

## STAFF REPORT

**DATE:** April 20, 2016

**TO:** Honorable Arts Commissioners

**FROM:** Allison Cummings, Senior Registrar, Civic Art Collection and Public Art

**RE:** Coit Tower Murals, Memorial Plague Reguest

SFAC staff has received a request from citizen Paul S. Lessig to place a memorial plaque honoring his brother, Russell Edward Lessig, beneath a depiction of him as a small boy in Roy Boynton's fresco mural *Animal Force and Machine Force*, 1934. The request is for a bronze plaque, approximately 2 inches tall by 7 inches wide, inscribed "RUSSELL EDWARD LESSIG 1930-2007 THE TOWER'S FIRST VISITOR" to be affixed directly to the mural's surface. Mr. Lessig states that his brother Russell was a frequent visitor to the construction site as Coit Tower was being built and was chosen as a model by the artist as he painted the entry way murals.

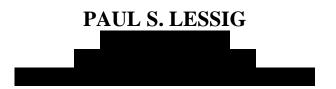
SFAC staff endeavor to deny the request based on the grounds that the plaques placement directly on the mural would be a permanent alteration of the existing form, integrity and materials of an historic property and is prohibited by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Preservation of Historic Properties, which states that "installing new decorative material that obscures or damages character-defining features or finishes" shall not be allowed.

In addition, SFAC staff is concerned about the precedent set in permanently memorializing individuals depicted in the Coit Tower Murals as the artworks portray hundreds of individuals and incorporate a number of people who were living and working in San Francisco at the time they were painted.

SFAC staff has shared Mr. Lessig's information and family history with both the Coit Tower Docent Program and the San Francisco City Guides, so that it may be included in their tours and communicated to visitors to the Tower. In addition, we have offered, should resources become available to create a detailed guide of all of the figures represented in the murals, to include information about Russell Edward Lessig in any presentation.

Since March 2014, SFAC staff has communicated the above response on multiple occasions in writing to Mr. Lessig, however he continues to pursue the goal of having the memorial plaque installed. As such, we now bring the matter before the Visual Arts Committee for formal action by the Commission.





April 15, 2016

Ms. Kate Patterson-Murphy Director of Communications San Francisco Arts Commission 401 Van Ness Avenue – Suite 325 San Francisco, California 94102

## Dear Ms. Patterson-Murphy:

Regretfully, my temporary 'health' status won't permit me to attend the next SF Art Commission's Board Meeting. Since you have advised me that the 'Visual Arts Committee' plans to recommend a 'Motion' to deny my request to have a Bronze Plaque affixed under the 'fresco' located in the Alcove of the Coit Tower's Rotunda depicting the 'image' of my Brother, Russell Edward Lessig, I'm submitting the attached 'Rebuttal' for delivery and review by both the "Visual Arts Committee" and the "SF Arts Commission Board" Meetings wherein this issue will be addressed and request a copy of the subsequent 'Agenda' and 'Minutes' of these proceedings that will be submitted for the 'Public Record'.

Your acknowledgement of this "Rebuttal Statement' and the resulting "Visual Arts Committee's" and "SF Arts Commission's Board of Director's" ultimate decision on this issue will be genuinely and fully appreciated.

Respectfully,

Paul S. Lessig

Incl: Rebuttal Statement

April 14, 2016

Attn: Visual Arts Committee & SF Arts Commission Board of Directors

## PLAQUE PLACEMENT REQUEST

## MOTION TO DENY REBUTTAL

Dear Arts Committee and SF Arts Commission Members:

My initial inquiry vis-à-vis requesting that an 8" x 2" 'Bronze' Plaque be affixed under the Fresco featuring my Brother, Russell Edward Lessig, was in 2008. Over the course of the last 8 years my request has been both ignored and shuffled between City Agencies, ultimately landing with the SF Art Commission's determinations. During this process the Mayor's office has since 'lost' the original Plaque provided (inscribed: Russell Edward Lessig - 1930-2007 - The Tower's First Visitor). It was not until March of 2014 that I was ultimately contacted by Ms. Kate Patterson-Murphy, Director of Communications for the SF Arts Commission, advising me that my request was being 'denied' based on some very 'debatable' and 'erroneous' reasoning; none of which 'questioned' the validity of my claim that my Brother was depicted in the 'Fresco' in question (see attached image) as the 'First' visitor to Coit Tower (our Family resided on Telegraph Hill adjacent to the Tower's construction site; my Brother was a constant 'pest' to the construction workers and artists. Ergo, when the need to fill the 'Alcove' in question arose, no doubt for the sake of expediency, they chose my Brother as their Model). Since 2014 I have endeavored, via numerous letters and emails to the President of the SF Arts Commission, its Board of Directors, the Mayor's office, and Ms. Patterson-Murphy, to address the 'debatable' and 'erroneous' concepts fostering denial of my request in an effort to have the decision to 'deny' it 'recanted'. These attempts proved fruitless and it was not until I requested to mediate with you through the 'California Lawyers for the Arts' that my request is finally being addressed by this Board.

In the essence of the Board's time I will not 'reference' the bulk of the Visual Arts Committee's erroneous reasoning for recommending a denial of my request; except to reference that its allegation that "the Plaque would be affixed below the Ray Boynton Fresco "Animal Force and Machine Force" is false – my Brother's Plaque is requested to be affixed below his 'Individual –Single-Image' Fresco (picture attached) in an Alcove of the Rotunda that once housed a 'public' drinking fountain. Since this area already includes a large 'Bronze' Plaque dedicated to the 'Daughters of the American Republic' above his Fresco, I question the reasoning for denying my request for the placement of an 8"x2" Bronze Plaque below it? If the issue is the 'wording' employed on the Plaque, I would be happy to have such wording, acceptable to the Visual Arts Committee, SF Arts Commission, and our Family, recast and provide a 'new' Plaque for placement under my Brother's Fresco.

Hopefully, both the Visual Arts Committee and the SF Arts Commission's Board of Directors, based on this 'Rebuttal', will 'recant' their objections and permit the placement of a Plaque to be affixed below my Brother's Fresco.

Respectfully submitted;