National Trust Declares Haight-Ashbury Its 100th National Treasure

On May 15, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named the “Corner of Haight and Ashbury,” the heart of the neighborhood at the epicenter of the American counterculture in the 1960s, as its 100th National Treasure. STORY ON PAGE 8
On June 25, the San Francisco School Board unanimously voted to paint over Victor Arnautoff’s sprawling “Life of Washington” mural at George Washington High School. It is merely the latest in a series of controversies across the country surrounding depictions of Native Americans, African Americans, and other historical events—frequently involving New Deal-era artworks—although rarely (if ever) is destruction of public art prescribed as the remedy for past injustices.

Created in 1936, Arnautoff’s thirteen-panel mural is the city’s largest fresco project from that period. The work presents a complex, subversive, and historically accurate counternarrative of Washington’s life and legacy, exposing our nation’s first president as a slave owner who countenanced Native American genocide under the guise of “manifest destiny.” Its depictions of these groups have long provoked anger and resentment, including a campaign led by African American students in the 1960s that asked the school board to erase them. At that time, a compromise was found by commissioning a series of “response murals” by African American artist Dewey Crumpler.

From the outset of the current debate, Heritage has recognized the offensive nature of Arnautoff’s mural and its impact on students, especially students of color. We have worked to listen, understand, and put forward constructive solutions that would conceal and/or reinterpret the mural while sparing it from destruction. In attending three of the district’s Reflection and Action Group meetings as a member of the public, I listened to heartfelt and often wrenching pleas from parents, students, teachers, and alumni on all sides of the issue. I learned about Arnautoff’s leftist political views and motives, but also about the very real emotional and physical trauma triggered by the mural’s depictions. I came to distinguish the artist’s admirable intent from how his images of slavery and Native American genocide are actually experienced by some students.

Although Heritage adamantly opposes the school board’s desire to paint over and destroy the entire “Life of Washington” mural, we support their guiding objective to protect and educate students. In April, we submitted a memo to the school district that suggests multiple potential paths forward, including case studies that combine screening, interpretation, education, and/or new artwork. Several of these examples are presented in Preservation Notes on page 4.

Whether you agree or disagree, the spirit of activism that underpins the “Life of Washington” debate can be traced to the racial and social-justice movements of the 1960s. On May 15, the National Trust for Historic Preservation recognized the counterculture era as an important chapter in American history by naming “the Corner of Haight and Ashbury” as its 100th National Treasure. The announcement kicks off an auspicious collaboration between Heritage, the National Trust, and Haight Street Art Center to develop a holistic vision for the future of the Doolan-Larson Building as a cultural destination dedicated to interpreting the counterculture movement and its legacies.

Finally, it is with great excitement and anticipation that Heritage welcomes Woody LaBounty as its new Vice President of Advocacy and Programs. As founder and director of the Western Neighborhoods Project, Woody has distinguished himself as an effective advocate and a magnetic public historian, building enthusiasm for our shared mission by connecting people to many of the city’s lesser-known historic places and neighborhoods. Woody’s people-centered approach to history and preservation promises to expand Heritage’s reach and relevance throughout San Francisco.
Woody LaBounty Joins Heritage Staff in New Leadership Role

Heritage enthusiastically welcomes Stephen “Woody” LaBounty as Vice President of Advocacy and Programs (VPAP), a newly created staff position that is a key part of the organization’s senior management team. A life-long San Franciscan, Woody is the founder and longtime executive director of Western Neighborhoods Project, a nonprofit member-based organization that preserves and documents the history and culture of the neighborhoods of western San Francisco. He will transition to his new role at Heritage in mid-August.

The need for this new leadership position at Heritage was originally identified during the board’s strategic planning process in 2016, and it has become a top priority due to Heritage’s rapid growth since that time, including the completion of the Campaign for San Francisco Heritage/Haas-Lilienthal House in 2017 and Norm Larson’s gift of the Doolan-Larson Building at the corner of Haight and Ashbury in 2018.

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—Woody LaBounty

Working closely with Mike Buhler, Woody will lead Heritage’s advocacy and education programs and support fundraising to advance Heritage’s mission. The VPAP coordinates preservation goals over different program areas, including advocacy, research, education, and community outreach, helping to advance Heritage’s citywide preservation mission by bringing partners together, providing technical and policy support, and leading advocacy campaigns.

Among his many responsibilities as VPAP, Woody will support Heritage’s Projects + Policy Committee, which reviews and comments on proposed development projects and legislation, and he will oversee the Landmark Fund program, including drafting, editing, and commissioning Legacy Business Registry and City Landmark nominations. Even before his first day in the office, Woody has been actively involved in interviewing candidates for the Communications & Programs Manager staff opening, which he will directly supervise.

As director of Western Neighborhoods Project, Woody has built relationships with elected officials, city agencies, corporations, local businesses, and diverse community and neighborhood associations. He has coauthored historic context statements adopted by the city, conducted neighborhood field surveys, and advocated before commissions and elective boards. In 2005 he led a successful effort to save and relocate four cottages built for refugees from the 1906 earthquake and fire. After restoration, the display of one of the cottages with interpretive material drew over 15,000 visitors in April 2006. His work as project director for the 1906 Earthquake Refugee Cottages initiative was recognized with a Governor’s Historic Preservation Award in 2007.

Woody is also an innovative, resourceful, and prolific public historian, having conceived and co-produced San Francisco History Days (formerly History Expo) at the Old U.S. Mint since its inception in 2010. Attended by 15,000 people each year, the annual exposition of local history groups, authors, researchers, and speakers has become the premiere gathering of the city’s history community. He is also co-founder of OpenSFHistory, an ambitious project to archive, catalog, scan, and put online San Francisco historical images from private collections, with more than 41,000 images processed thus far. Since 2013, he has co-hosted the Outside Lands San Francisco History Podcast, a weekly program on San Francisco history that highlights the work of local authors, researchers, and community organizations such as the San Francisco History Association, Shaping San Francisco, Chinese Historical Society of America, and Mechanics’ Institute. Over 330 episodes have been produced to date!

“I grew up here, love San Francisco, and over the past twenty years have been committed to raising awareness of and enthusiasm for the preservation and appreciation of traditionally overlooked neighborhoods and communities in the city,” says Woody. “With the new Vice President of Advocacy and Programs position, I see a tremendous opportunity to deepen Heritage’s presence and increase its effectiveness in all corners of San Francisco.”

Woody’s first day in the office at the Haas-Lilienthal House is this August 16. He can be reached at wlabounty@sfheritage.org or (415) 441-3000 x20.
On June 25, the San Francisco School Board unanimously voted to paint over—or, if too costly and time-consuming, cover with panels—Victor Arnautoff’s controversial 1936 “Life of Washington” mural cycle at George Washington High School (GWHS). Despite Arnautoff’s intent to expose racial injustice and genocide countenanced by this country’s first president, his depictions of Native Americans and African Americans in five of the thirteen mural panels have long been derided by activists as deeply offensive, demeaning, and traumatic to students, especially to students of color. The intense debate surrounding the mural’s fate has sparked international media coverage, condemnation, petitions, and inflammatory rhetoric from activists, teachers, students, alumni, artists, academics, preservationists, historians, and art critics, among others.

Amid the rancor, however, the school board has thus far shown little interest in exploring alternatives that would edify, re-contextualize, and/or achieve the district’s primary aim to “remove the mural from public view.” Meanwhile, a new group has formed, the Coalition to Protect Public Art, to advocate for “alternative options to increase education, provide mural context for viewers, create more art, and provide students and others a choice to decide for themselves whether or not to view art instead of the government destroying art and permanently preventing anyone from ever seeing it again.”

The school board’s decision in June initiates a lengthy environmental review process—most likely requiring an Environmental Impact Report (EIR)—that will define project objectives, assess the project’s potential impacts on historic resources, and evaluate a range of less harmful alternatives to destruction. Reversibility is a key consideration in determining whether changes to the mural will result in an adverse effect under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The school board’s preferred option—to paint over the mural—is intentionally permanent; but under CEQA, the district will not be permitted to destroy the mural if feasible alternatives are identified in the EIR.
In a lengthy memo to district officials in April 2019, Heritage presented a series of case studies and potential solutions for addressing objectionable and offensive imagery in the Arnautoff mural. From the outset, Heritage has recognized the offensive nature of the mural’s depictions and their impact on students. Then and now, Heritage’s goal is to provide the school district with a range of technical options to facilitate a constructive and unifying solution.

George Washington High School is merely the latest in a series of controversies surrounding depictions of Native Americans, African Americans, and others in historical events locally and nationally—frequently involving New Deal-era artworks. Although each case must be considered in its own context, the examples below show that there are myriad creative approaches to remedying inaccurate, offensive, and/or stereotypical content in public art, including screening, interpretation, and/or new artwork.
Screening
Heritage has long supported a solution at GWHS that would conceal the offensive depictions in a way that allows people to choose to view them and to add interpretation that explains why the mural panels are hidden. Similarly, the GWHS Alumni Association has proposed a combination of screening, interpretive panels, site-specific curriculum, and creating new murals with positive portrayals of Native Americans and African Americans.

Earlier this year, in an analogous controversy involving a dozen Christopher Columbus murals at the University of Notre Dame, the administration recently elected to cover the murals with a “woven material” that will allow them to be displayed on occasion. A permanent display of high-resolution images of the murals will be placed elsewhere on campus.

Created by Frank Mechau in 1937, the “Dangers of the Mail” mural in the Clinton Building in Washington, D.C. elicited controversy because of its depictions of nude women being attacked by Native Americans. In response to calls for removal led by Native American federal employees, the General Services Administration screened the mural with a custom-designed curtain and developed an interpretive program for all 22 New Deal murals in the building. The program comprises wall-mounted panels adjacent to each of the murals, web content (including an essay on “Controversy Then and Now”), and public tours. The curtain can be opened and closed by visitors so that the mural can be viewed in the context of other murals as originally intended.

Re-contextualization
Created in 1939, the “Old New York” diorama at the American Museum of Natural History was reinterpreted in 2019 to correct historical inaccuracies.
large labels onto the glass, correcting various untruths. The largest one, visible from a distance, beckons: “Reconsidering this scene.”

A similar intervention was done in 2017 on the large bas-relief covering the Palazzo degli Uffici Finanziari in Bozen-Bolzano, Italy, which shows Benito Mussolini on horseback: a lit inscription is now projected onto the facade with a sentence by Hanna Arendt in German, Italian, and Latin: “Nobody has the right to obey,” challenging the Fascist motto: “Credere, obbedire, combattere” (Believe, obey, fight). A set of explanatory panels have been installed on the pavement in front of the building. Thus, the monument has been given a new meaning, opposite to the original one. (Similarly, teachers and students at GWHS have installed temporary signage in an effort to reinterpret the “Life of Washington” mural and Dewey Crumpler’s “response murals,” with historical quotes and other contextual information placed under both murals.)

New Artwork
Another common response to address controversial historical depictions is to commission new artwork “in response.” One need look no further than GWHS for an early example of this approach, where artist Dewey Crumpler’s 1974 murals respond to Arnautoff’s 1936 fresco with evocative imagery honoring the contributions of African American and other marginalized peoples.

A 1934 mural by Ann Rice O’Hanlon in the lobby of Memorial Hall at the University of Kentucky, depicting the history of Kentucky, provoked anger among students who find the images of slaves and Native Americans demeaning. The university formed a task force that decided to commission new art that could put other perspectives in front of student eyes. The resulting work by Trinidadian artist Karyn Olivier, titled “Witness” (2019), gilded Memorial Hall’s domed ceiling with gold leaf and painted figures of people of color that Olivier based on images from the 1934 mural. Olivier surrounded the dome with portraits of people of color who played important roles in the state’s history. The dome is inscribed with this quote from Frederick Douglass: “There is not a man beneath the canopy of heaven, that does not know that slavery is wrong for him.”

In 2015, New Zealand indigenous artist Lisa Reihana created the powerful digital panorama “In Pursuit of Venus [infected],” which reanimates the story of Captain Cook and “first contact.” The 80-foot-wide, 13-foot-tall “digital scroll” with a soundtrack—a full 64 minutes—reinterprets an 1804 French wallpaper by Joseph Dufour, Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique (“savages”). With the original wallpaper displayed nearby, Reihana’s monumental, immersive artwork places re-enactments by performers of Polynesian, Maori, and Aboriginal First-Nations descent within a painted Tahitian landscape in which the historically accurate geographical features and architecture bump up against the imaginary exotic plant life. Reihana’s epic work will be on display in San Francisco at the de Young Museum from August 10, 2019 thru January 5, 2020.
On May 15, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named the “Corner of Haight and Ashbury,” the heart of the neighborhood at the epicenter of the American counterculture in the 1960s, as its 100th National Treasure. Together with Heritage and the Haight Street Art Center, the announcement was made at the Doolan-Larson Building in an event emceed by legendary rock journalist Ben Fong-Torres. The daytime press event and community celebration were followed by an evening reception attended by luminaries of the era and other neighborhood denizens. Over the next year, the three organizations will develop a vision for the Doolan-Larson Building to serve as a center for the interpretation of Haight-Ashbury’s many contributions to America’s countercultural legacy.

“The counterculture that converged in Haight-Ashbury truly changed the world. By designating this iconic corner a National Treasure, we are acknowledging this neighborhood’s standing as one of America’s most renowned and significant historic places,” said Barb Pahl, Senior Vice-President of Field Services at the National Trust. “We look forward to bringing our expertise to help reimagine the Doolan-Larson building as a place to both celebrate and interpret the cultural revolution that took place here.”

The Haight Street Art Center printed a limited-edition poster for the event and mounted a vintage-poster display in the attic. “The values of the San Francisco counterculture have informed my personal and professional choices for decades,” said Roger McNamee, activist, author, and founding member of Moonalice. “These ideals inspired the Haight Street Art Center. The counterculture deserves an interpretive center to shine a bright light on the city’s cultural history. What better place than at the corner of Haight and Ashbury?”

Haight-Ashbury was the locus of a cultural upheaval whose global influence still radiates more than 50 years later. In the summer of 1967, tens of thousands of young people from across the country and around the world converged on the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, marking the culmination of a countercultural movement that forever transformed American life. The counterculture ethos developed in Haight-Ashbury had a deep and long-term societal impact, promoting equal access to health care and housing, environmental protection, and a more relaxed
approach to sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll. The era’s receptiveness to new ideas continues to resonate through American life to this day in law, politics, business, and other elements of the culture.

The Doolan-Larson Building itself played a key role in defining the trendsetting fashions of the era. It was home to one of San Francisco’s first hippie clothing stores, Mnasidika, run by Peggy Caserta, a lover and close friend of Janis Joplin. The store is where Jimi Hendrix supposedly got his trademark bell-bottoms and vest, and where the Grateful Dead conducted an iconic photo shoot. Peggy Caserta returned to San Francisco for the first time in 30 years for the National Treasure announcement, generously lending Heritage the original Mnasidika storefront sign for the event.

The National Treasure announcement kicks off a collaborative planning effort that aims to reimagine the Doolan-Larson Building and turn the upper-floor residence into an interpretive center that recognizes the history of the countercultural movement of the 1960s and also reflects Larson’s time in the house. A team assembled by the National Trust will work with Heritage and the Haight Street Art Center to: (1) develop a community-outreach and engagement strategy; (2) analyze market trends in the neighborhood, including local and regional demographic trends, real-estate supply, and demand for specific uses (e.g., retail, rental venues, and/or cultural destinations); (3) identify best practices for site-management, disposition of contents and collections, and programming options for the Doolan-Larson Building; (4) make recommendations on interpretive strategies for the building and the surrounding neighborhood; and (5) develop an operating model and business plan with revenue projections and a feasibility analysis.

In addition to the National Treasure designation, the National Trust and American Express awarded Heritage a $150,000 grant in November 2018 for exterior repairs and improvements, starting with a roof replacement project completed in early August. Heritage also commissioned a comprehensive condition-assessment report, completed by Architectural Resources Group earlier this year, that will inform the planning process and help prioritize repairs, accessibility upgrades, and other capital improvements.

With San Francisco’s cultural history under threat amid the rapid growth and changes in the city’s local retail-business environment, Heritage’s Haight-Ashbury strategy aims to protect and interpret not just the Doolan-Larson Building but the fabric of the surrounding neighborhood. With a grant from the San Francisco Historic Preservation Fund Committee, Heritage’s consultant, Donna Graves, is documenting the neighborhood’s 1960s-1970s counterculture history as part of Landmark District nomination being prepared in partnership with the San Francisco Planning Department.

Through our work with these various partners, Heritage aims to ensure that the counterculture movement—and the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood in particular—are fully recognized and preserved for their important contributions to San Francisco and American history.
Soirée 2019: Legends & Landmarks

More than 300 guests celebrated San Francisco’s landmarks and legacy businesses on May 18 at the historic Palace Hotel. The event began at the Gilded-Age landmark with a cocktail hour and signature drink, the Pied Piper, named for the 1909 Maxfield Parrish painting hanging in the hotel’s eponymous bar. Guests perused silent-auction items featuring classic San Francisco establishments such as Sam’s Grill, Cliff House, Old Clam House, and Great American Music Hall. Bidders also vied for tours of the Doolan-Larson Building at the corner of Haight and Ashbury—which had just been named a National Treasure by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Guests then moved to the Grand Ballroom for dinner and a video program highlighting some of Heritage’s Landmark Fund program nominations—San Francisco Zen Center, Arion Press, and Lorna Kollmeyer Ornamental Plaster. Auctioneer extraordinaire Lenny Broburg led a successful live auction and “fund-a-need” appeal to benefit the Landmark Fund. After dinner the party progressed to a “supper club” beneath the Australian-crystal chandeliers and stained-glass dome of the iconic Garden Court, San Francisco Landmark #18. Guests enjoyed sumptuous desserts, casino-style gaming, a photo booth, and rousing music by Bud E. Luv and his band, whose set-list included tunes from Frank Sinatra to Bruno Mars. The lavish evening was capped by a shimmering, Art-Deco era performance by the DecoBelles dance troupe.

Soirée was attended by young and old, loyal Heritage supporters, and new friends. The event raised money critical to Heritage’s efforts—through our Landmark Fund program—to nominate 50 buildings, businesses, and/or nonprofits for City Landmark or Legacy Business Registry designation by our 50th anniversary in 2021.

Save the date for next year’s Soirée at Bimbo’s 365 Club on Friday, May 1, 2020!
Fund-A-Need Bidders
Daniel Baker • Rochelle Beverage • Peter Birkholz • Martin Brown • Michelle Buhler • Pauline Buhler • Kim Butt • Jon Carden • Beatrice Carrot • Gina Choe • Leo Chow • Donna Colson • Carla Cooper • Debbie Cooper • Rashel Cordova • Jennifer Correia • Eileen Cree • Christina Dikas • Richard Dreyer • Jessica Fairchild • Sarah Fields • Tamara Flores • Erin Garcia • Cathy Garrett • Jeff Gherardini • Tom Gille • Nancy Goldenberg • Kristin Gonsar • Elizabeth Graux • Terry Haney • Jim Hurley • Ellen Johnck • Colleen Johnson • Daniela Kirshenbaum • Lada Kocherovsky • Enrique Landa • Ben Lang • Jordan Langer • Paul Littler • Christoph Lohmann • Peter Mason • Kathy Mattes • Rudy Mojica • Steve Orlandi • Diane Oshima • Lynn Peirano • Wendy Proctor • Clint Reily • Katie Ribary • Samantha Rose • Greg Ryken • Gerald Sams • Greg Sheppard • Jim Siegel • David Skaggs • Elisa Skaggs • Dr. David Smith • Millicent Smith • Jenny Sosnowski • Ruth Todd • Brian Turner • Michael Tzortzis • Caglar Unlu • Glenn Wertheim • David Wessel • Andrew Wolfram

Volunteers and Staff
Michael Bennett • Kayla Brittingham • Sharika Etheart • Claire Fianegin • Rajni Gagnon • Nancy Glass • Deb Grant • Katherine Hansen • Nicolette Heaphy • Lynne Howe • Tracie Hussain • Laura Isaeff • Pam Larson • Sabina Lewis • Sydney Mountain • Honey Rothert • Esther Suen
August 2019

August 22, 2019, 6 PM
Filmmaker Jim Yager kicks off Heritage’s 2019 LECTURE SERIES with an intimate screening of his new documentary, *Water from the Wilderness*, about the past, present, and changing climates and times. Lecture Series tickets at www.sfheritage.org

September 2019

THURSDAY, SEPT 26, 6 PM
2019 LECTURE SERIES
History of Tamale-Making in San Francisco
Jonathan Lammers
906 World Cultural Center
(at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church)
906 Broadway
Tickets at www.sfheritage.org

October 2019

THURSDAY, OCT 17, 6 PM
2019 LECTURE SERIES
Janis: Her Life and Music
Holly George Warren
The Bindery, 1727 Haight St.
Tickets at www.sfheritage.org

November 2019

THURSDAY, NOV 14, 6 PM
2019 LECTURE SERIES
South Park & Rincon Hill
Paul Fisher
Presidio Golf & Concordia Club
8 Presidio Terrace
Tickets at www.sfheritage.org

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT UPCOMING HERITAGE EVENTS, PLEASE VISIT SFHERITAGE.ORG OR CALL 415.441.3000