

Saving the Coit Tower Murals and the Civic Art Collection

FISCAL YEAR 2011-12
ANNUAL REPORT



Photography courtesy of Alexander Troy.

Established by voters in 1932, the San Francisco Arts Commission has jurisdiction over all of the art belonging to the City that are not included in the Asian Art or Fine Arts Museums' collections. The City's Charter charges the Arts Commission with the preservation and care of the works in the Civic Art Collection. The murals located at Coit Tower are a part of this vast and prestigious collection, which today is comprised of over 4,000 objects, 800 of which are integrated into public facilities and spaces of every description, from the airport to the zoo.

Collectively the Civic Art Collection is valued in excess of \$93 million dollars. Due to the City's budget challenges, this one-of-a-kind collection has been historically underfunded. In fiscal year 2010-2011, city funding for the maintenance/conservation budget for the entire collection was \$75,000; prior to that it had only been \$15,000 a year. Unfortunately, this amount is not enough to address the innumerable needs of an aging collection that is, in many cases, vulnerable to graffiti and other types of vandalism.

Recently, Coit Tower has been in the news, because after 22 years and over 4 million visitors, it is time for the Arts Commission to undertake significant restoration work on the murals. Created in 1934, the murals at Coit Tower include 27 distinct frescos painted by 26 artists, many of whom either studied with or were influenced by the famous Mexican muralists Diego Rivera and Jose Clemente Orozco. The last major restoration took place in 1990 and focused on the ground floor murals. Today, the condition of these murals remain significantly better than before 1990, which is a testament to the protective measures that have been in place for some time, such as a metal barrier located in front of the murals, glass coverings on some of the most vulnerable areas and restricted access to the murals located on the second floor.



Maxine Albro, *California (detail)*, Coit Tower, 1934; fresco.

Get Involved

For more information or to make a donation to ArtCare, please contact:

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Most of the observed damage is either environmental or mechanical—meaning direct contact with the murals by an object or person that causes the displacement of pigment. The environmental damage is largely the result of exposure to moisture, which has left salt deposits or “efflorescence” on some areas of the mural. This is a well-documented historic problem that requires ongoing attention. However, without a dedicated and sufficient revenue source, the Arts Commission has been unable to mitigate damage to the murals or engage in restoration efforts. Until now...

In 2013, the Recreation and Parks Department will undertake a \$1.5 million restoration of Coit Tower. In addition, the Department has pledged \$250,000 for the restoration of the murals as well as 1% of the gross revenues generated by the Tower concessionaire for ongoing maintenance and care of the murals. Early projections indicate that under this agreement the Arts Commission would receive approximately \$6,000 annually for maintenance and restoration of the Coit Tower murals. A comprehensive mural assessment estimates that the total cost to restore the murals will be \$300,000, so we are well on our way towards achieving our financial and restoration goals.



Keith Haring, *Untitled (Three Dancing Figures)*, 1989.

But how will we get there? What about the other aging works in the Civic Art Collection? The answer is ArtCare. Faced with the ongoing dilemma of a lack of funds to provide appropriate care for the collection, the Arts Commission needed to develop a new strategy. Established in 2010 in partnership with the San Francisco Art Dealers Association, ArtCare is dedicated to raising funds for the conservation and maintenance of the Civic Art Collection. ArtCare provides a vehicle for the private sector to become a partner in preserving the city’s public monuments and artworks so that future generations can enjoy these works for many years to come.

Since ArtCare’s founding, the Arts Commission has restored a seminal 1971 Peter Voulkos sculpture (one of the City’s first art enrichment commissioning projects) at the Hall of Justice on Bryant and 7th streets and the 1982 Man Lin Choi Korean Monument, *Movement: The First 100 Years*, located in the Embarcadero Ferry Park. In addition, restoration work on the 1989 Keith Haring *Dancing Figures* sculpture at Moscone Center was just completed thanks in part to \$65,000 from the Keith Haring Foundation and donations to ArtCare. In June, the sculpture was returned to its refurbished pedestal, located at Howard and Third streets.

Update

In June, the SFAC hired a leading art conservator specializing in W.P.A-era murals to complete phase one of a comprehensive restoration project at Coit Tower that included cleaning the surface of the frescoes located on the first floor.



Man Lin Choi, *The First 100 Years*, 1982.

In these difficult economic times it has become apparent to all that the City cannot care for the Civic Art Collection on its own, and this formidable collection has aged and requires a more aggressive schedule of care. By establishing this innovative public-private partnership, the Arts Commission ensures that San Francisco’s assets maintain their value and integrity, and remain priceless treasures for all citizens and visitors to enjoy.