



Recreation in Harlem

Georgette Seabrooke | 1937

Discovery



Original Location

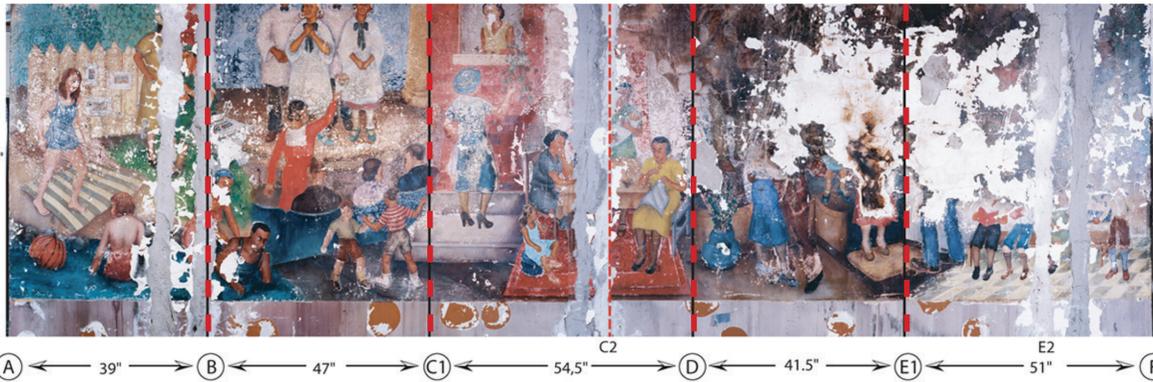


“Recreation in Harlem” is a story of re-discovery and renewal. Originally painted for the Nurses’ Recreation Room, over the years the mural had been damaged by fire, painted over, and covered with drywall. Conservators carefully removed the post-historic paint layers and discovered that many vignettes were intact, though the overall composition was fragmented.



Because the mural was painted directly onto the plaster wall, the mural had to be cut in sections from the building. The conservators had to make certain that the plaster substrate underneath was stabilized before transportation. The mural surface was then covered with a facing paper to protect the oil paint during stabilization and relocation.

Removal



The terracotta block wall was reinforced from the reverse with a steel framework. Five segments were cut to minimize disruption of the intact scenes and make each individual piece light and narrow enough to fit in the elevator. The steel support (*far left*) was designed to both support the murals in storage and to integrate seamlessly when installed in the new atrium space (*left*).

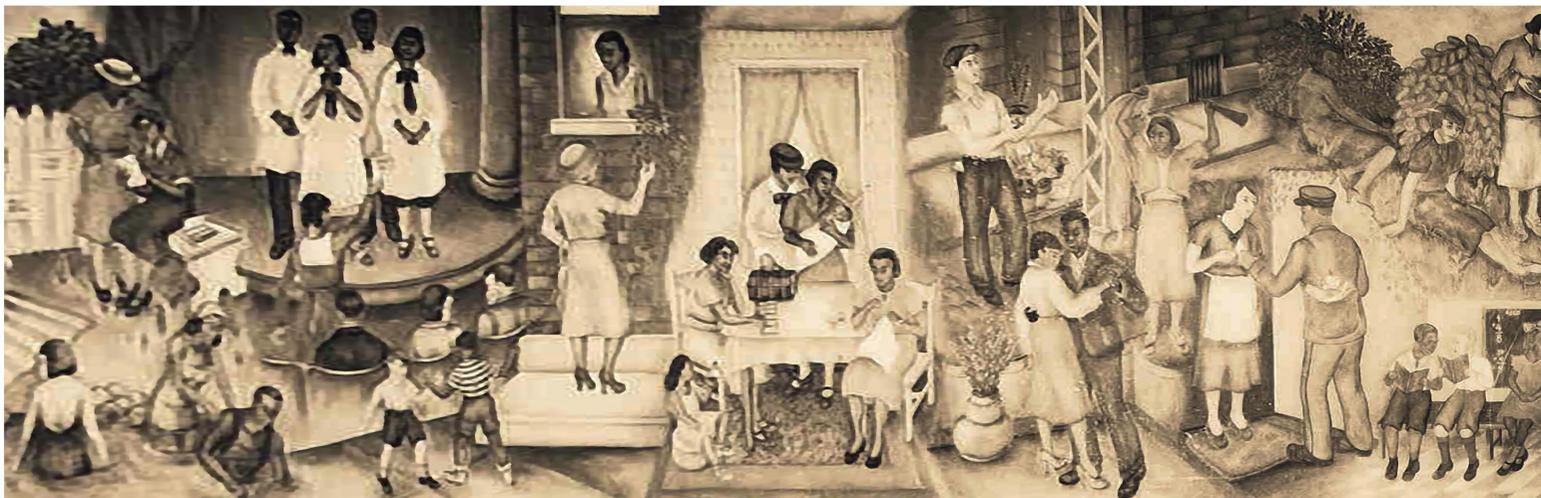


Cross Section

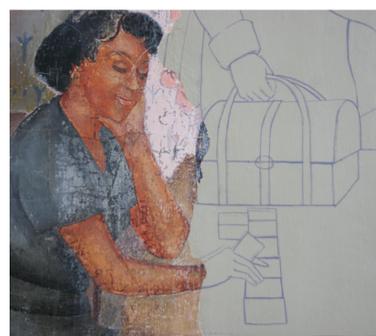


Installation

Restoration



Since portions of the mural were lost, the best way of recreating the composition was to rely on historic photographs. Due to the narrow size of the original hallway, the historic photo was taken at an angle (*see above*). The archival photograph was scanned and digitally manipulated to compensate for distortion (*left*). By overlaying a grid onto the adapted historic photo we were able to interpret damaged information and fill in the details. A historically compatible palette was determined by matching adjacent colors.



The project team chose not to fully restore the mural to a like-new appearance, but rather recreated the figures in the severely damaged areas to unify the composition. The conservators used easily reversible conservation paint so that in the future, conservators can work on the mural without disturbing the original, and differentiate between the original and new paint.