



Conservation Strategies

Art  
Architecture  
Archaeology

July 27, 2021

Tara Thompson, Arts & Culture Manager  
Planning & Economic Development  
City of Santa Rosa  
100 Santa Rosa Avenue, Rm. 3  
Santa Rosa, CA 95404

Via Email: TThompson@srcity.org

Re: Casting Ruth Asawa Panels at Old Courtyard Square into Bronze

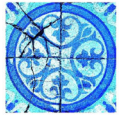
Dear Tara,

I am pleased that the City of Santa Rosa is considering casting into bronze the Ruth Asawa Fountain panels at the Old Courthouse Square. I have been involved in this project since 2016 and conducted archival and materials research of the original panels.

The panels are fabricated from glass fiber reinforced concrete (GFRC) containing an acrylic copolymer with both chopped and woven fiberglass. Other than the fiberglass, there is no internal structural reinforcement or framework. The panels are only about ½" thick with the perimeter edges and a few thicker GFRC runs across the back that are about 2" x 4" wide. The panels were cast into molds with a first layer of unreinforced GFRC about 1/8" thick, followed by pours of the chopped glass fiber GFRC mixture. This means that the most significant top artistic detail layer is unreinforced and susceptible to wear and delamination.

Indeed, over the 34 years since the original panels were installed in 1987, they have suffered from exposure to the sun and weather and show wear, pitting, and loss of surfaces, exposure of the underlying woven fiberglass, micro fissure cracking from expansion and contraction of the material from daily fluctuations in temperature, and staining that is difficult to impossible to remove. If left in an outdoor environment, the panels will only continue to degrade and loose even more of the original artist's details on the surface. In addition, people sitting or climbing on the edge of the fountain, skateboarders, dogs urinating, etc. will only further contribute to more rapid deterioration of the GFRC panels.

In my discussions with the fabricator, contractor and family regarding the original fabrication, it became evident that the original intended material for the artwork was bronze; however, at the time, it was decided that bronze would be too expensive. Bronze is a much longer enduring material outdoors and maintenance of the bronze is fairly straight forward. Maintenance of the deteriorating GFRC will likely involve paint coatings that will not provide the same colors or textures as the currently uncoated GFRC.



Conservation Strategies

Art  
Architecture  
Archaeology

If the GFRC panels are reinstalled outdoors, there is a very high risk of further loss of detail, even with expensive ongoing conservation. Casting the panels into bronze is a very pragmatic solution that will preserve as much of the remaining original artistic detail as possible.

Kind Regards,

Principal Conservator  
Conservation Strategies  
Art Architecture Archaeology