

October 30, 2017

Zimmerman Murals Project Planning Group Meeting

2-3:30 pm, Waters Room Zimmerman Library

Minutes (Draft)

(written by Alex Lubin)

In attendance: Alex Lubin, Diana Gourlay, Chris Wilson, Michael Trujillo, Les Field, Mark Emmons, Ed Padilla, Mel Ribas, Samuel Sisneros, Suzanne Schadl, Arif Khan, Lloyd Lee, Kathy Powers, Lea McChesney, Kevin Brown, Felipe Gonzales, Virginia Scharff, Lawrence Roybal, Patrick Hogan, Maxine Marks, Claudia Miller.

Couldn't attend: Kymberly Pinder, Geraldine Forbes, Rebecca Schreiber, Jennifer Marley

- I. The meeting was convened at 2:00pm by Alex Lubin. Alex described the purpose of the planning group – to engage the campus community, and students especially, in a discussion of what should be done to address decades-long complaints and protest regarding the “Three People’s” murals. Alex indicated that the current administration is willing to finally make some changes, and he doesn’t begin the process with one solution in mind. Rather than discuss whether the murals are problematic, Alex wants the committee organized around the question of what should be done.
- II. Introductions (name and how work/research engages with the Zimmerman Murals project)
- III. The group engaged in a discussion of what we need to know or study in order to come up with a solution or proposal to deal with the murals.

Felipe: We need to know more about the history of racial formations that made the myth of tri-cultural harmony seem progressive in one moment and problematic in another. We also need to know what historical contexts make the murals problematic today.

Maxine: We need to know the legal question of who owns the murals.

Kevin: We need to know more about art and aesthetics, how art representations of the WPA may diverge from native and indigenous art representations. What is the narrative were trying to represent with this mural?

Les: Totem poll issue was explicitly about reparations – the mural is different. Is decolonization a narrative of the mural project?

Lloyd: Our discussion should begin with the understanding that the University is a colonial institution – murals are part of the colonial history and present... (Lloyd presented an example from another institution of a problematic mural that was concealed, except in rare cases for donors). We need to draw on other examples.

Chris: seconds the notion that UNM's history should be read through the lens of colonialism.

Suzanne: We should think of institutions in their contexts. Zimmerman Library has an imperial history (Latin American collections, for example). Libraries are also imperial/colonial and if we begin with that premise we'll be better able to conceive of restorative justice.

Michael: We should bring previous and current student protestors (in regards to murals) back to campus as many are still around ABQ.

Felipe: Portia Veccio (UNM archivist) did some research on the protestors.

Samuel: A social justice approach means that the murals should be removed. There have already been committees in the past and nothing has been done. What's the purpose of the course, when we already have had the university discussion? Samuel suggested the committee reach out to student groups that have voiced objection to the Adams paintings such as the KIVA Club, MEChA, Red Nation and the Raza Graduate Student Association.

Several people mentioned our concerns and our confusion about the role the art class has in presenting a solution to the administration

Alex: Agrees that the murals should have been dealt with already, long ago. But thinks we are in a political moment when change is finally possible. Because of national debate, because of the current administration, because of other historical forces, now seems to be a time when things can change.

Kathy: The course gives voice to students in the present but not the past. What makes the UNM Murals committee unique is that student voices will be brought into the discussion. The process of addressing the murals could retraumatize students who have been impacted by the murals as well as students who want to keep them. This is contentious politics over whose history will be institutionalized and how. Oral histories should be conducted with the students who have protested over the years to preserve the memory of protest as the impetus for this movement and also the social context in which each wave of discontent has occurred. At Georgetown, the story of the students is being lost in the story of how the university is confronting its past. I have made the same suggestion there.

Ed: Despite the claim that the murals make the library a hostile place, many students enjoy the library as a place to study. Wants the class to engage with issues of

ensorship/ freedom of speech/ freedom of expression. . . need to be careful not to undermine these freedoms.

Mel: Other classes have dealt with the murals and produced proposals to deal with the murals – how will previous efforts be brought into this effort. Why should only this class provide the “solutions.”

Virginia: A broader effort is necessary. The lesson of the UNM Seal debate is that a broad series of discussions need to take place.

Lloyd: NAS is willing to cross-list the course, but would like to see the course open to branch campuses. The more people engaged in the course the better.

Chris: The course is a good vehicle for having the discussion/debate. Who will make the decision in the end? Would it make sense to bring the Regents into the process earlier?

Felipe: We need to know about the medium of the murals – its materials. Is it a mural or a painting? What kind of construction was used.

Lawrence: Remember that there were several public for a with the UNM Seal debate and the final decision from the Regents was a “no.” (But the UNM President suspended the seal).

Mel: Supports campus wide input and involvement. All previous classes that have focused on the murals should also been engaged/ considered. Removing murals for storage is consistent with historical preservation. And what is the process of historical preservation anyway (call for some critical thinking about the purpose of historic preservation).

Kevin: We should be careful to protect student, since some students in the UNM Seal debate received threats.

Ed: Conservator would need to study murals to understand the materials/construction. It is premature to remove the murals now.

- IV. Alex concluded the discussion at 3:35 and asked the committee to consider comparable examples at other University that we could include in the OneDrive folder. He indicated that he would plan a second meeting to talk more specifically about the outline of the course, based on input from today’s meeting, to be held sometime in November.

Adjourned.