movement rather than in their current form. More in-depth studies of such functions are executed by other scholars who specifically pinpoint this feature as a topic of study, such as Mary Strong.

Scholars like Erika Doss and Jonathan M. Lohman also attribute community murals with the power to establish a sense of place and to trigger and form new memories. According to Doss, community murals create a sense of place as graphic representations of its associated people’s values and culture in the surrounding environment. These murals as absorbed into the environment as a sense of place, serve as shared triggers of individual and collective memory of old generations and serve as a backdrop for future memories by the new generation. These discussions are also offered independently of other mural literature: they are extremely specific in topic.

The other side of mural literature involve the discussion of the technical practice of, and the ethical and legal complications posed by mural conservation. While Timothy Drescher and Ann Garfinkle consider the legal and ethical implications of conservation efforts, conservationists like Amanda J. Norbutus analyze the physical impacts posed on the murals by various chemical conservation practices. Scholarship on conservation thus branches off into

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14 Timothy W. Drescher, “Priorities in Conserving Community Murals” (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Conservation Institute, 2004), http://hdl.handle.net/10020/gci_pubs/priorities_community_murals; Ann Garfinkle, “The Legal and Ethical Consideration of Mural Conservation: Issues and Debates,” (Los Angeles,
two separate sectors: the material impact on murals and the intangible, conceptual, and legal impacts.

The overview of the scholarship on community murals offer discussion of the different qualities, functions, values, and practices of the art from. However, these scholarship remain heavily divided in topics of study when viewed individually. This is particularly true between those that provide historical overviews of the murals and those that analyze their physical conservation. The latter leave unaddressed the social, cultural, and historical significance of the resource that they are conserving, while the former simply mourn the loss of murals after their disappearance. Even within the non-conservation literature, the works are divided between historical analyses and current functions and processes. Therefore, while the existing literature on community murals address the complexities of community murals as a collection of scholarship, they fail to address the resource in comprehensive, all-encompassing manner as individual studies.

Within this literary context, this study reevaluates community murals to better understand their social and material significance in a holistic manner. It recognizes the complexities of murals not just as paintings on walls but as retaining an intangible value, providing a means of social expression. Chapter 2 on Ephemerality discusses an aspect of community murals often overlooked—the impermanent nature of community muralism. It analyzes the impact of ephemerality on the practice and imagery of community murals. Chapter 3, a case study of the San Francisco Mission District Murals, further analyzes community murals.

in real time, as they exist on walls and in practice today to identify what aspects of community murals are valued and elaborated upon in practice, on the ground. Chapter 4 evaluates the applicability and capacity of existing policies/programs in addressing the complexities of community murals as identified in the previous chapters. This evaluation is then used to determine whether or not the current challenges of community mural conservation lies in the contemporary approach and practice. This study will ultimately recommend a holistic model for addressing and preserving the values and significance of community murals as newly analyzed in this study.
Chapter 2: Ephemerality – Complicating Community Murals

Ephemeral art refers to inherently impermanent works. They are most often purposely executed to have a finite life by means of “fugitive media,” types of materials that “in a relatively short period of time [...] undergo chemical or physical changes which permanently alter them.”\(^\text{15}\) These permanent alterations within its finite lifespan are often referred to as “inherent vice.”\(^\text{16}\) The ephemeral character of such artworks instills in them a sense of evanescence and liminality, attributes skillfully and thoughtfully worked into the creations by the artists. That is, the inherent vice is embraced and absorbed to be a part of the work in its entirety. The fleeting character of such artworks often renders them process-based, with the sense of a temporal framework and change as some of the principal features of the intended message. The temporariness enables the artists to “visualize time and memory as active, if not political, dimensions of the work.”\(^\text{17}\) Ephemerality brings such visual arts into an active, performance-like realm distinct from other time-based medium (such as video and audio recordings and films) in that the piece is “lived” over time without means of re-experiencing the performance through documented media.\(^\text{18}\) In other words, these works are time- and space-specific which make them all the more powerful tools of expression.

There are three major categories of ephemeral arts. The first is the traditional, cultural art forms closely related to ethnographic studies. Found among traditional settlements found

\(^{15}\) Stephanie E. Hornbeck, “A Conservation Conundrum: Ephemeral Art at the National Museum of African Art” in *African Arts*, Vol. 42, No. 3 Ephemeral Arts 1 (Autumn, 2009), 55. It must be noted that not all ephemeral art is intentional; there are instances in which artists employ new medium without full understanding of the materials’ long-term properties.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.


\(^{18}\) Of course, there are instances in which films and other forms of recording are weaved into the ephemeral artwork; however, these recordings and playback mechanisms are often executed ironically, to highlight the evanescence, disappearance, and absence increasingly apparent throughout the life of the work. (Ibid.)
throughout different regions of Africa, the various Native American settlements of North America, and the Tibetan peoples of Asia, among many others, this category of ephemeral arts include, but are not limited to, body paintings, sand art, and ritualistic objects. The discussions of these works are primarily materials-based, elaborating on the inherent vice of the impermanent materials. The materials are largely organic: vegetal, wood, clay, and natural pigments are commonly found and are understood as symbolizing the relationship to the larger environment and nature. As these art works are usually ephemeral by virtue of the materials employed, they prove to be process-based and intentionally ephemeral—or at least display ambivalence towards permanence. This category of ephemeral art also includes cultural and ritualistic performances that engage much of the aforementioned process-based arts.\textsuperscript{19}

The second category of ephemeral art discussed are socially- and politically-charged contemporary arts, both performance and visual. These works also include installation art and exhibits, and, at times, films. In discussing this category of ephemeral works, the scholarship tends to emphasize the intended message of the art and its relationship to the process of change. As these works, exhibits, and performances embrace the element of change and impermanence, they are intentionally ephemeral. Allyson Purpura frames such works as a counter-movement responding to the “Western regime of value that […] extolled permanence as a virtue,” the artist’s use of fugitive materials a means of critiquing the societies and institutions that have inherently internalized this philosophy.\textsuperscript{20} A prominent art movement of


\textsuperscript{20} Purpura, “Framing the Ephemeral,” 13.
its kind was Dadaism. Dada artists employed fugitive media to highlight the “immediacy of the senses” and embraced “transience as a way to amplify [the] present.”21 This was particularly powerful in the early 20th century, during World War I—a time perceived as being nonsensically violent. Dada paved the way for contemporary artists to use ephemerality as an agent of social and political critique. The sense of immediacy and the emphasis on the present, as expressed by the fleeting character of fugitive media, have been the core of contemporary ephemeral arts defined by this category. Some of these works include performance-based works such as the *Project for a Memorial* by Columbian artist Oscar Muñoz who continuously painted a face on a hot, cement sidewalk with water that evaporated before the entire face was ever completed to symbolize the mysterious disappearance of people in South America during political unrest; and the *New Imaginaries*, a trilogy of public art projects that celebrated the “contemporary, fleeting and diffuse” by exploring the relationship between people and the public spaces—the built environment—of Johannesburg, South Africa.22 With ephemerality as their core element, these works are able to highlight the social and political commentaries on the present.

The third category of ephemeral art explored is unique in that it is ephemeral in twofold: in its physicality and relevance to its audience. Works belonging to this category are not necessarily or primarily process-based or performance-oriented in their execution—this is not where their ephemerality lies; rather, they are ephemerally rooted in their materials used and its ability to represent its audience. This complex category of ephemeral art is comprised of community murals, the topic of this study.

The first layer of ephemerality in community murals is rooted in its physicality: its exterior placement and the subsequent exposure to the elements. Developing from a period of increasing racial and socioeconomic tensions and segregation, they assumed the function of providing a channel of social expression for the disenfranchised, underserved urban communities. The community mural movement aimed to reconnect people to the arts, which had undergone separation between the fine arts and those considered lower forms, to establish a means of expression as a collective people defined by shared culture, values, and experiences. Alan W. Barnett, a noted scholar of community murals, goes so far as to claim this movement a “fundamental change in the relation of culture to ordinary people.”

Acting as the common language through which a people can assert their presence in society, protest the hardships and injustices, and celebrate their cultures, these works were, and continue to be an expression of agency over their misrepresented lives. To uphold this social and perhaps philosophical function as a medium of expression that silently but powerfully exerts a community’s presence, these murals require public access. As exterior walls provide the maximum exposure to its audience, the community members, exterior walls are most often where community murals continue to be painted.

As works of social art covering and brightening up the exterior walls of a given community, the murals cannot avoid impermanence, regardless of artistic intent. Murals even on the best prepared walls are subject to weathering when left unprotected and exposed outdoors: prolonged exposure to varying light, temperature, humidity, and oxygen—the four

\[\text{23 Barnett, Community Murals, 15.}\]

\[\text{24 While community murals also exist on interior walls, they are generally in locations that provide great exposure to the community members: public schools, community centers, etc. Though sheltered from extreme weather conditions, however, the interior murals are subject the natural course of material destabilization through time.}\]
major agents of deterioration—will cause physical changes to the paint. While discoloration, cracking, and chipping of the paint are the most obvious alterations/damages to murals, other, less obvious chemical changes are also likely occurring. Furthermore, in addition to the physical makeup of the painted images themselves, murals are also subject to the conditions of the surfaces on which they are painted—the walls and structures. When left to the elements without any form of physical interventions for the material conservation of these murals, these works inevitably come to an end in their finite life. Therefore, the community murals’ placement within the community they serve, on the exterior walls, leave them at the mercy of the elements and ultimately render them ephemeral in their physical composition.

Whereas the first layer of ephemerality is established by the close relationship between the murals’ function/purpose and their physical location within a community, its counterpart is rooted in the relationship between the function/purpose and the audience of the murals. The purpose of the community murals is to illuminate the contemporary issues and concerns of the current community as defined by the community members. These representations are, however, as much of a mode of internal, self-empowerment as it is a mode of outward communication. The murals function as a “new way of being together” and help to create a unifying, collective identity amongst the community members. Then how do these community murals, reflecting the contemporary concerns and interests of a given community for the community members themselves, contribute to their ephemeral character? They do so by way of relevance of the mural imagery to its audience.

It is possible for individual murals to become irrelevant to the community and be “painted out” and replaced while the practice of community mural painting stays relevant and

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26 Barnett, Community Murals, 42.
present within a changing community. This practice of “painting out” and replacing old murals most often takes place in areas of spatial limitations—communities with limited wall space for new murals. This potential to become irrelevant ironically lies in the murals’ ephemerality that enables them to capture the “variability” and “dynamism” of its community. As these murals are a means of community expression, they must grow and evolve to parallel the changes of its community through time. They must negotiate new imageries to effectively reflect the changing attitudes, social views, and values. Therefore, past images may no longer reflect the present community and prove irrelevant in the contemporary context. However, as long as the muralists and the community continue to work together to assert their collective presence through this channel of expression, the murals as a practice remains relevant and thus continues to exist. On the other hand, the entire concept of community murals can also be “ephemeral” in that the practice in its entirety also has the potential to cease being relevant to their community. As art forms predominantly popular in disenfranchised, underserved areas, the individual murals assume a relatively short lifespan directly resulting from the quickly changing community demographics. The mural’s life is threatened and eventually ends when the mural “outlasts the community consensus that it originally reflected and helped shape,” a common

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27 While large-scale mural communities and organizations like the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Organization face the problem of limited wall space and thus have to decommission some of its existing murals, smaller-scale organizations such as the Precita Eyes Muralist Association of San Francisco have available an ample supply of blank walls for new projects. Therefore, the latter organization leans towards the practice of repairing and “touching up” existing murals as it paints new ones on blank walls. Murals are generally painted out by necessity—either by the need for space or due to their physical condition.


29 This is not to say that all murals inevitably lose relevance with time; as a community ages, it can maintain its relevance to its murals as representation of its shared history. Shared experiences and identities of the past may even aid in informing and constructing the present state. Continuing relevance may depend on the relatability of the imagery to new generations.
occurrence within the rapidly changing urban America.\textsuperscript{30} Whether it be that the existing community has adopted entirely new means of representation or that the existing community has been completely replaced by way of new development, murals can become irrelevant and thus expendable for the new residents. This is especially likely if the new community is more affluent than the previous. Traditionally, as previously discussed, community murals was a way for the underserved minority to assert their identity and presence in society. When a community no longer consists of the under-represented residents, the community murals lose their primary function as a channel of social expression as well as their authors/audience. Murals then, are rendered ephemeral by both its physical materiality as well as its functional relevance to the community. It must, however, be clearly distinguished which “mural” is being assessed: individual murals or murals as a practice, as both concepts can be determined irrelevant and thus ephemeral/impermanent.

The dual ephemerality as established above presents both important benefits and challenges for community murals. As the ephemeral character of the murals lies heavily on the works’ relationship to the contemporary—the contemporary social and political concerns, issues, values, as well as contemporary community dynamics—it extends a certain power to the murals that enhances their ability to represent their communities. Clearly an ephemeral art, the community murals then, like the other categories of ephemeral arts previously discussed, amplify the present by setting forth its impermanence. Executing the murals with assertion of presence in mind, the muralists have the option to forego the intensive planning and careful application of materials required by traditional monuments, and thus offers a flare of

spontaneity to the murals. Together with the emphasis on the present, this spontaneity in murals enable the wall paintings to act as powerful “mirrors” of the community, showing its members their history present, and future potentials. As mirrors, the murals highlight the immediate. They effectively capture the contemporary moment and project it onto the public walls for the members of the community to reconnect to the arts, to identify with their culture, and to exert a sense of agency over the representation of the self. Therefore, the importance in community murals lay in access and availability of the images to its audience, the community; though no evidence suggests that muralists purposely neglected the question of longevity of their works, the somewhat crude preparation for and execution of the early murals such as the Wall of Respect in Chicago suggest that they were at least ambivalent about the idea of permanence. The focus is on the message of the images and how quickly and readily they can be accessed. This relative lack of concern for the permanence and protection of the physicality of the murals enable the works to continually be executed on public, exterior walls, further sustaining the high level of access and availability. Therefore, the ephemerality of the community murals—in their continued exposure to the elements and their continuously changing messages paralleling the changes in the community—strongly contribute to, if not enable, the democratic character of the art form.

As community murals illuminate the community’s identity as constructed by its members, these murals are not simply meaningful images on walls but are social processes

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31 This is strictly in comparison to traditional monuments, which by design are traditionally meant to be permanent in both material and message. Community mural range in the intensity of planning and material selection, depending on the source of funding and the intended message.
33 Ibid.; Cockcroft et al., Toward a People’s Art, 2.
rooted in the relationship between the producers and the audience of the murals. They are closely interlinked, the muralists working in close cooperation with the community members to design and execute the most appropriate images as desired by the collective group. Without this broader level of involvement in mural design, community murals would no longer be considered a democratic art, as they would not reflect the voice of the general people but the voice as decided by the few. Therefore, the social and cultural significance of community murals are both inherently tangible and intangible: the combination of the physical product, the murals, and the social process of constructing the representations of the collective identity must both be present to establish the complete significance of the community murals.

Problems arise, however, with the question of the conservation of these murals, especially in light of their ephemeral character.\textsuperscript{34} Considering the murals' material impermanence, a decision must be reached in regards to the degree of intervention in addressing this problem. Should the deterioration process of the mural be intervened upon at all? Should it be preserved? Repainted? Painted out? What are the implications of any of these decisions?

The challenge in answering any of these questions first lies in identifying exactly what to conserve. Both existing scholarship and my own analysis have declared community murals a social process comprised of both tangible and intangible elements. The community murals derive their significance from the involvement of a social group otherwise under- or misrepresented, underserved, and disenfranchised. It is significant in that it is the medium of social expression for those who do not have other means of doing so. This involvement, the cooperation between the community members and the muralists (who are often from the

\textsuperscript{34} The term conservation is used here in a generic sense encompassing all types of intervention: restoration, maintenance, repainting, and preservation.
community or have great knowledge of it) to collectively decide upon an identity, aesthetic, and voice constitutes the intangible aspect of the community mural practice. The physical product of the resulting murals constitutes the tangible aspect. Which of these, the tangible or intangible, demands precedence in conservation efforts? As the practice of conservation traditionally impacts the tangible values and resources, let us discuss the issues around the conservation of the actual murals.

The discussion above has concluded that the tangible element, the physical murals, are ephemeral. They are intended to change with the community as necessary, to capture the contemporary moment in time. The concept of these murals, then, is in direct contradiction with the concept and mission of conservation. How does one approach the issue of indefinitely prolonging the life of something meant to be impermanent and permeable to change? If we were to forcibly conserve a mural to maintain a certain condition, aesthetic, and imagery, what implications does it have on the social process of community murals as a whole? Will it continue to be a community mural, or will the intervention freeze the mural in time and disconnect it from the larger social movement? What is a static community mural? How will this then influence the relevance of the mural to the larger community through time?

Even if a case presents itself where traditional means of conservation is appropriate, careful consideration must be given to balancing the authenticity and integrity of the mural with its significance and values. This issue begs the question: what are the values that need conserving? What demands priority—the artistic workmanship and integrity of the physical mural or the community identity and voice expressed through the imagery? The traditional practice of the preservation field, including that of the cultural landscape preservation focus, complicates this matter because it is in the habit of prioritizing the tangible values of cultural resources. It often designates greater value to authenticity and integrity as these are
quantifiable elements (such as the remaining amount of original paint applied by the original artist) as opposed to the ability of an image to express a community’s voice, a qualitative element. Therefore, there is little existing precedent within the preservation field that can advise in this difficult balancing act. What is the ideal point of balance between original workmanship and the intangible function? Is it site- and community-specific?

Further complicating the matters of conservation of community murals is the ethics and legality of ephemeral arts. Alterations or removal of murals can potentially be in violation of the muralist’s rights under the Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA) which grants the artist “moral rights”: the “right of attribution” and the “right of integrity.”35 These moral rights grant the artist the right to be identified with his/her work and to protect his/her work from alterations or destruction. It also imposes a legal liability for those who alter, mutilate, or destroy works. However, while it does not mandate conservation, it also protects conservators from “liability for distortion, mutilation, modification, or destruction” given that the work is properly performed with due diligence in testing—that is, as long as there is no “gross negligence” by the conservator.36 As conservation efforts done on murals inevitably involve alterations and modifications, and, as many communities opt to add on to existing murals as a means of adapting to passage of time and changes in values, an artist’s rights reserved under VARA comes into question. It involves careful negotiations balancing respect for the artist’s original work and intent with the need for maintenance, repair, and alterations. While some community mural

36 Ibid., 8.
organizations require muralists to waive their rights under VARA in painting a mural, others are free to file legal claims if ever they feel their rights threatened.  

As we can gather from this discussion of community murals as ephemeral art, the ephemerality of murals offers depth and complexity both in how the murals function to benefit the community in means of expression and in the challenges the murals pose in regards to conservation efforts. The impermanent, evanescent character of community murals better highlight the immediate present—the community’s contemporary state. It also enables the murals to evolve and change with the community to reflect its social, cultural, economic, and political changes. It renders the murals an organic entity within the community, to accommodate for the changes in the values, struggles, and desires of the community through time. However, alongside such benefits is a set of challenges posed precisely by the same ephemeral character. The ephemerality of the murals require multiple balancing acts in considering conservation—to maintain a work’s relevance to its community, to balance the qualitative and quantitative (as well as tangible and intangible) values of the murals, and to negotiate the artist’s rights with the necessary interventions.

The following case study of the San Francisco Mission District murals offers assistance to contextualize ephemeral community murals in real time and space. It also helps to crystallize the relatively abstract discussions of this section by providing real-world examples. Maintained, painted, and advocated for by a community-based organization and boasting of an illustrated chronology of images and social history, the Mission District murals show how they fit into the larger scheme of the community and how it is valued. Finally, the case study provides more

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37 For example, the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program now requires muralists to waive VARA when executing a mural, as shared by Catherine Myers, City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, during a private conversation, March 21, 2016. VARA will be discussed in detail in upcoming sections of this study.
specific examples of the benefits and challenges of ephemeral community murals relating to the discussion in this section.
Chapter 3: Case Study – San Francisco Mission District Murals

To better understand the ephemerality of community murals and the abstract discussions of the previous section in real time, it is first necessary to understand the place of the art form within the broader context of its community. What is the origin of this set of community murals? In what ways are these murals important to the community? What values are they ascribed and what functions do they serve? How does ephemerality factor into the murals’ functions and challenges within the community? What are some challenges that these murals face that call for their protection?

Methodology

I execute an in-depth case study of the San Francisco Mission District murals to gain insight to addressing these questions. I conduct qualitative research consisting of a combination of participant observations, interviews with muralists and mural organizations, and mural tours. Participant observation, common to the cultural anthropology and ethnography field, is a research method in which a researcher takes part in the everyday activities and interactions of the subject community to gain an understanding of its culture. This research method acknowledges the researcher’s position as one not fully included as an in-group member of the community, emphasizing the importance of the perspective of the researcher as observations are made and requires that the presence of a third party, the researcher, be taken into account when analyzing the data.\(^3\) As the case study’s purpose is to first identify the inherent and physical values of the murals, such a form of qualitative research, aimed at “understanding [the] natural phenomena and not [...] assessing [its] degree and magnitude” (emphasis my own),

proves an effective approach.\textsuperscript{39} Formal interviews add another dimension to such observational data, providing the in-group members’ perspective on the research topic. I deploy interviews over surveys as the target of analysis is the in-depth \textit{content} of the answers rather than their \textit{frequency}—qualitative over quantitative data. I carry out the final component of fieldwork by attending educational mural tours led by the organizations when available. These tours aid understanding of the aspects of the community murals that the groups feel are most representative of the collection and noteworthy of emphasis. Finally, in order to put this primary source data into temporal and sociocultural context, I turn to secondary sources to construct a brief history of the mural community and its surround area.

\textbf{San Francisco Mission District}

Favored for its location in a wide, flat valley floor with ease of access to various water sources, the Mission District is the oldest settled area in San Francisco. Geographically, this resource-rich area is protected by the San Miguel Hills to its west, present-day Potrero Hill to its east, and by Bernal Heights to its south. The hills block and protect the area from the ocean wind and fog, making the district one of the sunniest in the city. It is also conveniently located between the commercial/financial districts and the outer residential areas, offering unique experiences and some of the most visited spots in the city by locals and visitors alike (Fig. 1).

The Mission District today is best known as a Latino area though it has served as home to a wide array of peoples. It was inhabited as early as the Costanoan language family (also known as the Ohlones) prior to European contact; it was also the terminus for the historic El Camino Real and a point of settlement for Spanish missionaries. Since then, other inhabitants

\textsuperscript{39} DeWalt and DeWalt, \textit{Participant Observation}, 1.
include, but are not limited to, the Mexican Rancheros, early American pioneers, and later Irish, Italian, and German immigrants. The Mission District derived its present, predominant Latino association despite its history of diverse inhabitants because Latino residents have been present regardless of the changing majority demographic. From the Depression through the post-War era, the number of Latino immigrants—both legal and undocumented—spiked, shifting the Mission’s demographics from predominantly Irish to Latino. A key driver was the Bracero Program, a series of bilateral agreements executed between the US and Mexican government in 1942 allowing for contracted laborers. While the official program involved only the two governments, it indirectly impacted the flow of non-Mexican Latinos into the country. As a result, the Latino population in the San Francisco Mission District is mostly from Central America, interestingly, in contrast to its counterpart barrios of Los Angeles where the population is predominantly Mexican, and in New York where it is mostly Puerto Rican. The building of the Bay Bridge in 1933 also contributed to this demographic shift: the construction of the bridge forced the Latino population of Rincon Hill up Mission Street to the present-day district.

Today, the Mission District is often known as the “Latino neighborhood,” reflecting a deep-rooted Latino and Spanish heritage in both its built environment and culture. This distinctly cultural area that has uniquely transformed through the various historic events and demographic shifts is often described as “a city within a city.”

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42 Ibid., 22.
43 Ibid., 19.
44 San Francisco Planning Department, City within a City, 1.
neighborhood, the Mission District’s physical, built environment is enmeshed with historic mission-era structures, including the city’s oldest structure, the chapel of San Francisco de Asís (better known as Mission Dolores), built during the second half of the 18th century and located in the northwest quadrant of the district. Mission style architecture is also adopted throughout the district’s commercial corridors as well as in its school buildings, such as Mission High School located two blocks south of Mission Dolores. In addition to the tangible, architectural influence, the Mission’s distinct heritage is evident in the intangible aspects of the district: in its music, language, food, and, most interestingly, its murals.

History and Development of the Mission Murals

The earliest known murals in the Mission District date back to the late 1960s or early 1970s. Strongly embracing the Latino ethnic imagery, these murals are generally accepted as a part of the Chicano/a Movement so prevalent in the early 60’s especially in California. While these murals’ connection to the Movement cannot be ignored, the Mission District murals likely stem from a combination of influences within that period: the existing Latino population in the area, as well as the indirect impact of the Mexican Mural Movement and the New Deal era murals via the Chicano/a Movement, and the Community Mural Movement, all during a time of intense social and civil rights issues.

The Mexican Mural Movement was initiated and funded by the new government after the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1917 as a means of educating its mostly rural and illiterate population about the struggles toward and achievements of revolutionary Mexico. From this movement rose the “Three Great Ones,” Los Tres Grandes—Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros—muralists most recognized for influencing mural arts in
subsequent eras.\textsuperscript{45} Rivera’s tendency towards indigenous, pre-conquest imagery in his work has especially impacted later artists.\textsuperscript{46}

Muralists of the New Deal era in the U.S. gained inspiration from the Three Great Ones as they executed thousands of murals as a part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) public arts program from 1934 to 1946.\textsuperscript{47} The Three joined the New Deal muralists in the 30’s as they fled the political scene in Mexico. Rivera painted four frescoes in San Francisco. Commissioned by the federal government, the murals painted in public buildings did not necessarily contribute to establishing a community; however, these public artworks demonstrated that "murals could be a viable means of public artistic expression."\textsuperscript{48}

At the same time, the Latino population present in the U.S. were often stereotyped as second class citizens, if not illegal immigrants, despite their deep-rooted history within the nation.\textsuperscript{49} While the population viewed Anglo assimilation as the best solution to this problem, a generation of resisters came to prominence in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{50} These socially conscious youths took inspiration from the leaders of the labor movement in activism and reversed the ideologies of cultural assimilation to reclaim, understand, and celebrate the cultural heritage of which they had so long been deprived.\textsuperscript{51} They called themselves Chicanos/as and fought for their rights to their cultural heritage as well as rights as equal citizens of the U.S. The Chicano/a Movement of the 60’s, inspired by the Mexican muralism, adopted muralism and adapted it to its own cause: as a vessel to communicate a people’s cultural heritage and the injustices done unto them in the

\textsuperscript{45} Drescher, \textit{San Francisco Murals}, 10.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 10-11.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} T.V. Reed, “Chapter Four Revolutionary Walls: Chicano/a Murals, Chicano/a Movements” in \textit{The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle}, (University of Minnesota Press: 2005), 103.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 104.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 105.
present. Thus started the muralismo, the mural movement to represent community activity and voice.

Nationally, at this same time, the Community Mural Movement was also taking hold. This mural movement was less ethnically-specific, but addressed the under- or misrepresented working class population in urban areas. This usually included Black and other ethnic minority populations. The movement aimed to challenge the “adherence to conventional pieties, modes of work, and human relationships” forced on them by the majority white population.\textsuperscript{52} In an age in which art was increasingly tied to academicism and locked away in elite galleries, this public art form provided a medium through which people could assert agency over their own cultural representation and community character.

While the imagery in early murals in the Mission District seem most connected to the Chicano/a Movement, they appeared almost a decade after those in cities like Los Angeles and San Diego. They also occurred on a much smaller scale. While the latter two cities displayed their art on large-scale buildings and public infrastructure, the San Francisco Mission District murals appeared mostly on small, private structures—mostly residential garages and fences. This suggests that the Mission murals were perhaps targeted not at the general Chicano/a population and their movement but at is immediate vicinity, its community, similar to the Wall of Respect in Chicago.

Further, the Mission District murals appeared within the context of immense civil, social, and political tension in the U.S. Appropriately, the early murals’ imagery not only celebrated Latin American heritage, but also depicted international terror, police harassment, and the dangers of drugs to the entire ethnic identity and body politic.\textsuperscript{53} As murals with similar

\textsuperscript{52} Barnett, \textit{Community Murals}, 45.
\textsuperscript{53} Drescher, \textit{San Francisco Murals}, 19.
messages appeared in other parts of San Francisco around the same time, namely, the Haight-Ashbury, Hunter’s Point, Western Addition, and the Fillmore, all in different styles, it is probable that muralismo was a citywide phenomenon, the images taking the cultural styles best understood by its community population. For example, the Haight employed Bohemian imagery while the other three districts depicted traditional African imagery as well as those of African American social and political leaders. The muralists in the Haight targeted its Bohemian “hippie” population, while those in Hunter’s Point, Western Addition, and the Fillmore the African American population, and those in the Mission its Latino population. Therefore, it is difficult to pinpoint just one source of the Mission District murals: a combination of influences from both historic and contemporary events likely spurred the Mission muralismo.

This mural practice has continued to the present day changing with the social and political climate of the immediate neighborhood, city, and the nation in its entirety. With the waning of the mass political activism prominent in the 60’s and early 70’s, as well as the aging first generation of muralists, the mural imagery shifted towards an apolitical form. Murals as an art form had, by this time, been accepted as an “approved” channel of expression, one through which the following generation of muralists was increasingly able to express its individual styles and ideas. Of course, much of the artwork still continued to serve as community murals, reflecting the contemporary values, interests, concerns, and styles, as will be discussed later through the interview.

Today, the Mission District murals are primarily the product of the Precita Eyes Muralists Association and Center, a community-based mural arts organization founded in 1977 by Susan Kelk Cervantes, a member of the “Mujeres Muralistas,” some of the best-known

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54 Drescher, San Francisco Murals, 37.
55 Ibid.
female muralists of the first generation. The Precita Eyes Muralists Association and Center aims to beautify urban environments, especially in communities of low-income and under-privileged members, and to make physically and conceptually accessible art through collaborations with other muralists and members of the community.56 The organization works to continue the spirit of muralismo, to “bring art into the daily lives of people through a process which enables them to reflect their particular concerns, joys and triumphs.”57 To achieve this goal, Precita Eyes takes on the responsibility of planning and executing murals, as well as monitoring, protecting, and conserving them. The organization offers mural tours and mural painting classes for both youths and adults. While it works predominantly with the Mission District and its abundance of murals, it also collaborates on projects in neighboring districts, cities, states, and even countries as opportunities present themselves.

On the Field

Having spent most of my childhood and adolescent years in the city, I have always proclaimed myself a “San Franciscan.” I am an in-group member of San Francisco. However, with little exposure to the study site, I cannot claim to have an understanding of the place, its complex dynamics of social, cultural, and physical interactions. I am not a part of the Mission District, I am not a member. My observations therefore reflect a certain level of understanding of the dynamics of the space but reflect a lack in capacity to personally relate to the lived experiences that the place offers.

57 Ibid.
My participant observation started with my commute to the Precita Eyes Muralist Association and Center, located on 24th Street, one of the major commercial corridors of the district (Precita Eyes indicated in red in Figure 2), by way of public transit. As I headed east from the Castro District into the core commercial blocks of 24th Street, I observed changes in both audio and visual stimulations on the bus. The building-scape observed through the window dramatically transitioned from a predominantly residential one with few storefronts to one of completely mixed-use and storefront lined, characteristic of much of the Mission District.58 Along with the changing building-scape observed, the mere ten-stop bus ride along 24th Street reflected changes in the numbers and demographics of its passengers: the vehicle shifted from a relatively empty, quiet space of few passengers of mixed races to one completely packed, with hardly any breathing room, as a noticeably large number of Latino passengers boarded. This change was particularly noticeable as we passed the intersection of Mission Street and 24th Street, a large transportation hub of the area where various bus and tram lines converged. The interior of the bus became lively and full of conversation, mostly in Spanish, among people who were friends, family, and neighbors; the bustling bags of groceries, the friendly chatter of passengers, and the delicious aroma of takeout foods all indicated that I was in a different neighborhood than one where I had boarded—I had crossed the threshold into the core of the Mission.

Corresponding to these changes was yet another visual change in the building-scape: the appearance of street art. Murals gradually appeared throughout my 10-stop bus ride, from zero murals at the point of my boarding, to completely embellished walls by the time of exiting the vehicle. The presence of murals achieved critical mass once crossing the threshold of

58 The Mission District is known for its heavily mixed-use quality.
Mission Street and continued its density well past my stop. Hyperaware of this new stimulus as a non-group member, I became the target of odd looks as I stared intensely at a mural portrait of a woman whom I did not know but could tell was celebrated by the loving way she was portrayed.

The Precita Eyes Muralists Center and Association occupies the ground floor of a typical San Francisco Victorian in the middle of the city block. A storefront with a central entryway flanked by two large windows, the Center served as an art studio full of renditions and sketches of murals as well as a retail space selling art supplies and souvenirs. A Center run by practicing muralists, the organization offered weekly tours on Saturdays and Sundays, with a brief introductory slideshow lecture and a walking tour of the vicinity, along 24th Street and the famous Balmy Alley (see short perpendicular line segment in Figure 2). Providing special discounts for San Francisco residents, students, and seniors, the organization demonstrated efforts to reach a large audience.

The tour began with a 45 minute slideshow presentation in the back studio room of Precita Eyes. There were a total of seven attendees, including myself: four were from the city while one couple came from Spain and one man was visiting from New York City. The majority of attendees were in their late twenties to mid-thirties. The presentation described the evolution of murals in a simple sequence of well-known works, ultimately leading to the origin and the progress of the Mission District murals. The general history told was consistent with the history of community murals as discussed earlier in this study. Minor differences included a heavier emphasis on the Mexican Mural Movement and the Chicano/a Movement. Also, as the scope of the presentation was on murals overall (not specifically community murals), the lecturer started her presentation with slides of the Paleolithic cave paintings of Lascaux, France and frescoes of Pompeii—ones definitely not addressed in existing community mural literature.
The walking portion of the tour continued immediately after the slideshow presentation. Having established a better understanding of the Mission District’s muralismo and the murals’ place within the community in concept indoors through slides, the walking tour was designed to have the attendees experience the murals in its real, physical environment. The tour included not only the famous Balmy Alley, just one and a half city block west of Precita Eyes, but also the different styles of street art decorating the otherwise bare walls of the building-scape. Throughout this walking tour, the Precita Eyes education coordinator and muralist (and my point-person for this case study), Patricia Rose, pointed out various murals as examples for discussion of community involvement, culturally diverse imageries, shared histories, and threats posed onto these wall paintings. Together with my own observations walking through the area the following day, this tour helped crystalize the abstract discussions in the previous section on ephemerality. The murals throughout the study area provided tangible examples of the benefits and challenges posed by this quality. They also enabled me to distinguish theirs different values and functions in the context of the community.

Observations and Analyses

The first mural of the tour, on the exterior wall of the “Belmar ‘La Gallinita’ Meat Market,” provided an example of a mural that had been added onto over a decade after its execution. This mural, called Leyenda Azteca, was an adapted rendition of an Aztec myth, painted by the muralists of Precita Eyes in 2000 upon the building owner’s commission (see Figure 3 and 4). Fifteen years after its execution, the cracking and chipping paint called for conservation to repair and paint over the original material. According to Patricia, while many of the conservation projects in the district involve the original artist revisiting his/her work to make repairs, this particular mural not only involved the Precita Eyes muralists but also local youths.
ranging in age from five to seventeen years old as a part of the organization’s mural education program. During the repair process, the children expressed a desire to expand on the existing mural, originally only occupying a portion of the wall, adding imagery relating to the myth. Rose proudly shared that the cacti had been painted by some of the youngest members of the community, kindergarteners.

This mural then emphasizes the continuity of muralism as a practice of community involvement and expression. The original Aztec-inspired image, with recent additions by the young members of the community, has expanded from echoing the ancient culture to serving as a creative outlet and an educational medium for the newest generation of the Mission District. In addition to the cacti painted by kindergarteners, other features of the mural, such as the dragon, had been painted by the older children. This practice of adding onto an existing mural is a demonstration of the benefits presented by the ephemeral art form in that the mural, by virtue of this character, is able change to incorporate its new members of the community into the existing cultural landscape. While the added images themselves may not express any serious forms of contemporary issues or concerns, they prove that this mural continues to be a democratic art in that it is now also art of, by, and for the children. This addition reflects community muralism as a current, ongoing process that has extended its relevance to its new generation (by means of their participation).

Immediately across the street from this conserved and modified mural, on the southwest corner of the intersection, was a mural that best emphasized the spontaneity of community muralism. This mural, a large, black and white portrait of a smiling woman set against a black background in aerosol paint with the name “Sandy” in large-scale red text, was painted in commemoration of the passing of a beloved community member, Sandy Cuadra (see Figure 5). According to Rose, this mural had appeared almost overnight, quickly planned and
executed by some of the teenage boys in the neighborhood mourning her departure. Surrounding the portrait and name were images of things that Sandy had loved in her life. The wall that lent itself to this artwork was the Mission Girls building, the Mission neighborhood center for young girls, providing academic assistance, a place for artistic expression and self-empowerment. The artists of the commemorative mural, in recognition (and perhaps in appeasement for the use) of the building and the organization, included in their work another beautifully written text that reads "Mission Girls" (see Figure 6).

This mural portrait of Sandy, in its swift planning and execution, embodies the spontaneity as made possible by the ephemerality of community murals. Spray painted directly onto the building surface without any evidence of wall preparation, this work suggests that permanence was not the priority for the artists. The unofficial negotiation of the use of space further supports this idea. This work, in its overnight appearance, highlights and reflects the urgency in the artists’ commemorative efforts and the community’s present feeling of loss and affection for its beloved member. The mural then proves ephemeral in the nature of its execution (without regards for longevity) as well as in the relevance of its subject, a figure of direct relation to the existing community but one who may not be as present in the minds of future generations. The transient nature of this art form is what enables such immediate expressions of contemporary sentiments without considerations for future relevance and permanence.

Continuing west, Balmy Alley provided a visual chronology of the community’s shared history through its vibrant and eclectic set of murals. A short alley composed of the rear of residential buildings, showing mostly wooden fences and garage doors, Balmy Alley is one of two best known alleys of such kind and is almost entirely covered in murals, including the oldest
extant mural in the community (see Figure 7). The murals in the alley created a beautiful, colorful space: the often overlooked structures such as garage doors and fences proudly functioned as gallery space to display historical and cultural images. The narrow, single-block space was a site for education in history and culture, a place to directly experience the past and present values and concerns of a community.

The painted histories and cultures of various Latino peoples contributed to a collective Mission identity, as appreciated by many community members including San Francisco’s sixth Poet Laureate Alejandro Murguia. Murguia, renowned writer and Latino studies scholar, is a native of the community and the founding member (and first director) of the Mission Cultural Center. Much of his work, both non-fiction and poetry, reflect the Latino/a culture in the Mission: the non-fiction *The Medicine of Memory* and short story “The Other Barrio” highlight the Mission District both in the past and present. He claims to gain inspiration from his community, from the members and the environment. Many of his poems are said to have been inspired by the historical images painted on the walls of Balmy Alley.

Much of the murals of Balmy Alley, that have inspired artists like Murguia, represented Latin American heritage and history, ranging from the negatives such as the struggles of wars, loss, and police brutality, to the positives such as the prosperity and rewards of hard work and family values. Muralists employed contemporary scenes of the city as well as traditional native imagery (usually of Aztec influence) to create a dynamic space of complex visual stimulations. Despite the very apparent Chicano influence, however, the mural imagery were consistent with

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59 The other of such alleys is Clarion Alley located a little over a mile northwest of Balmy Alley.
the existing population of the community and reflected not just the Mexican American culture but also various Central American cultures and values. For example, the work *The Culture Contains the Seed of Resistance that Blossoms into the Flower of Liberation* by O’Brien Thiele and Miranda Bergman in 1984, depicts both the terrors and hopes of Central America during various civil wars. On one side is the horrific scene of military and government exploitation, missing family members from war, starving children as a result of favoring exportation of produce over sustaining and feeding the population; on the other, separated by a tall maize stock, are the warm, happy, prosperous lands and people as a result of cultural awareness (see Figure 8 and 9).

Another mural in the alley communicating a strong message and community sentiment is one painted by those who have lost their loved ones to AIDS: *Those We Love, We Remember* (1995) (see Figure 10). The work was planned and executed by Edythe Boone; however, Rose has added that she had worked in collaboration with those who had experienced such loss, including children. The Mural includes names in remembrance of their loved ones. This mural is consistent with the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic in San Francisco in the late 1980s through the 90’s.

Of course, there are murals that celebrate Latino heritage as well: various murals depict the contributions of Latino artists to popular culture, in movies and music, as well as portraits of famous Mexican artists (see Figure 11 and 12). There also stands a garage door with a mural that simply reads “Latino Pride” (see Figure 13). In its dynamic range of such celebratory and remorseful, memorial murals, Balmy Alley acts as a visual chronology of changing cultural and historic events as well as values and traditions. As Rose claims, these murals are reflective of the evolving community; the murals change alongside its physical and cultural space.
This area of the Mission District has continued to be the “stronghold of Latino population and culture” in the city and has thus experienced a continuation and growth of the Latino community that originally sparked the early mural movement.\textsuperscript{62} The continued presence of the same community through the decades has therefore enabled the murals, both older and more recent, to remain relevant to its people by means of shared histories as well as contemporary values. Though some murals depict events and sentiments of the past, the underlying shared cultural and ethnic representations enable the community members to relate to these images and apply them in informing their present identities. A Mission native and a contributor to the \textit{Mission Local}, an online-based, self-sustaining neighborhood news site, Mark Rabine commented that these old murals become “a part of the streetscape, then the community, and then, like an old friend, part of [himself].”\textsuperscript{63} Writing on the recent unveiling of a restored community favorite, \textit{Carnaval}, Rabine claimed that this “time warp” depicting the annual Carnaval festival of the Mission District had become a cultural heritage for the community (see Figure 20).\textsuperscript{64} As the generation that witnessed the painting of the original mural, he says that the persistence of such murals today reflects that the community still exists: “we’re all still here; the people, the ghosts, and most of all the work.”\textsuperscript{65} Therefore, regardless of the age of the mural, where a community is able to collectively understand the cultural and historical cues of the imagery, they remain relevant.

However, while the predominantly Latino community has persisted through the past decades, the Mission District is currently experiencing a dramatic change in its demographics.

\textsuperscript{62} City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, \textit{City within a City}, 95.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.; San Francisco Carnaval has taken place annually since 1979, with its 38\textsuperscript{th} annual parade scheduled for Memorial Day Weekend.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
that is effectively uprooting and displacing much of this long-established community. With the booming tech industries of Silicon Valley, the Mission and its rich cultural heritage are increasingly becoming prime targets of settlement for the new demographic of “techies.”

Increasing demand for residential (and, in turn, commercial) space has driven up both the rental and real estate market of the Mission, rendering many of its existing residents unable to meet rising costs of living. Once a neighborhood of affordable housing, the Mission has come to boast of some of the most exorbitantly high rents, forcing its original lower working-class residents to leave (though often in extreme protest).66

This demographic shift proves a challenge to the community murals: are community murals “community” murals without the community whom they were intended to represent? The physical murals remain in the Mission District; however, as Garogoli and Said have observed, the artists are leaving, and so are the other community members. This process of gentrification serves as an example of the problematic side of the ephemeral community murals. If this demographic shift continues, the Mission District will no longer be a predominantly Latino community of lower working-class residents but one of young, affluent professionals. As previously discussed, community murals provide a channel of social expression for the disenfranchised; the new residents of the Mission District are not disenfranchised. Will they feel the need to adopt the practice of community murals or will this

historically significant social phenomenon become obsolete? If the new residents continue painting murals, how would these new murals relate to the existing mural fabric of the district?

While the most dramatic effect of gentrification would be the physical destruction of murals by way of new development or owners (as has been the case previously), a set of murals in Balmy Alley poses another threat to the practice of community murals. Three murals covering three adjacent surfaces in the alley are completely out of sync with the surrounding murals in that they are of geometric shapes and patterns in pastel tones such as pinks and light blues (see Figure 14). This set of murals seemed out of place and difficult to “read” upon encounter. When our tour group inquired after the story behind this work, Rose hesitated and jokingly told us that it was painted to direct our attention across the alley, to the third floor mural that read “Rejoice.” She then continued to explain that she had experienced the most difficulty in trying to incorporate this particular mural set into the general scheme of her tour, as it realistically had no relation to the other murals other than the fact that it was painted in Balmy Alley. This mural was not a work of Precita Eyes: it was commissioned by the owner of the property on which it was painted. The building itself, Rose explained, had long been a part of the community until recent years, functioning as a multi-unit, multi-family housing for local residents with children. However, it had been purchased by the current property owner who had development in mind; the tenants were displaced and the building renovated to be single-floor condominiums for unimaginably high rental prices, a reoccurring pattern in recent years. Rose shared that there are rumors of it being an Airbnb. This change was obviously not received in a favorable light. When asked why the mural was painted, she claimed that she could only

guess that it was for the sake of being a property on Balmy Alley with a mural—because it was characteristic of the neighborhood. Perhaps it was a method to appease the neighbors.

This set of pastel-toned, geometric-patterned murals demonstrate the threats of gentrification, not only in their aesthetically inconsistent appearance but most importantly in its effect on the relevance of community murals to the people. As discussed in the previous section, it is possible for the practice of community mural painting to prove “ephemeral” in that the practice itself has the potential to become irrelevant to the existing community. If the gentrification process effectively uproots the existing community in its entirety, the remaining community murals no longer have the proper audience nor artists to continue their presence in the district. Without the shared experiences and constructed identity, both the images and the practice become irrelevant to the new residents. Without the social philosophy inherent in community murals, mural painting is no longer a democratic art form—they are simply paintings on walls, as these geometric murals seem to be. These murals then are crystallization of some of the challenges posed by the ephemeral quality of community murals.

Some other challenges set forth by the ephemerality of the murals revolve around material impermanence. Two sites demonstrate this challenge particularly well: the 500 Years of Resistance by Isaias Mata from El Salvador in 1992 and the murals of the 24th and York Mini Park. The former is a large-scale mural covering two adjacent walls of Saint Peter’s Church on Alabama and 24th Street. Mata had been a refugee in San Francisco, specifically at the Saint Peter’s Church, during the political conflicts of the early 90’s in El Salvador. The mural recognizes the horrors of war and celebrates the strength and resistance of the people. With much of the Latino population still worshipping at Saint Peter’s, this mural is a testament to the struggles and strength of all Latin Americans, not just El Salvadorians. It is meant to reaffirm the migrant community and to encourage strong, supportive relationships among its members.
However, after over two decades of exposure to the elements, the mural began to crack and peel from the underlying structure, requiring conservation. Precita Eyes exerted intense fundraising efforts to transport Mata back to San Francisco to restore his work; the organization’s staff and even community members off the street joined the effort and assisted in Mata’s process. Today, the mural stands fully repaired without any trace of previous “blemishes” (see Figure 15). While Mata’s personal involvement in this conservation process eliminated the potential issues of alterations to an artist’s work, the repainting of much of the mural poses the question of “authenticity,” especially in later discussions of historic preservation.

A more dramatic example of material impermanence is seen in the 24th and York Mini Park two blocks east of the church. This single-parcel mini park, surrounded on three sides by the exterior walls of neighboring buildings, was temporarily closed by the city’s Health and Safety Department. All three sides of the parcel were covered by scaffolding, obstructing views to the murals behind them. The Precita Eyes conservationist Yano Rivera explained that the park was indefinitely closed due to lead paint regulations. The buildings surrounding the park were all wooden frame-structured buildings of the late 19th, early 20th century whose exterior walls were covered in lead paint. Murals had been painted directly on top of these walls, and when the murals began to peel, as they do with prolonged exposure to the elements, it peeled along with it the underlying lead paint. The resulting lead paint chips fell to the park grounds, a

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69 The social value ascribed to this mural by the community was apparent in the willingness of numerous community organizations to contribute in funds and labor to save and restore this mural. Such organizations included, but were not limited to, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers 1245 (IBEW) and the SHARE foundation, a non-profit organization helping marginalized Salvadorian communities. IBEW 1245 San Francisco unit organizer Eileen Purcell claimed that this mural was a “celebration of Latin identity, history and culture, and [...] also an affirmation of the power of organizing” and that it was a wonderful way to get involved in the local community. (“San Francisco Unit Helps Preserve Beloved Mural,” IBEW 1245, accessed May 7, 2016, http://ibew1245.com/2013/06/06/san-francisco-unit-helps-preserve-beloved-mural/)
children’s play area. The Health and Safety Department, notified of the lead paint, temporarily closed the park and approached Precita Eyes about the possibility of their taking on a conservation project to address the issue. The organization gladly accepted the project and have developed a two-phase plan to protect the murals as well as maintain the safety of the playground. This lead abatement plan involved a two-phase fundraising goal: to fund the project of sealing the existing murals in a clear coat of chemically sensitive adhesive to halt the damage (recently finished) and to eventually bring the original artists back to repair the cracks in the paint and fill in the areas that had already chipped off (see Figure 16 and 17). Again, these deteriorating murals demonstrate the physical ephemerality of community murals, not only in the physical composition of the painted images but also in the condition of the underlying structures.70

Other forms of spontaneous and impermanent works observed in the study area were text-oriented murals that communicated assertive messages, located west of Balmy Alley on 24th Street. Combining large-scale texts and images, these works respond to current social struggles and cultural appropriation (see Figure 18). Others were in support of the fight against contemporary cases of police brutality, adopting slogans such as “Everyone Matters” (see Figure 19). These works also show signs of quick application, be it on brick walls or over existing graffiti, which suggest the artists’ ambivalence towards permanence. Further, the messages inherent in these works reflect the present hardships and challenges of the community—these messages highlight the present state of the Mission District and even apply to American society at large. The artists, through the ephemerality of these works, then, effectively capture the

70 While the Precita Eyes Muralist Association makes it a point to invite original artists to conserve failing murals as circumstances and funds present themselves, no policy mandates mural conservation nor require the involvement of original artists in the effort.
state of contemporary society and project their messages onto the walls for other community members to relate to, contemplate, and digest.

The ephemerality of the community murals as defined in the previous section and concretely demonstrated in this case study enables the art form to assume greater complexities of expression. This quality allows both the mural and the artist to respond to social and physical changes and represent their community in their most accurate and current state; it enables the creation of a continually changing, responsive cultural landscape. However, the inherent impermanence of the physical artwork, as well as the ever-changing nature of the community itself also provide challenges in considering the murals as resources for protection. Physical deterioration of murals call for conservation considerations. These considerations then bring to fore the question of authenticity in materials as well as the risk of stagnation within a framework of an ongoing social practice. The changeability of the community, be it as a result of gentrification or of adopting a new form of expression, challenges the relevance of community murals in relation to its people. Therefore ephemerality is a double-sided coin in the discussion of the protection of murals: the quality that enables continuity of the art as a practice is also one that has the potential to render the existing artworks irrelevant to the community.
Chapter 4: Existing Policy and Practice Evaluation

The past section examined the manifestation of ephemerality in community murals and the benefits and challenges it posed in serving the murals’ function. It provided concrete examples of the material challenges posed by the inherently impermanent nature of these murals; it also revealed the power of communication and community involvement made available by their emphasis on the present. The case study has also shed light on additional preservational values of community murals such as the cultural practice of muralism in establishing and maintaining a community identity. This chapter now evaluates how well and to what extent applicable policies and programs in historic preservation and art conservation recognize, address, and embrace the complexities of these ephemeral community murals and practice. What do the policies and programs do? In what ways are they relevant or applicable to community murals? Do they apply specifically to the physical images or the transient nature of the art as well? How about its intangible character as a form of cultural and social practice? What does this policy and practice evaluation reveal of the effectiveness of the current historic preservation and art conservation field in addressing this complex, ephemeral cultural resource?

The following list of policies and programs represent only a sample of tools available in historic preservation and art conservation. These have been selected as most representative of the potentially (or currently) relevant tools in the two fields. The policies and programs from the historic preservation field are limited to the federal level, as they are applicable to such cultural resources nationwide regardless of state- and city-specific policies. The policies from the art conservation perspective include two federal policies directly relating to artists’ rights and an accepted code of ethics for art conservation. The list also includes a non-profit historic preservation organization and its own set of approach in addressing murals.
First written into law in 1966, The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) (16 U.S.C. §§ 470 to 470X-6) is the principal umbrella policy for the historic preservation field, making provisions for preservation programs on state and local governmental levels. It is a federal policy that recognizes the importance of and makes provisions for the protection of the nation’s historic and cultural resources. The NHPA establishes a national historic preservation program under the Department of the Interior to identify and protect locally, tribally, and nationally significant resources. It makes provisions for programs such as the National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmarks; it also establishes administrative offices such as the State Historic Preservation Offices and Certified Local Governments to work in partnership with the federal government to implement the NHPA. That said, let us examine exactly how community murals may fall under the jurisdiction of this policy.

The purpose and language of this legislation makes the historic preservation field relevant in considering community mural preservation and protection. Section 1 (16 U.S.C. 470—Short title of the Act) of the NHPA first recognizes the importance of “historic heritage” in the development of the Nation and that such “foundations” of the Nation should be preserved as a “living part of our community life and development” to provide a sense of “orientation” to the citizens. It further acknowledges the acceleration with which such resources significant to the national heritage are endangered and lost, and deems these resources “irreplaceable heritage.” The finite lifespan and the limited supply of these “historic properties” provide the grounds for the national historic preservation program. It calls for the preservation of such “irreplaceable heritage” so that its “vital legacy of cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational, economic, and energy benefits will be maintained and enriched for future generations of Americans.” The community murals, as representative of a social movement significant to American history, achieve both local significance in their respective communities as well as
national significance as a part of a larger movement/phenomenon. Individual murals are without a doubt impermanent in both materiality and presence (see section on ephemerality) and are unique to their individual locality and community despite fitting into the broader national narrative. As a mirror of their community, the murals continue to provide both cultural and educational benefits to all audience. The NHPA then directly applies to the locally and nationally significant community murals. Further, the following sections of the NHPA uniformly address the target resources as “historic properties,” identified in Title III Section 301 (16 U.S.C. 470w—Definitions) as “any prehistoric or historic district, site, building, structure, or object, included in, or eligible for inclusion on the National Register, including artifacts, records, and material remains related to such a property or resource.” The murals fall under the definition of “historic properties/resources” as an “object,” to be defined in the following discussion of the National Register of Historic Places. Thus, the technical language of the legislation enables further applicability to murals.

The National Historic Preservation Act is too all-encompassing a legislation to effectively evaluate its capacity to address community mural preservation in all its ephemeral and intangible complexities. Excluding its general statement of purpose and definition of the term “historic property,” its provisions are too general for the purpose of this study. Therefore, the specific programs for which the NHPA has made provisions will be evaluated individually throughout this section. However, it should be noted that while the NHPA considers intangible—such as the cultural, educational, and inspirational—benefits in the general purpose

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71 Section 1 of the legislation is particularly relevant to the consideration of murals in its use of the term “historical and cultural foundations of the Nation” (emphasis my own). While the applicability of the term “historical” may be debatable, the term “cultural” is an accurate modifier in discussing community murals as a resource.

72 This definition also pertains to “historic resource,” 16 U.S.C. 470w—Definitions.
of the preservation program, the legislation’s language addressing the resources are strictly tangible and physical. The umbrella policy for the historic preservation field in its general framework, then, though perhaps not explicitly, excludes the intangible heritage and values of the Nation. The resources considered are physically rooted.

Under the NHPA, the National Register of Historic Places (established by NHPA Title I, Section 101, 16 U.S.C. 470a(a)—National Register of Historic Places, expansion and maintenance) is the primary tool for the historic preservation field in identifying and protecting historic resources in the country. Administered and maintained by the Secretary of the Interior through the National Park Service, the National Register of Historic Places establishes a set of criteria and a designation process and is the official inventory of historic resources on a national level. Nominations can be drafted by individuals or other public entities and submitted to the respective State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPO) for review and official nomination to the National Register. The Register alone does not place great legal impositions on the owners of the designated historic properties; however, this inventory often helps to identify historic properties for state or municipal preservation programs and protection. Further, those listed on the National Register are subject to Section 106 review (to be discussed later in the chapter) in cases of a federal undertaking, which may place restrictions on private property owners. The National Register also provides benefits for the property owners: preservation-conscious rehabilitation projects (that meet specific requirements) are eligible for a 20 percent tax credit while donations of perseverance easements make the owners eligible for

74 Ibid.
a charitable contribution tax deduction.\textsuperscript{75} Such properties may also have indirect economic benefits such as increased tourism interests. The National Register of Historic Places, when standing alone, is an inventory of the nation’s historic resources (excluding those subject to Section 106 review); in combination with local and state preservation programs, it provides a means of protecting these resources.

The National Register, regardless of its limitations, is relevant to this study of community murals in determining its eligibility for listing. The Register is only applicable to tangible properties: “physically concrete properties that are relatively fixed in location.”\textsuperscript{76} It explicitly excludes cultural events and culturally significant individuals.\textsuperscript{77} Historic properties classified as districts, buildings, sites, structures, or objects are eligible. Therefore, community murals, as a cultural practice—muralism—is not eligible on its own. However, as mentioned in the discussion of the NHPA, the community murals as a historical and cultural resource is relevant to the register in that it can be classified as an “object.” The Register recognizes an object as “those constructions that are primarily artistic in nature or are relatively small in scale and simply constructed” and may be movable, though it must be “associated with a specific setting or environment.”\textsuperscript{78} This definition allows all murals, not just community murals, to be included in the pool of historical resources for potential nomination for the Register. As paintings, murals are primarily artistic; located on buildings or structures’ surfaces, they vary in scale from very small to monumental; directly painted on walls, they are physically rooted in a setting or

\textsuperscript{75} “National Register of Historic Places,” National Trust for Historic Preservation.
\textsuperscript{76} National Park Service, National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, (Department of Interior: 1995), 4.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 5.
environment. Therefore, community murals, at least in their material sense, are eligible for consideration for the National Register.

The historic property, to be eligible for the National Register, must also possess historic significance. Historic significance is defined as the “importance of a property to the history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, or culture of a community, State, or the nation.” 79 The area of history and the period during which the property displayed the significance (Period(s) of Significance) are also key to the nomination process. Historic significance is achieved by meeting the National Register Criteria—the property must meet at least one criteria. The four criteria are as follows:

A. Association with historic events or activities,
B. Association with important persons,
C. Distinctive design or physical characteristics, or
D. Potential to provide important information about prehistory or history. 80

The properties must also be fifty years or older to be considered “historic.” 81 For those properties that do not meet this fifty year requirement, “Criteria Consideration G: Properties that have Achieved Significance within the Last Fifty Years” may be applicable. 82 Properties that must meet Criteria Consideration G are those that are less than fifty years old; have achieved significance less than fifty years ago despite its age; continue their Period of Significance into a period less than fifty years; and those that have non-contiguous Periods of Significance at least once of which is less than fifty years before the time of nomination. 83

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79 National Park Service, National Register Bulletin 16: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form, (Department of Interior: 1997), 3.
80 Ibid., 1.
81 Ibid.
82 National Bulletin 15, 41.
83 Ibid.
include eligibility for exceptional importance and eligibility for information potential. To meet this Criteria Consideration for exceptional importance, the property must have sufficient historical perspective that provides an overview of the role/impact of the property type within the larger historical context. To qualify for information potential, it must contain data superior to or distinct from those available from other sources, including “culturally related sites.”

Once establishing significance and related criteria, the property must also display integrity—that is, possess the ability to effectively display and communicate the said significance. Integrity is achieved through the property’s location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The community murals, in strictly considering them as historic objects, have the potential to meet any of the four criteria as well as Criteria Consideration G. As the Community Mural Movement started in the late 1960s, they must meet the latter requirement to be eligible for listing today. However, it should also be noted that these murals are approaching their maturation date of turning fifty years old within the next decade. In terms of possessing integrity, as long as the mural has not been painted over, destroyed, or dramatically altered, this requirement would not pose a problem. However, in cases such as the 500 Years of Resistance and Leyenda Azteca, the mural on the wall of the Belmar “La Gallinita” Meat Market, both of which have undergone conservation face the challenge of determining material integrity. While the imagery of the 500 Years of Resistance is consistent with the original design, the physical material is only two years old. The mural on the meat market wall has changed both in imagery and physical material, posing an even greater problem. In simpler cases when a level of integrity

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84 National Bulletin 15, 41.
85 Ibid., 43.
86 National Bulletin 16, 1.
87 For example, the oldest extant mural in the San Francisco case study area, located in the east side of Balmy Alley, dates back to 1973, turning fifty in just seven years.
can be established, community murals are then eligible for consideration for the National Register of Historic Places in that they have the potential to meet the necessary criteria and that they, when strictly considering the direct products of the Community Mural Movement of the late 1960s, possess an identifiable Period of Significance. Once eligibility is established, the remainder of the nomination process includes extensive historic research and documentation. It requires narratives of the property’s historic context and significance, as well as physical descriptions. The completed nomination produces a detailed report of the historic property for the national inventory. However, is this documentation truly representative of the community murals as a historic and cultural resource?

While the National Register of Historic Places nomination is applicable to community murals, the program is one-dimensional in that it fails to encompass the complexities of the transient nature of the art form as well as the intangible values of the practice, of muralism. The emphasis on period(s) of significance and integrity freeze the resource in time. On the National Register, these murals would be significant only as original products of the Community Mural Movement of the era and only as products of the period-specific artists. It is heavily material-based, only considering as a historical and cultural resource the physical mural, the painted image. However, as discussed previously, community murals prove a distinct cultural and historical resource in that they are ever-evolving. The images are meant to change, fade, be adapted upon, and/or painted over to serve as expressions of the evolving community. Therefore, while the National Register provides an effective means of documenting and listing historic resources, it is not yet capable of embracing the multi-dimensional nature of resources such as the community murals.

Another form of protection is the National Historic Landmark designation. The National Historic Landmarks (NHL) program falls under the National Register of Historic Places and is thus
also established by the National Historic Preservation Act, (16 U.S.C. 470a(a)). NHLs are a special category within the National Register and are distinct from other listings in that they are of exceptional significance to the nation as a whole. The designation process of an NHL is more complex than that of the National Register: a historical property’s significance is assessed by professionals in history, architectural history, anthropology, and other related fields knowledgeable in the “broad range of the nation’s resources and historical themes” (36 C.F.R. 65.4—National Historic Landmark criteria). In a way, the NHL process is a stricter version of the National Register process: while the same definition of historic property applies and provisions are made for resources achieving significance within the past fifty years, these properties must be of national significance and be exceptional in comparison to others of its kind. Further, the NHL program involves additional complexities in the designation process that involves approvals by the National Historic Landmarks Program staff, the Landmarks committee, the NPS Advisory Board, and finally, the Secretary of Interior. Needless to say, this is a long and tedious process. The biggest difference between the NRHP and NHL programs is that the latter makes provisions for annual monitoring of the properties for maintenance of high integrity and its designation can be revoked if the property fails to meet the criteria (36 C.F.R. 65.7—Monitoring National Historic Landmarks; 36 C.F.R. 65.9—Withdrawal of National Historic Landmark designation).

A set of murals of a similar nature is currently undergoing the NHL designation process: Chicano Park of San Diego, CA, currently listed on the National Register, is under consideration for an NHL designation and provides a great example of how socially-driven murals maneuver

88 Properties on the National Register do not require national significance.
the NHL process. To understand how the park lists its resources, we must first understand how it came into being.

Chicano Park is a 7.4-acre park located in the predominantly Hispanic neighborhood of Barrio Logan in San Diego, CA. The park consists of a forest of cement pillars of the highway overpass covered in colorful, expressive murals and mosaics. In the mid-60s, Interstate 5 Freeway bisected the neighborhood, only to be further obstructed in 1969 by an overpass to the Bay Bridge connecting Coronado Island to mainland San Diego. These constructions subdivided communities and displaced many of its residents and industry. In its residents’ fight to keep their homes and community intact, the activists fought against displacement and instead demanded community space, a park, under the bridge amidst the concrete structural supports. Learning that the city had no intentions of meeting their demand for a large park ground, the activists took over the space and built their own park. On April 22, 1970, the community members picketed the construction work in the area, drove the workmen out (by picketed protest, not force), and literally moved onto the land. They occupied the land for twelve days. The creation of the park and its murals and mosaics was a positive response to a terrible situation: the residents hated these structures that cut through the heart of their neighborhood but found ways to deal with it creatively. The parties finally reached an agreement and the first of the Chicano Park murals began to take form in March, 1973, to be followed by many more throughout the decade. The establishment of Chicano Park paralleled the social landscape of the time: a time of hyper ethnic consciousness and the peak of the Chicano Rights Movement. As such, the success of Chicano Park is representative of the both sociocultural and socioeconomic struggles and a fight to reclaim not only their community but also identity.90

This social, historical, and physical context of Chicano Park is important in understanding the exact historical resources listed as contributing resources on the NHL nomination form. The NHL nomination of Chicano Park, available via the NPS database, lists 49 contributing objects (specifically murals) and two contributing structures (one “kiosko” or kiosk, and one sculpture).\textsuperscript{91} None of the bridge and freeway overpass structures are considered contributing resources beyond providing canvases for the Chicano murals. This indicates that the national significance of Chicano Park lies in the Chicano artwork rather than the physical site or structure, as representative of the Chicano Movement and its cultural and political expression. This example of nominating socio-politically-based murals sets precedence for other murals of a similar nature, such as the community murals. If the nomination passes the final rounds of recommendations and approvals, it will further strengthen the applicability of this program in community mural preservation/protection.\textsuperscript{92}

However, the Chicano Park nomination is based strictly on the historic property’s role within the context of the nation-wide Chicano Movement. It falls within NHL Themes III and IV, “Expressing Cultural Values” and “Shaping the Political Landscape.”\textsuperscript{93} It defines its Period of Significance as 1970-1989 and therefore identifies the other 25 murals as noncontributing, as they were painted after the set time period.\textsuperscript{94} This program, like the rest of the National Register process, freezes the historical and cultural resource in time to reflect only a set period, despite its continued social and cultural significance to its community into present day. Then,


\textsuperscript{92} Chicano Park was last reported to be considered for an NHL designation by the NPS Advisory Board on March 25, 2016. No further updates on its status are available. Federal Register \textit{Vol. 81, No. 58} (Friday, March 25, 2016), United States Government Publishing Office, accessed April 8, 2016, https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-03-25/html/2016-06848.htm.

\textsuperscript{93} National Historic Landmark Nomination: Chicano Park, 19.

\textsuperscript{94} Chicano Park continues to add new murals to its beautiful collection even today, despite the end of the “Chicano Movement.”
the NHL program, like the NRHP, lacks the capacity to address and embrace the element of continuity in resources such as the community murals. Though the NHL program enables a comprehensive study of the resource within the framework of American history, as a program that places great value on high integrity, it contradicts the naturally ephemeral qualities of community murals and upon designation restrains the functional quality of community muralism today.

As mentioned above in the discussion of the National Register of Historic Places, the National Register does not possess much legal power for the protection of its resources (rather, it acts primarily as an inventory of such resources); however, Section 106 is one of the exceptional instances in which a National Register listing may provide protection for historic properties. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470f—Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, comment on Federal undertakings) requires historic preservation considerations in Federal undertakings by virtue of the presence of not only National Register-listed properties but also those eligible for listing. A “Federal undertaking” is defined by the National Park Service as a “project, activity, or program either funded, permitted, licensed, or approved by a Federal agency.”95 If such historic or eligible properties are involved, the relevant SHPO or THPO (Tribal Historic Preservation Officer) must be consulted to properly identify the resources and assess the impact of the undertaking on these properties. If any adverse effects are found, the Federal agency must begin consultation with the SHPO/THPO and other professionals to minimize or mitigate such effects. The undertaking cannot proceed without executing a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) which outlines the process through

which the agency will minimize adverse effects on historic properties, or a termination of the process by the agency or the SHPO/THPO. The consultation process must show due diligence in its efforts to minimize negative impact, regardless of its termination. Invested with strong legal mandates, this two-sentence section of the NHPA proves to be one of the most influential preservation tools for the field.

While powerful and often effective in implementing preservation plans for historic properties, the Section 106 process is based entirely on such resources as identified within the framework of the National Register and is therefore equally limited in addressing the complexities of the cultural resource that is the topic of this study. As explicitly stated in the *National Register Bulletin*, the National Register and thus the Section 106 Process deal strictly with tangible, physical resources of the built environment. Section 106 possesses neither the capacity to address the intangible values nor the ephemeral character of these historical/cultural properties; it is only capable of addressing the physical “object” that is the painted mural as a static entity.

Though not a form of protection or designation, the Cultural Landscapes Program offers a comprehensive method for documentation and tool for management. The Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI) and Report (CLR) together, creating the Cultural Landscapes Program, was one of five corrective actions initiated in 1997 to address a crucial shortcoming in the preservation of cultural landscapes and historic cultures as identified in the 1990 Secretary of the Interior’s Annual Control Report.”

A cultural landscape can be categorized into four types: historic

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96 Robert R. Page, *National Park Service Cultural Landscape Inventory Professional Procedures Guide*, rev. Jeffrey Killion, Gretchn Hilyard, (Department of Interior: January 2009), IN-2. A three-year initiative to field-test an inventory system methodology started in 1994; in 1997, funding was allocated to initiate CLI in all regions of the National Park Service (Ibid.).
designed landscape, historic vernacular landscape, historic site, and ethnographic landscape.\textsuperscript{97}

The community murals, when applicable, would fall under the ethnographic landscape category as the community contains cultural resources that its members consider heritage resources.

The CLI serves as a comprehensive inventory of all cultural landscapes in the national park system. Those documented for the inventory are landscapes “having historical significance that are listed on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, or are otherwise managed as cultural resources through a public planning process and in which the NPS has or plans to acquire any legal interest.”\textsuperscript{98}

Inventoried landscapes are thoroughly documented within the framework of a standardized methodology and acts as an aid in developing treatment and management plans of Parks’ resources. This inventory system is meant to be more flexible than the other historic preservation programs—it is intended to be able to encompass the diversity and variety of existing cultural landscapes. The documentation process is much more complex and requires: determination of the National Register eligibility (as well as the corresponding research and report); ethnographic studies of associated peoples when applicable; and a detailed chronology of the landscape that identifies major events and dates of physical change that relate to the site’s significance.\textsuperscript{99} It also calls for the analysis and evaluation of the integrity of the unit’s landscape characteristics and features. Furthermore, a complete CLI unit record requires description of at least one landscape characteristic; landscape features identified with the landscape require explicit contribution status to the significance of the cultural landscape.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{97} Birnbaum, \textit{Preservation Brief 36 Protecting Cultural Landscapes}, 2.

\textsuperscript{98} Page et al., \textit{National Park Service Cultural Landscape Inventory Professional Procedures Guide}, IN-2.

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 6-4 – 6-6.

\textsuperscript{100} There are thirteen categories of landscape characteristics (not including “other”): Archaeological Sites; Buildings and Structures; Circulation; Cluster Arrangement; Constructed Water Features; Cultural
This process aids in better understanding the relationship between the physical space and use—understanding what makes it a cultural landscape. The Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) then expands upon the CLI to create an in-depth treatment plan and a long-term management tool for cultural landscapes. A CLR includes determining of treatment applications and standards, application of the Secretary of the Interior’s standards for the treatment of historic properties, analyses of cost estimates, as well as exact records of executed treatments.\textsuperscript{101}

While this Cultural Landscape Program is most conceptually applicable to the topic of this thesis thus far in this chapter—it has the capacity to document both the historical objects, the murals, and the social context via ethnographic studies—it is unfortunately of little practical use. The community murals, their deep-rooted connection to the physical space, and their relationship with their associated people (especially in instances of ethnic enclaves) all create a cultural landscape worthy of inventory; however, CLI/CLRs are, as mentioned above, limited to sites within the NPS system or those that it has an interest in acquiring. As community murals are traditionally in lower working-class urban areas, they are unlikely to be absorbed into the NPS database of resources. Therefore, while this program is most capable of embracing the changing nature and social presence and impact of a site, it unfortunately does not yet have the capacity to include non-NPS-related cultural landscapes into its inventory. However, the methodology of documentation for such landscapes still proves most effective in capturing the complexities of the resource in a comprehensive way and thus should be applied even when documenting and otherwise studying sites outside the parks system.

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Traditions; Land Use; Natural Systems and Features; Small-Scale Features; Spatial Organization; Topography; Vegetation; and Views and Vistas (Ibid., 7-4).

On the art conservation side, the two major legislations that apply to the community murals revolve around artists’ rights. The concept of copyright protection has been present in the United States judicial system as early as early as the Copyright Act of 1790. It has since been revised and rewritten as the Act of 1909 and the contemporary version, Act of 1976. Copyright Act has also been amended frequently to envelop developing technologies—the last amendment took place in December of 2014. Based on the United States Constitution Article I Section 8—“the Congress shall have Power...To promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries”—the Copyright Act grants artists agency over their own creative product, be it writing, scientific invention, music, or visual arts. The general scope of this legislation covers “original works of authorship fixed in any tangible medium of expression” (17 U.S.C. § 102(a)). The copyright ownership over the original creation/form reserves exclusive rights for the owner to do and authorize the reproduction, derivate works, distribution, performance, and display of the protected works (17 U.S.C. § 106). This law also offers legal, financial remedies to the copyright owner upon the infringement of their exclusive rights.

In other words, the Copyrights Act provides protection for the owners by treating the copyrighted works as physical, tangible units eligible for creative and economic possessions. These are a set of proprietary rights protecting the work from unauthorized claim of ownership, reproduction, distribution, use, and performance; these are only possible upon authorization of the copyright owner. The works, emphasizing originality, can be interpreted as economic resources in this law, especially given the wide range of financial and legal remedies in response.

Note: The complete version of the US Copyright Law consulted for this section is the December 2011 version and does not include the 2014 amendment.
to copyright infringements. As practicing attorney Ann Garfinkle explains in her overview of legal rights for visual artists, the Copyrights Act is largely economic in its premise, as its main incentive is to promote continued progress and innovation. Under such premise, then, though artworks such as the community murals are eligible for and are largely already protected by copyrights, this Act does not protect them as expressions of the artist so much as it protects them from financial exploitation and reproduction. With only the requirement of originality, the Copyright Act does not protect artworks themselves (content)—it protects the artists’ interests.

Another source of protection for artists is the Visual Artists Rights Act of 1990 (17 U.S.C. § 106A) (VARA). VARA is an amendment to the copyright law to provide moral rights independently of the artist’s economic rights as guaranteed by the existing legislation. VARA was the result of the US’s signing of the Berne Convention of for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works (1978) and was signed into law through Title VI of the Judicial Improvements Act of 1990. It is included in the Copyright Act under Section 106A (basic provisions) and 113 (exceptions). Moral rights of attribution and integrity are considered a set of “natural rights” that recognize a work as an “extension” of the creator. Explicitly limited to visual arts as defined in 17 U.S.C. § 101—Definitions, these rights reserve for the artists the right to be identified with their work (rights of attribution) and to protect their works from unauthorized modification or destruction (rights of integrity). It is important to note that the moral rights protect the work from intentional distortion, mutilation, or other modifications of a work that would threaten the artist’s reputation or intention (17 U.S.C. § 106A(a)). Said modifications also

103 Garfinkle, “The Legal and Ethical Consideration,” 5.
105 The US became a signatory ten years after the Berne Convention took place, in 1988, effective 1989. (Garfinkle, “The Legal and Ethical Consideration,” 6).
106 Ibid., 5.
include conservation efforts. Statutory damages for willful infringement of these rights is over $100,000.\textsuperscript{107} Exceptions are available if artists have entered into a written agreement to waive such rights, a work cannot be removed without damage, or the artist cannot be contacted for safe removal of such works. VARA protects works of living artists and only applies when the work is subject to the broader copyright protection under the Copyright Act of 1976.\textsuperscript{108} VARA also preempts equivalent State laws.\textsuperscript{109}

While VARA, by recognizing the artist’s moral rights, provides a level of protection for the work of visual art as an expression—an extension of the artist’s ideas, this package of seemingly comprehensive rights and protections have great potential to be of disservice to the protection and preservation of community murals. As previously mentioned in the section on ephemerality, community murals are ephemeral and constantly subject to change; unfortunately, VARA effectively prohibits the works under protection from alterations. As seen in the San Francisco Mission District case study, much of the existing murals are continuously added upon to “update” the imagery to meet the contemporary voice and expression. Further, as a form of ephemeral art, community murals are subject to removal or replacement, a process complicated by Section 113 of VARA. The enforcement of the rights under VARA also calls into question the concept of ownership of the work of visual art. The moral rights defined by VARA, as discussed above, stem from a notion of natural rights, as an extension of the individual’s creativity. However, community murals are intended for the entire community, they are

\textsuperscript{108} Garkinle, “The Legal and Ethical Consideration,” 8.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 10,
“H.R.5316 Judicial Improvements Act of 1990,” Congress.gov. Note: The legal doctrine of severability allows parts of the law that conflicts or overlaps with the federal law to be severed from the statute and its remaining parts of the state statute valid and applicable (“The Legal and Ethical Consideration,” 11). California’s California Art Preservation Act of 1979 (CAPA) is an example of such legal severability.
expressions of the collective, planned and executed in collaboration with its members. Can individual artists truly claim authorship over these works of art? The effectiveness of copyright laws and VARA are circumstantial at best, especially in dealing with such cultural resources.

To avoid accusations of gross negligence in handling works of art and other cultural properties, conservators are advised to follow the Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC). This Code of Ethics and Guidelines provide the framework within which conservation professionals are expected to practice. It recognizes the preservation of cultural properties as the primary goal of the conservation field and identifies said cultural properties as “individual objects, structures, or aggregate collections [...] which has significance that may be artistic, historical, scientific, religious, or social, and it is an invaluable and irreplaceable legacy that must be preserved for future generations.”

The code of ethics emphasizes respect for both the cultural properties as well as other conservation professionals, transparency in planning and practice, and safety of the property and people alike. The Code is provides the broad framework to establish the proper mindset for the practicing professionals. The guidelines for practice that follow establish both minimum accepted level of performance as well as recommended practice for the different categories of conservation. It briefly outlines the different procedures to be followed per different types of situations. Most of all, this set of code and guidelines require clear, detailed, and permanent records of any actions taken in practice for future references as well as

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Had the conservation processes by the Precita Eyes Muralist Association not involved active participation from the original artists for murals protected under VARA, a strict observation of the guidelines for practice may have been required.

111 The four broad categories of conservation identified by AIC are: Examination/Scientific Investigation, Preventive Conservation, Treatment, and Documentation (Ibid.).
evaluation of conduct. However, adherence to the Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice is a personal responsibility and thus in itself does not have any power of implementation.

However, in conjunction with other laws and policies relating to historic or artistic works, such as VARA, this set of code and guidelines can provide and act as a standard of comparison/evaluation. In the case of VARA, the Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice of AIC is often used as a determining factor in evaluating and determining destruction of works of visual arts as a result of gross negligence.112

While the Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice for AIC is applicable to the practicing art community by channels such as VARA, it, like the previously discussed historic preservation programs, it is heavily “object”-oriented and is thus ineffective in encompassing the complexities of preserving community murals. Understandably, conservation is a material-based field and is therefore concerned with the tangible, physical material. However, in providing recommended practice guidelines for a material science, it indirectly regards cultural properties as static. The conservation practices are meant to provide in-depth knowledge of the condition of and treatment for cultural properties in line with the property’s significance and thus slows, prevents, or controls change.113 On the other hand, as repeatedly mentioned, community murals often change. Therefore, while very important and effective in the conservation field, the Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice is only applicable to community murals when the physical, material mural and its imagery is identified for conservation in which case it would provide a fine standard of practice. However, conservation as the only means of preservation would change the community from an ephemeral, organic

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112 Garfinkle, “The Legal and Ethical Consideration,” 16.  
113 “Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice,” AIC.
cultural landscape of people and their medium of representation into a gallery space of static, past images.

Departing from policies and programs, let us consider the workings of an existing mural program. Rescue Public Murals is a project initiated by the national non-profit organization Heritage Preservation in December 2006 to direct public attention to US murals, document their cultural and historical contributions, and to work with experts in securing support to “save” them.114 The program has established a national committee of advisers: related professionals and experts such as muralists, conservators, art historians, public art professionals, etc.115 The program has initiated efforts for assessments, restoration, advocacy, and documentation of public murals, though a clear set of procedures for each program is lacking. The Assessment program refers to the condition assessment of the murals—their physical state, structural and material stability, etc. This process involves a multidisciplinary approach so that a mural’s history, techniques of execution, and current physical conditions are thoroughly recorded and considered.116 The Documentation program is an ever-growing online collection of mural images and information in recognition of the fact that not all murals can be saved. The collection is called Community Murals and is available for noncommercial use on ARTstor. However, a uniform process of image and information documentation is not clearly identifiable across the available files. The Advocacy program is intended to involve the local constituents and mural enthusiasts for notifications, suggestions, and support, in addition to working with other mural programs and initiatives throughout the country. The Restoration program is a

conservation-based effort to address the physical deterioration of the murals and to return the images to close to their original, complete form. The murals most heavily targeted by the Rescue Public Murals program are outdoor murals as they are “especially vulnerable.”\(^{117}\)

While the program’s approach in addressing existing murals is a little vague and open-ended, their Best Practice for Mural Creation program effectively addresses the potential difficulties a mural might face throughout its life, as learned from the existing, deteriorating murals today.\(^{118}\) It breaks the process of new mural creation into six steps: planning, wall selection, wall preparation, painting, coating, and maintenance.\(^{119}\) The planning stage involves a very direct address of all the conceptual and theoretical challenges as experienced by old murals today. It calls for a careful and well expressed consideration of the purpose and subject of a mural, the intended lifespan of a mural, ownership, copyrights, funding, location, maintenance, and most importantly, community involvement.\(^{120}\) Wall selection and preparation addresses the physical setting and condition of a site: exposure to traffic, sunlight, vegetation, quality of drainage, level of access, structural stability, necessary repairs prior to priming, etc. Interestingly, it calls for historic research of the building to determine its protection status as a potential historical property. Any treatment carried out in the preparation process must be minimal in adverse effects. It also calls for photographic documentation of the primed wall, products, as well as records of method and conditions of application. The actual painting process also calls for consideration of paint selection and the temperature during the painting of

\(^{117}\) “About Rescue Public Murals,” Heritage Preservation.

\(^{118}\) As a national organization, much of the four programs addressing existing murals are commissioned on a local level, as observed from the program’s archive of highly endangered murals (http://www.heritagepreservation.org/RPM/atrisk.html) which likely explains its vague framework.


\(^{120}\) While a mural, when properly executed and maintained, can easily last up to thirty years, the method of execution should depend on the intention of the mural. The question of intended lifespan of a new mural takes into consideration the ephemerality and the spirit of community murals.
the mural. The Best Practices calls for the safe-keeping of all printed literature on paint
products used, in addition to photographic documentation of the painted sections of the wall.
Same form of careful selection of materials and documentation extends to the coating process
of the mural. Additionally, however, the Best Practices suggests that an easily observable spot
of the mural uncoated and photographed to serve as a point of reference for weathering,
change of color, and effectiveness in protection. Last but not least, the maintenance section
calls for easily accessible information to report graffiti and vandalism, a regular inspection
schedule, as well as the documentation of any damage observed before remedied.121

The Rescue Public Murals program provides an example of how organizations are
approaching community murals.122 The development of this program itself reflects the
increased recognition of such murals as historically and culturally contributing and significant to
the broader US narrative. The lack of a set of Best Practices for existing murals paralleling the
level of detail for new murals likely lies in the fact that the program is a national initiative while
community murals are entirely site-specific on a micro level. As different mural sets range from
extreme to extreme, a set of detailed best practices for existing murals would be unable to
address all of such resources. The initiative for existing murals, to encompass all the
circumstantial variations, must to be general and broad. A local-level approach is likely
necessary to effectively carry out the program’s mission of rescuing public murals.

121 For detailed information of each step, see:
Heritage Preservation, “Mural Creation Best Practices.”
122 Of the sixteen murals documented across eleven sites around the country, two were from San
Francisco. Unfortunately, both murals have been destroyed: one when the building was destroyed and
the other when the building changed ownership and was painted out.
The analysis in this section shows that the national level policies and programs often fall short of effectively addressing the complexities of community murals as a historical and cultural resource. The policies and programs studied, while influential and effective in their target areas, are one-dimensional in their function and protection: the national historic preservation policies captured the historical and physical values of the resource, while the copyright laws protected the artist’s economic interests and reputation. Rather than help parse out the effective methods of protection and preservation of community murals, the copyrights and artists’ rights laws only raised more ethical questions that further complicated matters. Issues of cultural and intangible values were left unattended. The Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practices, like the preservation programs, was largely object-driven and had the powerful potential to freeze the resources in time, to remain static in a changing world. While the Rescue Public Murals program reinforced the importance of the community murals as a resource and began to develop processes for mural conservation, these processes tended to overlook the ephemeral qualities of community murals. These strategies of approach left unaddressed the murals’ intangible values of social expression in their framework of “saving” existing murals. It effectively, though indirectly, addressed the matter in making provisions for future murals; however, it only addressed the cultural property as a physical, static image. Though the policies and programs were effective in protecting the murals as a physical resource—be it as historic properties or as creative works of specific authorship—they were not comprehensive enough to address the community murals as a complex set of tangible and intangible values. When all the national level initiatives prove overly targeted in their approach of the historical and cultural resource, where do we go from here?
Chapter 5: Synthesis and Recommendations

In light of the reevaluation of the values of community murals as a historical and cultural resource as well as the overly-specific focus of the federal-level policies, I recommend a framework for a local/community-level mural conservation program. It provides the general framework of an organization and a methodology of approach based on the values of the murals’ ephemeral character and social function. The following only provides the general outline of a program, to be adoptable and adaptable to encompass the great range of variation in community murals.

Organization

This program can be either adopted as an extension of an existing entity such as a mural organization or a local preservation group or developed into a new entity. When developed anew, the program should work in close partnership with existing mural and preservation organizations, as well as city agencies where applicable. The program will assume stewardship over the community murals. It should consist of five main programs: Documentation, Conservation, New Murals, Advocacy/Education, and Funding.\(^{123}\)

The program will establish an Advisory Board of Council to be representative of the entire community. Board members should include community representatives, muralists, conservationists, art and social historians, and stakeholders including potential developers and businesses. While all members would ideally be local, those who are not should have a great

\(^{123}\) As the scope of this study did not include funding at any level, the funding program will not be elaborated upon, though it presence and performance are crucial to the success of any organization.
understanding of local histories of the murals and community. This Board will serve as the central force to all decision-making.

**Documentation**

The organization should adopt a form of documentation similar to that of a Cultural Landscape Inventory previously discussed. This form of documentation in conjunction with photographic records will help contextualize the murals within the broader development of the community. In addition to dates, names of artists, and identification of imagery, this documentation should involve historic research including oral histories of local community members of their personal experiences and memories relating to the mural. This documentation will take form of a single CLI-like record with individual murals and their respective history and information listed as features of this landscape. This additional method of documentation is to aid in understanding the resource by providing the social context that gave rise to these artworks and to preserve the memories around it. As Sarah Adams points out in her discussion of ephemeral art and memory, overreliance on physical archives in isolation from its context places pressure on the archives as a site to reconstruct memory where it does not attain the proper information to perform such function.

**Conservation**

As the community murals have already been so strongly established as a historical resource, the conservation and restoration of historically and socially significant murals should

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124 A similar panel of people have been suggested by Timothy Drescher and Catherine Myers. Drescher, “Priorities in Conserving Community Murals”; Catherine Myers, City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, during a private conversation, March 21, 2016.

125 Adams, “People have Three Eyes,” 16-23.
not be overlooked. The aim of this study is not to prioritize the sociocultural values of muralism over the sociohistorical values of the physical murals; the purpose is to find a safe middle ground in this delicate balancing act. Therefore, this community mural conservation program must incorporate a physical mural conservation unit to its cause. However, the determination for murals to undergo restoration efforts must be made entirely by the Advisory Board of Council. As the Heritage Preservation mural program demonstrated, the national-level efforts cannot address the community-specific values and social histories; therefore, it must be up to this community-based organization to effectively identify and address the different preservational values. This Board will charged with the task of creating a set of criteria specific to the values and history of the community that it serves, incorporating public interests and opinions through community meetings and focus groups. The existing set of murals should also be surveyed to identify those eligible for any official historic preservation listings such as city, state, or the National Register. Once murals for restoration are identified, conservators must follow the Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practices of the AIC to insure quality of work.

Recognizing that not all murals can or should be saved and restored, the Board must also produce guidelines for the decommissioning of murals. Under-maintained and eroding murals negatively affect the aesthetics of a community and can also be mistaken as an index of socioeconomic quality of the area. That is, chipping, weathering murals may inaccurately indicate a destitute neighborhood. Therefore, a schedule and strategy of mural decommission and removal must be established to make way for new murals of new expressions as well as to avoid giving false impressions poor neighborhood quality. Until the time of decommission and removal, the mural should be regularly maintained and cleaned to enhance the experience of the cultural landscape. As with the conservation criteria and methodology, the Board must take into consideration the public opinion as voiced through public meetings and focus groups. As
mural applications and the underlying structures of the community murals vary with climate, building types, and local practices of each community, the decommissioning strategy must also be developed locally. However, all decommissioning and removal of murals should respect the built environment of the community and minimize adverse effects on structures and future murals.

All meeting, both of Board members and the broader community, should be accurately recorded and archived to correspond with the documentation of murals as outlined above. Public and administrative reasons for deciding conservation or decommission will reflect the relevance of the values and imagery expressed in murals and contribute to the understanding of the changing cultural landscape as a whole. Further, transparency in any decision-making is crucial to minimizing contestation from the public and potential funders.

Advocacy and Education

Continued urban presence and availability as a channel of expression is key to the significance of community murals as a cultural resource and thus the organization should advocate for presence and practice of muralism in the community. It should develop education programs for visitors and the community members alike to increase awareness and gather support. Proper interpretation and presentation of such resources also has tourism potentials by way of murals and illustrated history tours. Education programs should also be designed to involve community members in not only advocacy of their community resource but also to contribute to creating new murals. Such programs should target the younger generation of the community to inform them of such a channel of expression and empowerment, to instill a sense of cultural and community pride as well as artistic accomplishment. In developing such programs, comparable program studies of other successful mural organizations such as the City
of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program and the San Francisco Precita Eyes Mural Association will prove useful.

**New Murals**

Continuity of community muralism is crucial to the preservation of community murals as a cultural resource and practice. As new generations of community members grow and the sociocultural setting change, new values and voices arise that need expressing. In planning new murals, however, we must learn from the dilemmas present us by the earlier artworks: issue of ownership, subject, longevity, relevance, etc. To continue muralism as a community mural practice, the organization should expend efforts to include the broader community in the planning process of new murals, whether it be initiated upon an individual artist’s idea, by the organization itself, or commissioned by a private entity.

The organization should adopt the Best Practices for New Murals designed by the Rescue Public Murals Program under Heritage Preservation as discussed in the previous section. It outlines the questions that must be addressed to minimize future complications in handling the resource and even deals with the concept of ephemerality in artist’s intent. It lays out the various documentation processes of selecting preparing a site, as well as painting, and maintaining new murals which will prove useful in future considerations and evaluations of the resource. In addition to the RPM-Heritage Preservation program’s Best Practices, the organization should implement social documentation programs interviewing artists of their inspirations, artistic intent, public reception, etc. as well as a brief recording of the contemporary community’s social, cultural, and economic atmosphere to contribute to the existing documentation of the community mural cultural landscape. The New Murals program shall take all prescriptive methods to minimize future complications and historical research.
This rough framework of a regionally- or locally-based mural conservation program provides a holistic approach in addressing the community murals. It strives to effectively encompass both the murals’ historical values as well as their contemporary function—to encourage the continuation of practice while appreciating its past products—as determined by preceding discussions of ephemerality in both theory and real life. The program promotes an even distribution of efforts to conservation and new mural creation, to balance past and present values, to ensure their continued urban presence in both physical form and practice.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

Existing literature established that community murals are most often valued for their association with a significant moment in American social history, as physical artifacts of a people’s movement. The murals are representations of a particular sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and sociocultural landscape in urban areas at a specific point in time. They are images of significant leaders and cultural celebrations, as well as of conflict and distress. They are, in contemporary studies, physical remnants of what once was. While community muralism—the practice of mural painting and the spirit of the movement as a channel for social expression and democratic representation—is recognized as central to the physical murals’ significance, they are, again, described as something of the past: it was a practice, but a practice that has already ended. Thus, the murals of discussion have become static as a result of the way in which they have been studied and discussed. As static artifacts, the earliest of community murals are then finite resources with cause for conservation and protection. However, the early community murals, the product of the actual Movement of the 1960s and 70s, continue to rapidly disappear from the built environment, begging a reevaluation of community murals and the values targeted for conservation. Without proper identification of what needs conservation and protection, efforts are ineffective and can result in greater loss of resources than necessary.

In this reevaluation process, I explicitly bring to fore the concept of ephemerality prevalent yet so often glossed over in the discussion of community murals. The discussion and analysis of ephemerality reveals that community murals are much more complicated than commonly viewed. It helps valuate the murals as not simple images of social expression but also as the physical act of expression. The study of ephemerality sheds light on the issues at the

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126 The term conservation is used here in a generic sense encompassing all types of intervention: restoration, maintenance, repainting, and preservation.
core of community mural conservation: impermanence in both material form and practice. When the values of community murals lie in the transience of the medium of art, one that evolves and changes organically paralleling its social and physical environment, the intentional and unavoidable impermanence and ephemerality should also be respected in considering conservation of the artwork. Ironically, this ephemeral character of the community murals as social expressions and material art form enables the continuation of community murals as a practice: ephemerality enables continuity. The San Francisco Mission District murals case study provides an example of such phenomenon by unveiling the active benefits of an ongoing yet ephemeral community mural landscape. In this community, murals are continuously added onto and elaborated upon, combining the expressions of past community members with those of the present. New murals appear constantly while existing ones are “updated.” In the San Francisco Mission District, community murals continue to exist as an illustrated chronology of social values of its people as well as a practice that turns the community into mirrors of their contemporary values and concerns. This analysis of ephemerality and the case study of the Mission District illuminate the importance of the ephemeral character of community murals: the significance of this mural type (democratic art and social expression) is achieved by means of its transient nature. The ephemerality not only empowers the images by providing it a sense of the immediate present but also allows for the ongoing practice of community muralism. Therefore, the values of community murals lie not only in the imagery of murals as past expressions but also in its ephemeral character that allows for continued expression and empowerment. In fact, the Mission District community murals, as tangible historical resources representing historically and socially significant individuals and moments in time, have lost much integrity—murals have chipped, weathered, and faded; where restored, the original artwork and materials are compromised (strictly materially speaking). However, as cultural resources, in continuation of
the spirit of community mural movement, the practice of community muralism, they retain
great integrity—they still serve the same function, organically changing imagery, message, and
materials alongside a changing community. Therefore, the cultural facet of community murals
(and the ephemeral character that enables this cultural function) deserves and demands just as
much, if not more, attention as does the historical side. In addition to the aesthetic and
associative values of the murals, the impermanent quality and intangible social values must also
be addressed in considering conservation.

However, the existing national programs and policies of preservation and art protection
have proved incapable of addressing the newly evaluated set of values for conservation as a
comprehensive whole. The policies of the federal-level historic preservation field are only able
to address the resource as a historic “object,” robbing the transient art form of its essential
color character. It requires an explicit Period of Significance which denies the significance of
continuity of practice. Further, if applied, these programs would isolate the resource from its
context, separating the murals from its community as a resource, which would ultimately render
them socially irrelevant. The one preservation program that can address the relationship
between the individual resources and its physical and social environment, the Cultural
Landscape Program, is ironically inapplicable as these murals are outside the program’s
jurisdiction. The key programs and policies representative of the historic preservation field have
thus fallen short of embracing this resource in a multi-dimensional, holistic manner. Such
inability comments on the place of preservation with a capital “P” in the protection of such
complex historical and cultural resources: it does not yet have a foothold in this scene.127

127 By preservation with a capital “P,” I refer to the “official,” established professional field of preservation
as defined by the Secretary of the Interior Standards and definitions. I attribute a sense of elitism to this
term. In contrast, preservation with a small “p” refers to the more vernacular practice of preservation,
being preservation-minded where the official standards and policies do not apply.
the other hand, the copyrights and artists’ rights legislation indirectly protect the artwork by primarily protecting the artist. Though together they protect the murals from unauthorized reproduction for financial gains and safeguards it from mutilation and destruction, they effectively attribute ownership to a distinct group or individual and are in conflict with the spirit of community murals as a democratic art of, by, and for the community. Furthermore, by protecting them from modification and “mutilation,” these legislations prevent the murals from being “updated,” which, in effect, rob them of their ephemeral character as well. Lastly, the analysis of the mural conservation program by the national non-profit organization Heritage Preservation, highlighted the difficulty in establishing a holistic methodology in addressing murals as a historical and cultural resource.

In addition to the inability to encompass the complexities of community murals, the evaluation of policies and programs present another pattern: the murals as a resource type is too site- and culturally-specific to be completely encompassed by a national program. Where federal-level programs and policies are general and broad in provisions and sparse in details as to not exclude the different variations of a resource, community murals vary in everything except the social function of expression. Therefore, these murals cannot be effectively addressed by such broad and general policies/programs.

My recommendation for a local mural conservation program aims to appease the conflicts between the complexities as presented by murals’ ephemeral character and the shortcomings of the overly-specific programs and policies. Collaging the positive features of different policies into an overarching program, this recommendation provides a comprehensive approach to dealing with complex resource such as the community murals. It aims to best balance the historical and contemporary social values of community murals, negotiating
between a preservationist urge to restore and protect all murals and an anthologist urge to sustain cultural practices.

This study demonstrates that while Preservation with a capital “P” is too restrictive to be applicable to such a multi-dimensional resource, the community mural conservation scene definitely requires a preservation (with a lower-case “p”) undertone as a basis for designing methodologies and making decisions. An understanding of and appreciation for various preservation practices and theories prove essential in balancing the past and present values of a resource as demonstrated throughout this study. Further studies on this subject should expand upon the workings of different mural organizations to extract patterns of most effective practice. The evaluation of the financial feasibility and analysis of funding would help further this framework towards real practice. Lastly, a testing of this program in an actual community mural setting would also prove beneficial to evaluating the effectiveness of it on the ground.

A comprehensive approach to preservation of historical and cultural resources should not be limited to community murals. All resources are complex and multi-dimensional—they all possess historical and contemporary values that need evaluation and negotiation to best serve the needs of the people at large, be it at a micro-scale of a community or as large as the entire nation. This study of community murals provides just one example of the rich and diverse supply of resources throughout the nation. It demonstrates that resources cannot and should not be addressed on a one-dimensional value system but approached from a holistic perspective that better contextualizes the resource and minimizes both its isolation from its physical and historical context, as well as it from its people and use. Where preservation with a capital “P” increasingly proves restrictive in ways historical and cultural resources can be addressed, we as new preservationists should embrace the concept of vernacular preservation, even at the cost
of being less systematized, to preserve not only the physical artifact of the past but also the sense of place and social values it helped create and maintain.
Bibliography


APPENDIX: FIGURES

Figure 1: Mission District Locator Map, created by Sang Bae.

Figure 2: Study Area. Blue line indicates the stretch of 24th Street studied; Black line indicates Balmy Alley. Created in Google Maps, 2016.
Figure 3 (Above) and Figure 4 (Left): *Leyenda Azteca*, Precita Eyes Muralists, 2000. Exterior of the Belmar “La Gallinita” Meat Market, 24th and Harrison Street. Restored, added onto, 2015. Photo by Sang Bae, January 2016.
Figure 5: Mural of Sandy Cuadra (section), local youths, 2015. Southwest corner of 24th and Harrison Street. Photo by Sang Bae, January 2016.

Figure 6: Mural of Sandy Cuadra (section), local youths, 2015. Southwest corner of 24th and Harrison Street. Photo by Sang Bae, January 2016.
Figure 7: *Untitled*, Irene Perez, Mujeres Muralistas, 1973. Balmy Alley. Additions made at an unknown date. Photo by Sang Bae, January 2016.

Figure 8: *Culture Contains the Seed of Resistance which Blossoms into the Flower of Liberation* (section), Miranda Bergman and O’Brien Thiele, 1984. Balmy Alley. Photo by Sang Bae, January 2016.
Figure 9: *The Culture Contains the Seed of Resistance that Blossoms into the Flower of Liberation* (section), Miranda Bergman and O’Brien Thiele, 1984. Balmy Alley. Photo by Sang Bae, January 2016.

Figure 10: *Those We Love, We Remember*, Edythe Boone, 1995. Balmy Alley. Photo by Sang Bae, January 2016.
Figure 11: Unknown. Balmy Alley. Photo by Sang Bae, January 2016.

Figure 12: Las Milagrosas, Mary Nash, 2001. Balmy Alley. Photo by Sang Bae, January 2016.

Figure 14: *Unknown*, ca. 2013. Balmy Alley. Photo by Sang Bae, January 2016.
Figure 15: *500 Years of Resistance*, Isaias Mata, 1992. St. Peter’s Church, 24th and Florida Street. Restored 2013. Photo by Sang Bae, January 2016.


Figure 18: *Our Culture Cannot Be Bought*, unknown. 24th between Lucky and Folsom Street. *Unknown*, 1974. Photo by Sang Bae, January 2016.

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