



Harlem Hospital Murals

Preserving Art in the Landscape of Modern Medical Facilities



EVERGREEN
Architectural Arts

Kim Lovejoy

EverGreene, Vice President, Director of Restoration

Kim Lovejoy has a broad and rich understanding of historic preservation having a background as an architectural historian, preservation planner, and building conservator. Kim, a Professional Associate of the American Institute of Conservation, has in-depth technical knowledge of conservation, restoration and maintenance of exterior and interior materials.

Gillian Randell

EverGreene, Chief Conservator

Gillian Randell, a Professional Associate of the American Institute of Conservation, specializes in the conservation of fine art including murals, painted decoration, wall paintings and mosaics. In addition to directing conservation work in situ, she is responsible for many of EverGreene's conservation reports, analyses and specifications.

Richard Saravay, AIA

HOK, Partner

Richard Saravay has been an architect for more than 40 years with over 20 years planning and designing healthcare facilities. He served as principal-in-charge for the Harlem Hospital Center new Mural Pavilion and has led teams for the several new regional medical facilities. Richard has a strong focus on how design impacts people and on how the designed care environment can enhance outcomes.

Harlem Hospital Center | www.nyc.gov/html/hhc/harlem

Harlem Hospital Center is a 286 bed acute care facility and a designated Level 1 Trauma Center, that provides a wide range of medical, surgical, diagnostic, therapeutic, and family support services to the residents of Central Harlem, West Harlem, Washington Heights and Inwood. It is the largest hospital in Central Harlem, capable of treating the most seriously ill.

EverGreene Architectural Arts | www.evergreene.com

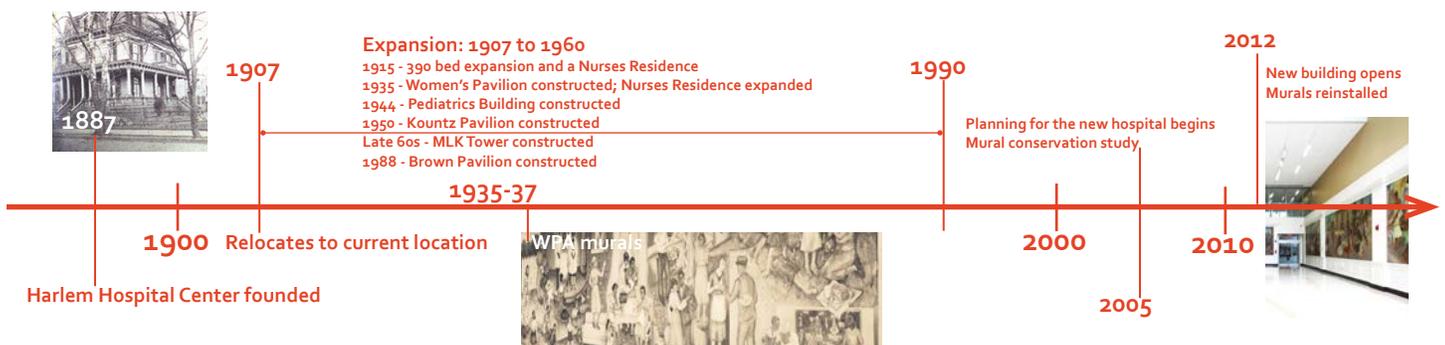
EverGreene Architectural Arts is one of the largest specialty contractors and architectural arts studio in the United States. Established in 1978, our mission and passion is to provide preconstruction and construction services for significant buildings requiring conservation, restoration or new design. We believe that the architectural arts enrich both our buildings and our communities.

HOK | www.hok.com

HOK is a global design, architecture, engineering and planning firm. Since our founding in 1955, we have used design to enrich people's lives and help organizations succeed. Our 1,600 people collaborate across a network of 24 offices on three continents. Our mission is to deliver exceptional design ideas and solutions for our clients through the creative blending of human need, environmental stewardship, value creation, science and art.

TDX | www.tdxconstruction.com

Established in 1980, TDX Construction Corporation specializes in the management of complex construction projects for public and private institutions. TDX has earned a reputation as a high quality, competitive firm that completes projects on time and within budget. The firm offers a full range of pre-construction and construction management services.





PLANNING FOR A NEW CENTURY

PLANNING & DESIGNING A MODERN COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

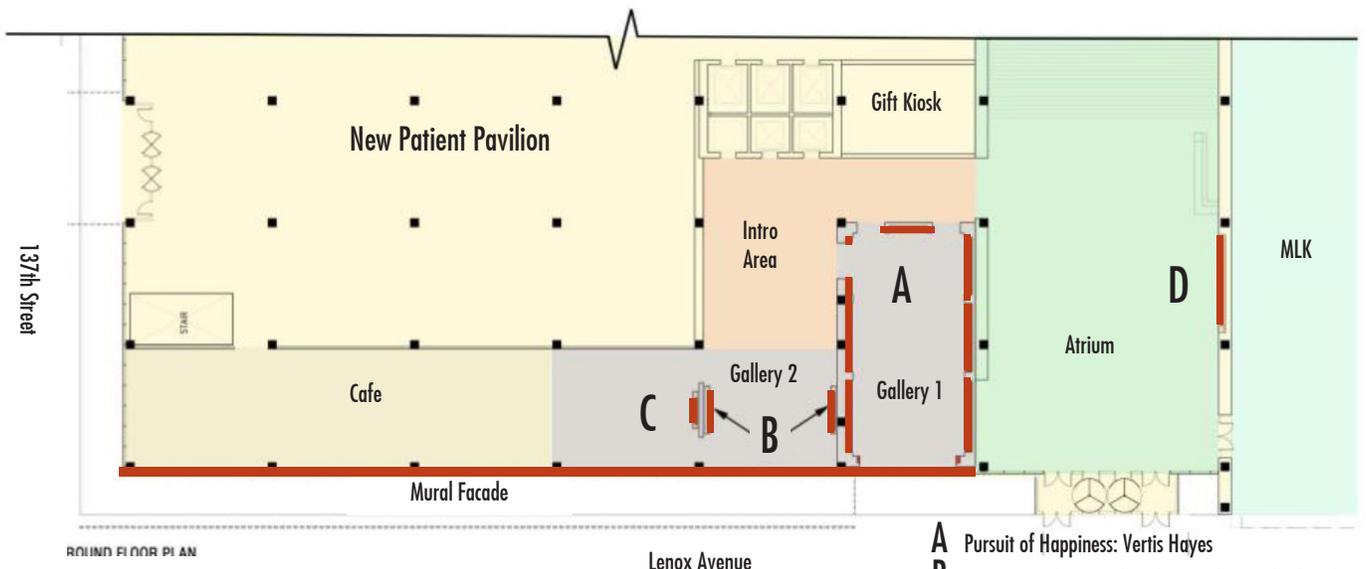
The restored Works Progress Administration (WPA) murals have emerged as symbols for the hospital and the community.

Functional obsolescence in the rapidly-changing technology of health care delivery has long been a threat to historic hospital buildings. As hospitals grow, and new facilities supercede the old, the future of public art in these spaces becomes a challenge. There are isolated examples in the U.S. of salvage and relocations of mosaics and murals from obsolete health care facilities.

Several early Harlem Hospital buildings, where the murals were originally installed, were marked for demolition as part of the hospital's master plan. The NYC Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC), the New York City Public Design Commission, and a community advisory group knew that the

murals in these buildings were significant. In the 1930s at that time of their creation, the murals had been steeped in controversy. Over the years as hospital functions evolved, they had become largely inaccessible. Influenced by the community advisory group, the 12,000 sq ft glass facade and atrium gallery became the centerpiece of the Medical Services Pavilion designed by HOK. EverGreene's conservation study brought new understanding of how these murals could be saved.

The Harlem Hospital Murals Pavilion boldly brings to public attention an important group of WPA murals by African-American artists, and the opportunity for fresh appreciation of their inspiring vision for generations to come.



Ground Floor Plan

- A** Pursuit of Happiness: Vertis Hayes
- B** Magic in Medicine and Modern Medicine: Charles Alston
- C** Modern Surgery and Anesthesia: Alfred Crimi
- D** Recreation in Harlem: Georgette Seabrooke

RECREATION IN HARLEM

Georgette Seabrooke | 1937

"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.

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

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.







PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Vertis Hayes | 1937



The murals were originally painted in a narrow hallway in the first floor New Nurses Residence. The work chronologically follows an arc of African American history moving from an ancestral village to an American city, and explores the transformation that occurs.

Four of the panels had been painted directly onto plaster and four had been painted on canvas. EverGreene conservators surveyed the murals, noted condition issues such as flaking paint and delamination of canvas from the substrate, and tested the plaster panels for stability. A system was developed with the design team for integrating the murals with the original architectural elements in a new gallery.

Canvas Panels

The canvas panels were protected with facing material to prevent more damage from occurring during removal. They were rolled onto large tubes, then unrolled and mounted on lightweight aluminum panels, which were strong and light enough to transport easily. Once on the panels, the paint was further stabilized and areas of loss were inpainted.

Plaster Panels

Removing the plaster panels was more complicated. After stabilizing and protecting the panels, a grid of steel channels was installed into the terracotta block substrate, to prevent any unwanted movement that might cause damage. Each panel was cut from the wall and lowered using a hydraulic lift system onto its own custom designed steel chassis for transport and storage.

Once the new hospital annex was built, EverGreene, in coordination with the construction manager TDX, returned to complete the mural installation. The steel transportation carts were designed for both storage and seamless re-installation. The panels were hoisted into place, and bolted to support beams.

Once in place, gallery walls around the murals were constructed, architectural details – plaster moldings, wood wainscot that matched the original, and faux marble baseboards – were fabricated and installed. Some of the moldings, such as the arch above the passage way, were salvaged from the original location, and restored for placement in the new gallery.



MAGIC IN MEDICINE & MODERN MEDICINE

Charles Alston | 1940

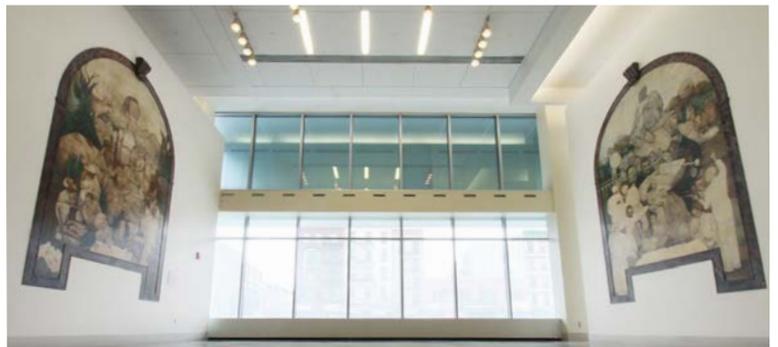
Charles Alston's two murals, *Magic and Medicine* and *Modern Medicine*, juxtapose traditional and modern healing practices in Africa and the United States. Originally installed facing each other, the new gallery design recalls the original spatial relationship.

Each mural was originally designed to fit around a large radiator. Rising heat and steam caused the canvas to become brittle and warp, and damaged the oil paint on the surface.

The entire surface of the canvas was covered with removable facing paper to prevent additional paint from flaking off the canvas. To remove the murals, a large roller was suspended from the ceiling by pulleys, allowing the conservators to slowly remove and roll the canvas onto a transportable tube. Because the canvas was in such delicate condition, removal took quite a long time; sometimes it took an entire day to remove only several inches of canvas.

Once fully removed, the rear of the canvas was patched and stabilized with adhesive, and the front was inpainted where areas of loss had occurred. The murals were mounted onto strong, but lightweight aluminum honeycomb panels to provide support to the fragile canvas. The murals were crated and moved to a climate-controlled storage facility. The murals were installed flush with the wall onto a sturdy plywood framing system. The aluminum honeycomb panel with attached mural was mounted to the backing.

The edges were finished with salvaged plaster corbels and a faux-marble painted border that replicates the molding from the murals' original locations.







MODERN SURGERY AND ANESTHESIA

Alfred Crimi | 1937



Alfred Crimi's *Modern Surgery and Anesthesia* is the only fresco in the Harlem Hospital Center. Crimi, an accomplished fresco artist trained in Italy, was the only non-African American commissioned for the project. A fresco is a challenging technique in which watercolor is applied rapidly to wet lime plaster. As it dries, the colors become fixed in the plaster. *Modern Surgery and Anesthesia* was created in an alcove in the former physician's dining room.

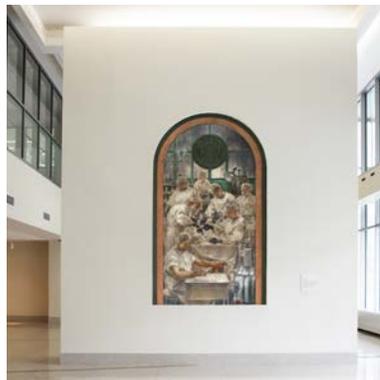
The initial conservation study revealed paint loss, cracks in the plaster, unstable substrate, and discolored areas. Prior to relocation, conservators applied a thick coat of a wax-like substance that—once dry—evaporates directly from a solid to a gas when exposed to oxygen. The mural was then wrapped in plastic to preserve the coating during transportation and storage.

The location of the mural in the previous building posed new challenges for its removal. To remove the mural, conservators constructed a steel support system in a very narrow air-shaft behind the mural. Once the steel structure was in place, and securely attached to the rear of the fresco, the mural was cut free, lowered, and rolled out of the building through an opening cut out of the wall.

A team of art movers, using a forklift and a crane, extracted the heavy mural from the building, and the fresco was taken to a climate-controlled storage facility, where it was stored horizontally for stability. By a process known as consolidation, adhesive was injected into the cracks to stabilize fragile substrate and edges.

Once in place, the plastic wrap was removed and the protective coating was able to sublimate naturally without disturbing the face of the mural. The custom built steel support installed on the reverse of the mural was hoisted from the ground to the concealed support beams and cranked into place with locking jacks. The wall was then built flush around the fresco.

Finally, inpainting was performed in areas where the paint was abraded or completely lost.



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

More than 5,000 jobs for artists and 225,000 works of art were created during of the WPA. Here are the artists who created the Harlem Hospital murals.



CHARLES ALSTON (1907-1977) was the supervisor of the Harlem Hospital Center murals, leading a staff of 35 artists and assistants and becoming the first African American project supervisor of the Federal Art Project. Alston was also the first African American to teach at both the Museum of Modern Art and the Art Students League.

"Magic in Medicine" and "Modern Medicine" by Charles Alston, 1939. Originally installed in the Women's Pavilion lobby. The canvas is adhered to plaster substrate, each 12' (h) x 9' (w), lunettes.



ALFRED CRIMI (1900-94) was born in eastern Sicily and moved to New York in 1910. He attended public school in East Harlem's Little Italy, and, in 1929, studied fresco painting in Rome. He was one of the most experienced artists in the mural division when he was hired by the WPA for the Harlem Hospital murals project.

"Preventive Medicine and Surgery" by Alfred Crimi, 1936. Originally installed in the Women's Pavilion, first floor. Fresco secco on cement-bound plaster, 10' (h) x 5'9" (w), lunette.



VERTIS HAYES (1911-2000) was born in Atlanta and moved to New York City in the early 1930s to study art. By age 25 he became a master artist on the Harlem Hospital Center murals and he had already worked for the WPA as an assistant on the lobby of a high-school building that is now part of the Parsons School of Design. He was one of the only members of the hospital team who had experience as a muralist rather than as an easel painter.

"The Pursuit of Happiness" by Vertis Hayes, 1937. Originally installed in the New Nurses Residence first-floor corridor. Four panels are oil on canvas adhered to plaster substrate and four panels are oil on plaster.



GEORGETTE SEABROOKE (1916-2011) was born in Charleston, SC and lived in New York City. She was an award-winning art student at the Cooper Union when she received the commission to be the youngest master artist on the Harlem Hospital mural project. After completing that project, she created a mural at Queens General Hospital for the WPA. She was a lifelong artist, art therapist, and educator, she has won numerous art and service awards. Her work has been exhibited at several museums and galleries.

"Recreation in Harlem" by Georgette Seabrooke, 1936-37. Originally installed in the Nurses Recreation Room. Oil on plaster substrate, 5'6" (h) x 19'5" (w).

