

## **Will Rogers Mural Interpretation Plaques Project Summary**

The Will Rogers Memorial Center Mural Interpretation project was accepted by the City of Fort Worth in January 2025. The project, partially funded through American Rescue Plan Act funds, included a community process to provide interpretation for two 200-foot-long murals depicting the cultural and economic history of the region and the state. The murals were commissioned to celebrate the 1936 Texas Centennial.

At the Mayor's request, the Fort Worth Art Commission gathered community input in response to a citizen's concern about the portrayal of African Americans on the tile mural on the auditorium. To consider the impact of removing or altering the mural, Historic Preservation Officer, Murray Miller, provided historic context of the mural in relationship to its creation and the architecture to the Fort Worth Art Commission in October 2019 and suggested using the plaza in front of the buildings for future interpretation.

The Commission held three public input meetings and community members overwhelmingly supported keeping the mural intact and providing interpretation of the murals. In January 2020, the Commission determined that "while the citizens' concerns were based upon possible misinterpretation of the imagery along with the negative response to the stylistic approach of the 1930s, it is vital that the City provide educational interpretation for the benefit of citizens and visitors who view the mural now and into the future."

An advisory committee convened by the Art Commission developed a project approach and on October 19, 2021, Fort Worth City Council approved funding from the American Rescue Plan Act and allocations from the Public Events Capital Fund and Public Art funds to engage in a community process to research, fabricate, and install permanent interpretive plaques for contextual and accurate historic information at the site.

Each of the murals includes six time-stamped vignettes portraying themes of Texas history.

Text was developed following more than two years of research and focus group meetings with community members representing the cultures depicted in the murals, consultation with local culture and Texas history experts, and guidance from the Art Commission-appointed WRMC Interpretation Advisory Panel. Rather than describing the scenes, the text provides context relating to the period and events illustrated and celebrates the people who contributed to the Texas story.

A total of fourteen white bronze plaques are embedded into the plaza in front of each of the murals encouraging visitors to consider the people who played a role in the settlement and development of the west as depicted on the auditorium, and the various people who shaped the cultural heritage of the southwest as illustrated on the coliseum.

The Will Rogers Memorial Center is centrally located in the city's internationally recognized Cultural District and attracts more than two million visitors annually.