

MEETING DATE: July 17, 2023 **AGENDA ITEM:** V.a. CONSENT
PROJECT NAME: Will Rogers Mural Interpretation Project
ACTION ITEM: Approve Final Design and Text for Interpretive Plaques for the Historic Tiles Murals on the Facades of the Auditorium and Coliseum at the Will Rogers Memorial Center, 3401 West Lancaster Avenue, 76107 (Council District 7 / Citywide)

PROJECT SUMMARY

- Mayor's Office asked the Art Commission to gather community input and make recommendations in response to a citizen's concern about the portrayal of African Americans on the tile mural on the Auditorium in September 2019
- Special Called Art Commission Meeting for City of Fort Worth Historic Preservation Officer Murray Miller to present mural review and historic context on October 7, 2019
- Art Commission Meeting for Citizen Comment on November 11, 2019
- Special Called Art Commission Meeting revealed community consensus for not removing the mural and providing historical context at the site on November 21, 2019
- Art Commission Meeting for Citizen Comment on December 9, 2019
- Art Commission makes general recommendations and forms an Advisory Panel* on January 22, 2020
- Advisory Panel Meeting to discuss overall approach on February 27, 2020
- Advisory Panel Meeting to review a conceptual design for Auditorium Mural plaques on April 17, 2020
- Agreement executed with Elements of Architecture for plaque design on December 8, 2020
- Arts Fort Worth staff conducts research and drafts interpretive text for Auditorium Mural, Jan – May 2021
- Advisory Panel Meeting to review preliminary design and layouts for Auditorium Mural plaques on May 14, 2021
- Advisory Panel Meeting to review scale samples, materials, and implementation budget on June 25, 2021
- Advisory Panel Meeting to finalize size, materials, and text recommendations on July 16, 2021
- Fort Worth Art Commission Meeting to review Advisory Panel's recommendations on July 19, 2021
- Informal Report from Public Events Department to City Council on project approach August 10, 2021
- City Council approves American Rescue Plan Act Funding for plaques (MC 21-0820) on October 19, 2021
- Arts Fort Worth staff conducts research and drafts interpretive text for Coliseum Mural, Sept. 2021 - May 2022
- Advisory Panel Meeting to review draft plaque text for Coliseum Mural plaques on April 8, 2022
- Local cultural and history experts to review for historic accuracy May - July 2022
- Cultural Focus Groups provide review and feedback August 2022 – April 2023
- Final Edited Draft Text to Advisory Panel May 5, 2023
- Art Commission holds a Public Hearing for Final Draft Text and review plaque design on June 12, 2023

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

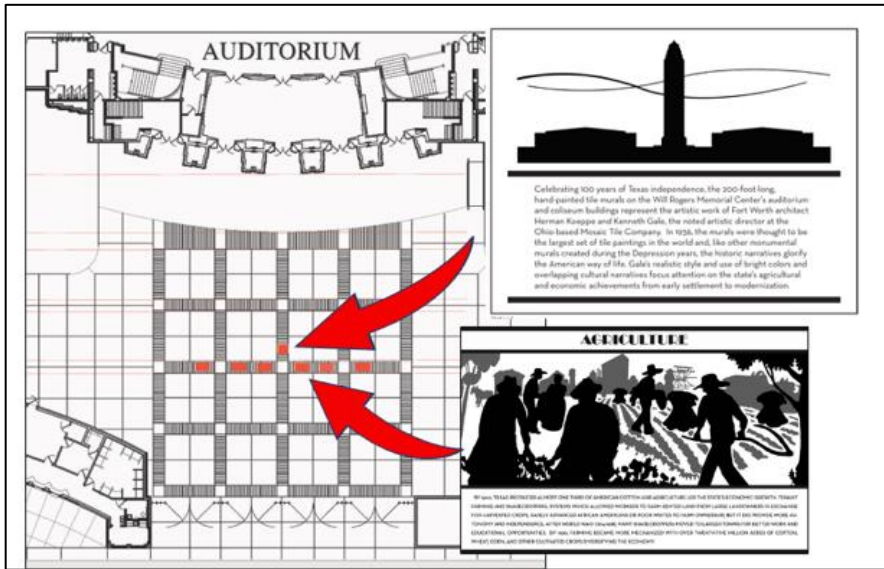
Staff recommends that the Art Commission approve the final design and text for the Will Rogers Memorial Center interpretive plaques.

NEXT STEPS

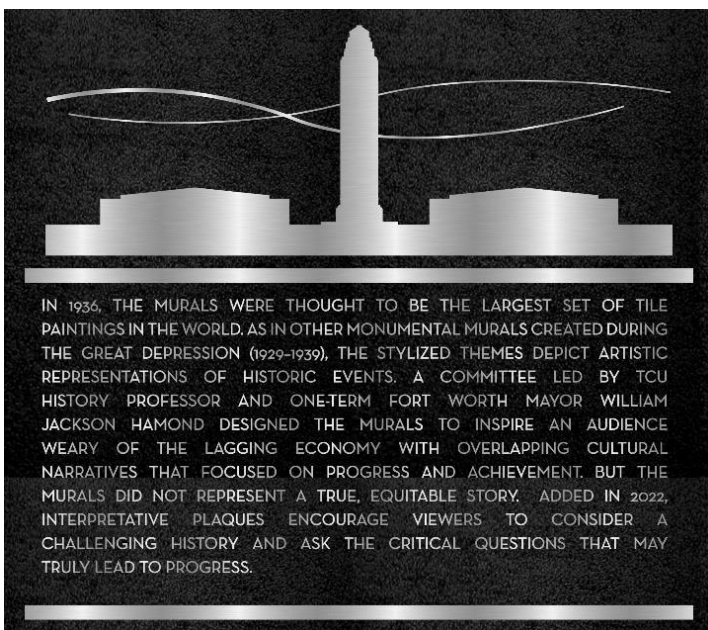
Upon approval of the final design and text, the Art Commission's recommendation, City Council will be asked to consider authorizing a construction contract to fabricate, deliver, and install the plaques.

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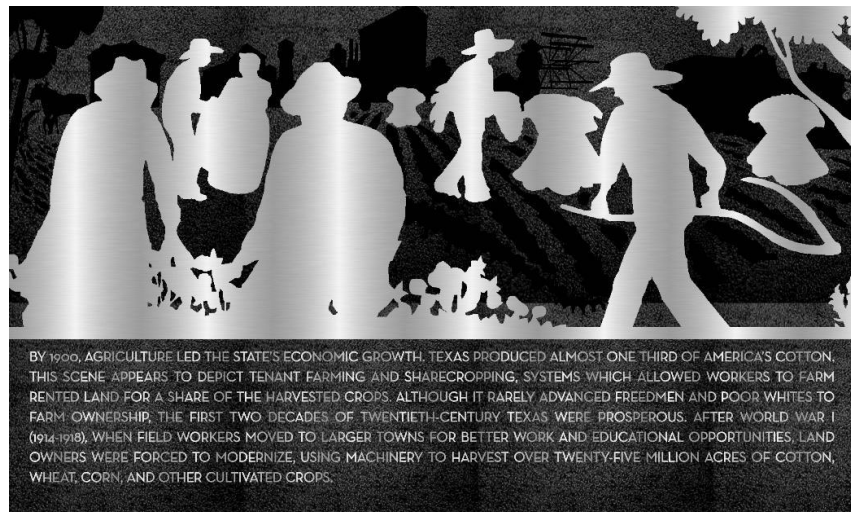
SITE MAP AND PLAQUE DESIGN (*Coliseum plaque placement and design are the same*)



FINAL PLAQUE DESIGN – Features white bronze plaques with three layers, including [1] a polished foreground (figures, text, and decorative bars); [2] an anodized (or painted) smooth background (mid-layer figures); and [3] anodized pebbled background. Raised layers are to be no more than 1/8 inch in height.



Example of introductory plaque design

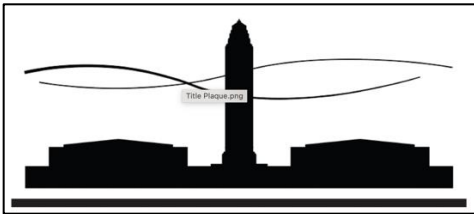


Example of plaque design interpreting a specific mural scene

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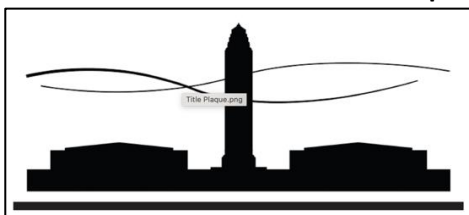
FINAL PLAQUE TEXT – *Centrally located introductory plaques, set into vertical brick banding in the plaza, provide context for the murals and describe the 1936 design process. The interpretation relating to the themes in each of the murals provides a balanced and more accurate cultural history introduced in the images.*

Coliseum Mural Introduction Plaque



The Will Rogers Memorial Center’s coliseum and auditorium were the centerpieces of the 1936 Frontier Centennial, a celebration of 100 years of Texas independence. Exciting displays and reenactments of frontier life glorified popular mythology of the “Old West.” The 200-foot-long, hand-painted tile murals on the two buildings’ facades feature highly romanticized interpretations of cultural histories. Installed in 2023, these plaques result from a community-centered City of Fort Worth initiative supported with federal American Rescue Plan Act funds to promote cultural equity and understanding.

Auditorium Mural Introduction Plaque



In 1936, these murals were considered the largest set of mosaics in the world. Like other public artwork created during the Great Depression (1929–1939), stylized images feature intertwined cultural stories. Themes directed by Texas Christian University Professor and one-term Fort Worth Mayor William Jackson Hammond focused on progress and achievement. Nevertheless, the murals did not represent an accurate story. The goal of these interpretative plaques is to encourage viewers to learn more about Texas’ multifaceted history and to foster cultural understanding and equity in our community.

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Coliseum Mural Plaque 1



For over 15,000 years, the land now identified as Texas was home to Native American societies, including the Caddo, Comanche, Apache, Atakapa, Tonkawa, Lipan, Coahuila, Wichita, Waco, Keechi, and Tawakoni. These sophisticated tribal nations, with unique languages and cultural practices, hunted the plains, worked the land, raised families, and engaged in trade. When Texas became a Republic in 1836, President Sam Houston established policies promoting friendship and trade with Indigenous tribes, however, future administrations disagreed with his stance, leading to mistrust and warfare for years.

Coliseum Mural Plaque 2



Indigenous people lived in a harmonious and spiritual relationship with the American buffalo and all of nature. Many depended on the bison for food, clothing, and tools, and honored them in stories and ceremonies. Plains Nations Indians were also skilled horse riders and breeders as well as agile hunters. By the late 1700s, their settlements moved efficiently across the plains following herd migrations. When overhunting, years of serious drought, and governmental policies led to the near extermination of the bison in 1878, Anglo colonists were more empowered to suppress and control Native people.

Coliseum Mural Plaque 3



In 1825, Stephen F. Austin brought 300 families to the Mexican province of *Tejas*, where Indigenous people vastly outnumbered Anglo immigrants. To control Indigenous land, Mexico granted land agents (*empresarios*) like Austin to recruit Anglo colonists to settle expansive territories. The first colony, with a population of 1,790 including 443 enslaved people, spread between the Brazos and Colorado Rivers. Stories of dangerous expeditions onto Native lands led by rugged frontiersmen shaped the stereotypes of the ‘peaceful and industrious colonist’ braving attacks of the so called ‘uncivilized Indians’.

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Coliseum Mural Plaque 4



The Lone Star flag flew over the Texas Republic from 1836 to 1846. Trading posts promoted the exchange of Native textiles, jewelry, and basketry for food, clothing, and other necessities. Although this scene depicts peaceful trade, the years preceding Texas Independence were full of conflict and violence. When Mexican law banned slavery in 1829, differences in cultural and political thinking led to revolution. To protect their families, Indigenous peoples and nations moved deeper into their ancestral homelands as more Anglos came to the new Republic. Eventually, Native Americans were forcibly removed.

Coliseum Mural Plaque 5



The United States annexed The Republic of Texas in 1845 as the 28th state. The first state census listed 212,592 people residing in Texas. By 1860, the railroad was important for long-distance travel and transportation of goods. The economy depended on agriculture, particularly cotton, and cattle ranching. Both brought prosperity to Texas and large landowners. Although slavery was abolished in the Confederate States in 1863, news of emancipation did not come to Texas until June 19, 1865, which, through the tireless efforts of Fort Worth’s Opal Lee, became a national holiday, Juneteenth, in 2021.

Coliseum Mural Plaque 6



Although the Mexican Vaquero is not shown in this scene, many modern-day ranching techniques and popular cowboy practices can be traced to them. Skilled horse and cattlemen, Vaqueros participated in traditional sporting events called *Charrería*, the precursor of the modern-day rodeo. Working ranch hands by day, mestizo (mixed Native American and Spanish people), Black, Anglo and Indigenous horsemen often competed in roping and riding competitions in their free time. By the 1890s, organized rodeos were popular spectator events that gave cowboys a chance to demonstrate skills honed on the range.

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Auditorium Mural Plaque 1



Spain, France, and Mexico explored and occupied Native American land from 1519 until 1836. Each nation’s influence can still be seen today. First to claim the new territory, the Spanish named it *Tejas*, the Caddo word for “friendship.” But Spanish missions set up as cultural centers for training and education enabled Spain to take Native lands and resources by forcing religious and cultural assimilation. The departing Spanish conquistador and the sterned-faced and traditionally dressed Mexican trio reference Mexico’s rejection of colonial rule in 1810 and the fight for Mexican independence.

Auditorium Mural Plaque 2



After Stephen F. Austin brought the first colonizing settlers to Texas, other Anglo immigrants seeking new opportunities followed, including David “Davy” Crockett. When Texas became a state in 1845 and Anglo population tripled in fifteen years, Indigenous people resisted intrusions onto their lands. Many were killed, enslaved, or forced into Anglo society. The 1850 Texas Census, including immigrants and enslaved people, recorded significant ethnic diversity in Texas. Joining the Confederate States in 1861, Texas seceded from the Union. It rejoined five years after the bloody Civil War ended.

Auditorium Mural Plaque 3



Texas ranching has been a major economic industry since 1730. The ancient practice of branding, permanently marking by hot iron, was brought to the New World by the Spanish. It became state law in 1848, requiring cattle owners to register unique brands as legal proof of ownership. With the invention of barbed wire (1874), Anglo landownership, made possible after the forceable removal of Native people, boomed, and vast parcels of land for grazing cattle and farming were created. Workers, by necessity and by force, were ethnically diverse, including women and enslaved Blacks and Indigenous people.

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Auditorium Mural Plaque 4



Use of the land and its value was changing dramatically. For the first two decades of 20th century, agriculture led the state’s economic growth. Texas produced almost one third of America’s cotton. This scene depicts tenant farming and sharecropping, systems in which freedmen, poor white, and Mexican workers farmed rented land for a share of the harvested crops. Sharecropping rarely resulted in farm ownership. After World War I (1914-1918), many laborers moved to cities for work, forcing landowners to modernize with machinery to harvest millions of acres of cotton, wheat, and other crops.

Auditorium Mural Plaque 5



The modern Texas economy began to boom in 1901. The discovery of oil in Beaumont was international news. Spindletop, the largest gusher the world had ever seen, blew oil more than 150 feet high and produced an unprecedented 100,000 barrels of oil per day and 3.5 million barrels the first year. By 1940, Texas led all U.S. states in oil production. Industrialization influenced growth in construction, shipping, transportation, and manufacturing and oil displaced agriculture as the economic powerhouse in Texas. As urban areas grew, the use of the land, and its resources, was changing more profoundly.

Auditorium Mural Plaque 6



New Deal programs helped Texas recover from the Great Depression (1929–1939). Federal funding for parks, highways, and public buildings provided much-needed work and improved infrastructure. Though not acknowledged in this scene, a diversity of men and women contributed to the building of new school buildings, the county hospital, a new city hall and public library, and the Will Rogers Memorial Center, including the Pioneer Tower, Coliseum, and Auditorium. Progress and achievement had changed the state, and the city, but not without commitment and not without sacrifice.