



ARTS COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION 20241216-009

Date: December 16, 2024

Subject: Recommendation to Council to take necessary steps and provide adequate funding to preserve the works of public art currently installed in the building prior to the Convention Center's demolition

Motioned By: Commissioner Schmalbach

Seconded By: Commissioner Maldonado

Recommendation

The arts commission recommends that the Austin City Council directs the Convention Center to take necessary steps and provide adequate funding to preserve the works of public art currently installed in the building prior to the Convention Center's demolition.

Description of Recommendation to Council

The Austin Art in Public Places deaccessioning jury recommended removal of four public works currently installed at the Austin Convention Center due to the Center's impending demolition. The pieces in question are in good condition but are integrated into the architecture of the building, therefore their removal requires specialty art handling and equipment. AIPP staff gathered deinstallation quotes from three local art handling companies; the estimated total cost for removal of three of the four pieces is between approximately \$80-100K.

One piece, a mosaic mural titled "Riffs and Rhythms" by the artist John Yancey received no bids due to challenges removing it without damage. However, it is possible to cut out the portion of the wall that currently holds the mural, ensuring its preservation. The artist wrote in an email to AIPP staff and commissioners: *This mosaic is attached/adhered directly to the wall with concrete and supporting structure, and, for this reason, the methods, equipment and logistics required to de-install it should be more effectively addressed as a direct contingency of the demolition process, rather than a traditional public art de-installation.*

The arts commission recommends this option should be fully explored before any final decision is made regarding its destruction. The contingency budget for the Convention Center demolition and construction or the Convention Center's reserve funds would be appropriate potential sources of funding for this removal.

Rationale

- Artworks should not be subject to destruction solely for the expediency of development. This sets a dangerous precedent that disregards cultural preservation. The City of Austin should lead by example to ensure that these works of permanent public art and preserved.
- The stewardship and preservation of public works of art is an important civic function and responsibility. Conversely, it is irresponsible to allow them to be destroyed for convenience.

Vote

For: 8 (Celina Zisman, Heidi Schmalbach, Felipe Garza, Gina Houston, Acia Gray, Amy Mok, Nagavalli Medicharla, Monica Maldonado)

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

Absent: 2 (Faiza Kracheni, Keyheira Keys)

Attest: Jesus Varela


