

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

We Represent

**Evolving Public Art at the Saint Paul
City Hall – Ramsey County Courthouse**

KRISTINA YOUSO, PAGE 20



Take a Hike

**A CENTURY OF WALKS
WITH THE ST. PAUL HIKING CLUB**

BOB THOLKES, WITH MEREDITH CUMMINGS, PAGE 1

By the Numbers . . .

Minnesotans like to get outdoors and hike. They do today, and they did more than a century ago, as well. And why not? Hiking is fun, healthy, and opportunities abound at parks of all sizes in St. Paul, Ramsey County, and across the state. Check out these impressive statistics:

Number of parks in St. Paul:
179

Approximate acres of parkland in St. Paul:
5,000

Percentage of St. Paul residents within a ten-minute walk to a park:
99

Number of parks in Ramsey County (county/regional parks and regional trail corridors only):
20

Number of state parks and recreation areas in Minnesota:
75

Average number of visitors to Minnesota State Parks each year:
9,700,000

To learn more about a local hiking club that's covered thousands of miles over ten decades, see the article "Take a Hike: A Century of Walks with the St. Paul Hiking Club" on page 1.

SOURCES:

<https://www.saintpaulparksconservancy.org/>;
<https://www.ramseycounty.us/residents/parks-recreation/parks-trails/find-park>; and
https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/faq/mnfacts/state_parks.html.

ON THE COVER



Minnesotans are hardy people, and snow wasn't about to stop members of the St. Paul Municipal Hiking Club as they set out one chilly winter day in 1930. *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*

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Message from the Editorial Board

Sometimes when we look closely, history helps us see the land and its people from different perspectives. In this issue, Bob Tholkes and Meredith Cummings share the history of the St. Paul Hiking Club. The dedicated members of this organization have been trekking around St. Paul, Ramsey County, and parts of Minnesota for one hundred years, exploring parks and neighborhoods from the ground up. Harriette Peterson Koopman and her daughter Connie Pettersen share vivid memories of Koopman's childhood, growing up in a large family on St. Paul's West Side Flats during the Depression. The children had exciting and sometimes harrowing close-up adventures on and around the great Mississippi River. One day, they even met a group practicing target shooting—possibly some of the infamous gangsters who sometimes hid in the city at that time! Kristina Youso fills us in on a much more recent change in perspective—the installation of new murals in the council chambers of the Saint Paul City Hall – Ramsey County Courthouse. This artwork better reflects the diverse heritage of the groups who have contributed to our city and county. And finally, bowing to the reality of the current pandemic, but also taking advantage of new technology, Jeremy Nienow tells us how to embark on virtual visits to local historic sites without leaving the comfort of our living rooms.

Anne Cowie
Chair, Editorial Board

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Evolving Public Art at the Saint Paul City Hall – Ramsey County Courthouse

KRISTINA YOUSO

“**R**amsey County Board and City Council Chambers has a new look,” announced Toni Carter, Ramsey County Commissioner for District 4 and board chair. “This beautiful, new collaborative artwork [comes from a] community-engaged effort to transform this space into one that more broadly represents our community and more inclusively reflects our past and present and also our hopes for our future together.”¹

Carter spoke at the board’s August meeting shortly after a public unveiling of four new murals by a diverse group of Minnesota artists, commissioned to represent a more accurate and comprehensive image of the history and people of Ramsey County. This artwork will, for now, cover, but not replace nor eliminate, four large, vertical paintings that were prominently displayed in Room 300 at the Saint Paul City Hall – Ramsey County Courthouse Council Chambers from the mid-1930s until this past August.

The elegant wood-paneled space functions as the formal meeting place of the Saint Paul City Council and the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners. The original murals, created by esteemed American painter John Norton, also were meant to depict the history, people, and progress of the City of Saint Paul ninety years ago.



This painting by Adam Swanson is one of four new works of public art that made its debut at the Saint Paul City Hall – Ramsey County Courthouse on August 19, 2020. For detailed information about this and the three other artworks, see pages 24-26. *Courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society.*

In each Norton mural, large white male figures—a voyager, a steamboat pilot, a surveyor, and a railroad signalman—tower over smaller scenes. In two vignettes toward the bottom of the paintings, Indigenous people are portrayed as subservient and rendered in a generic way, rather than belonging to specific communities. In others, African Americans are represented in servile roles. Only two paintings include female figures—both in the background, barely noticeable. An overall message of white male hierarchy is explicit.

At county board meetings in the late 1980s, Commissioner Ruby Hunt spoke up about the Norton artwork, which had bothered her and some others for years.² Were these paintings truly representative of our citizens? What about significant contributions made by people of color and women? What were the paintings communicating about the city and county’s history and values?

At that time, Hunt was chairwoman of a committee to oversee the renovation of the city hall-courthouse. She advocated to keep the old artwork but pushed to add new, more representative art, as well.³ In the end, the renovations moved forward. Finding a solution to the murals that appeared to celebrate and privilege the white male role in history did not. It would take a future generation to address the complicated issues behind this public art, including addressing arguments about heritage versus history, correcting history, and working to eliminate racism and bias.

John Norton: Artist of Public Works

To better understand the original public art in the council chambers, it is useful to briefly examine Norton’s life and career and the themes and artistic style of the new Saint Paul City

Hall – Ramsey County Courthouse, which was being built at that time.

Born in Lockport, Illinois, John Warner Norton (1876-1934) studied at the Art Institute of Chicago⁴ at the turn of the century and spent most of his professional life based in the Windy City. He taught at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts and worked as an illustrator before trying his hand at murals, which had become popular, thanks in part, to several large-scale murals on display at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.⁵ Norton eventually became a celebrated muralist himself with works in several major public buildings, including the Logan Museum of Anthropology at Beloit College in Wisconsin (installed in 1925), Chicago's Daily

News Building (1929), and the Chicago Board of Trade Building (1930), among others.⁶

Norton's 16' x 5' murals at the city hall-courthouse, painted in the 1930s toward the end of the artist's life, are historically significant. They are consistent in style, subject matter, and sensibility with his other projects, rendered in Art Deco and Modernist idioms, and concerned with populist and historical subjects. The artist created a general theme celebrating the city's territorial and modern history, with a focus on transportation and progress. While many of his earlier projects date to a time of prosperity, these murals reflect Depression-era America when the country struggled to reemerge from shared economic hardship and loss.⁷



John Norton painted four untitled oil-on-canvas murals, two of which were installed on the east wall and two on the west wall of the council chambers in the Saint Paul City Hall – Ramsey County Courthouse between 1931 and 1933. These include: voyageur and early exploration; steamboat pilot and scenes of transportation and settlement; surveyor and railroad construction; and railroad signalman and the work of the city. *Courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society.*

Norton's surveyor and railroad construction painting, for example, presents an idealized and heroized image of labor. Holding a surveyor's essential tools, a man stands as the central figure, larger than other figures. He is surrounded by scenes relating to railroad construction. Railroads are essential to the history of St. Paul, most notably in the person of James J. Hill and his Great Northern Railway. For decades, the city was a major center of railroad transportation to many points in the American West.

Railroads made mass immigration and settlement of the North American continent possible and involved tremendous human labor. In smaller images set behind and next to the featured figure, men using a horse transport raw materials for construction, and various tools are employed to harvest timber and craft railroad ties. Clearly evident is the sheer physical strain of the manpower required to lift and place metal track. In this male domain, laborers are resolute, in good health, and physically powerful.

The surveyor overseeing the scene meets the viewer's gaze with apparent confidence. The wheel-like form visible at the side of his surveying instrument is echoed by the orange circular shape behind him, representing a stylized locomotive. The design and geometry converge to create the effect of an almost-halo.

The landscape is abstracted and decorative, with overlapping pastel forms alluding to forest, hills, greenery, and prairie. The gentle softness of the lands belies the sheer physical hardship of the enterprise but conveys a sense of beauty in human endeavor.

Norton expressed his thoughts about the art in a personal letter to one of the architects working on the building project, "I want them to be a sort of glorification of the ordinary guy that packed the canoes on the old portage, stacked the grain, drove the spikes and mixed the concrete."⁸

The paintings can be understood as a statement about the value of labor and working people, consistent with the sensibility of many Works Progress Administration (WPA)-era projects that were helping the unemployed get back on their feet. For centuries, art in the Western canon had emphasized religious themes and promoted aristocracy, power, and wealth. In the 1930s, the idealization of the working class

was itself radical and linked to international labor movements. Labor unrest was widespread throughout the country in the 1930s, and in the Twin Cities, it involved workers from many industries and sectors. Here, Norton presents his working-class subjects as worthy of admiration and evidence of historical progress, despite the fact that his work expresses the bias, limited historical viewpoints, and racism of his time.⁹ A contemporary muralist who championed labor issues is Diego M. Rivera, whose subjects were notably more diverse.¹⁰

The Norton paintings, characterized by dramatic vertical lines and a majestic, soaring sense of space, deftly integrate with the Art Deco aesthetics inside the monumental city hall-courthouse. Holabird & Root of Chicago, in partnership with local architectural firm Thomas Ellerbe & Co.,¹¹ designed the building with an elegance conveying progressive ideals and a futuristic vision of a modern and industrialized society. In a style blending Zig-zag Moderne and American Perpendicular, the major interior common spaces in this building express an exuberance, ambition, loftiness, and investment in luxury materials not often found in Minnesota buildings of the era.¹²

2017–2020: Moving Forward

Beginning in 2017, discussion of Norton's artwork returned to the fore, bringing some of the same questions former Commissioner Hunt and others asked previously. How has our public art represented us? Who is included and excluded? Who is in power? What messages are conveyed?

Many at leadership and community levels recognized the historic nature of the Saint Paul City Hall – Ramsey County Courthouse, its Norton paintings, and the value in their preservation. Some felt that preserving history was paramount and nothing should change. Others suggested simply covering the works, except for tours or educational purposes. Still others, uncomfortable or incensed by the racism and sexism in the images, pushed for the removal of the art completely.

According to City Council President Amy Brendmoen, over the years many people have expressed that they found the paintings inappropriate and unsettling when called to testify in chambers.¹³ As a woman working in that

To learn more about John Norton and his works on the Ramsey County Historical Society website, go to https://www.rchs.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Norton-History_2020.pdf.

setting, she did too. And while some might argue that Norton may have been well intentioned in the 1930s, Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS) President Chad Roberts pointed out, “Intention is important, but it is not enough to have good intentions.”¹⁴ The messages conveyed by major artworks in significant public spaces matter.

At an early 2019 meeting regarding the murals, a Dakota elder spoke up against the perpetuation of racism, “. . . we are talking about changing the narrative.” Another man, a descendent of a formerly enslaved person, also favored removing the art.¹⁵ Indeed the council chambers are “a place where people come when they are very vulnerable,” said Brendmoen.¹⁶ These murals don’t help in making some citizens feel represented.

It’s important to note that government officials reflect the increasing diversity of St. Paul. For the past twenty years, the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners has been majority female, and today it is chaired by Commissioner Carter, an African American woman.¹⁷ The current Saint Paul City Council is the first supermajority of female council members in St. Paul history,¹⁸ and its president is a woman. In addition, St. Paul also is currently led by its first African American mayor—Melvin Carter III. After years of inertia, and in light of the increased diversity in Ramsey County and the ongoing debate over the Norton murals, there was a solid consensus that change was needed.

With RCHS Partnership, Task Force Convened

As city and county leaders considered the issues related to the artwork, Ramsey County Commissioners Jim McDonough and Victoria Reinhardt asked the Ramsey County Historical Society to get involved.¹⁹

RCHS President Roberts determined that the best approach would be to involve a group of community members as decision makers. In December 2018, the board approved the creation of a task force to select artists to create new murals. These would be placed over (but not touching) the Norton works, thus preserving the original art in place. As City Councilmember Rebecca Noecker commented, “We are embarking on a process that is not going to destroy

our history—that is impossible to do.” Newly commissioned murals, “will keep our history alive and current and reflective of who St. Paul is today.”²⁰

The task force was assembled through a public process involving recruitment, application, and review of thirty candidates. The group started with eleven members, including two Dakota individuals and members of the Hmong, African American, and Latino communities.²¹

Next step? The search for diverse artists. The process included a call for artists distributed through many channels to arts and cultural organizations, community organizations, and individual artists. Prospects attended tours of the council chambers to view the original murals and the space. The group received twenty-one submissions, interviewed nine people, and selected three artists and one artist collective.²²

Process Decisions and Installation

Logistics were daunting. As noted, the original Norton murals are 16 feet tall. Creating contemporary art of this scale would be extremely expensive. Furthermore, compared to smaller, more typically sized paintings, large-scale works are challenging to install, uninstall, and store. Creative brainstorming identified a solution: the team would commission artworks of the same vertical format of the original murals but at 20 percent scale.

In August, technicians installed the new artwork over the recessed Norton murals. The process took about six hours. *Courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society.*



According to Mollie Spillman, RCHS curator and archivist, “The projected reproductions of the new paintings in the courthouse were produced in an expanded format on a silicone-edged graphic (SEG) material and fitted into frames that were mounted in front of the original [recessed] Nortons. The SEGs are 15'8" high by 4'6" wide. The new originals are different sizes based on options given to the artists using a formula from the printer that allowed them to be reproduced with complete accuracy to their original.”²³

A Time for Celebration: Artists

The artists selected reflect a rich array of backgrounds, artistic styles, and creative interests. The Latinx Muralism Apprenticeship at Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES) based in St. Paul, Adam Swanson of Cloquet, Leah Yellowbird of Grand Rapids, and Emily Donovan, also from St. Paul, responded to the themes of the people, history, and progress of the area and to the chamber space in unique ways.

The Latinx Muralism Apprenticeship at CLUES

In one corner of the room is a welcoming and seemingly joyful image of a woman wearing the garments of a farm worker and standing proudly in a field. Monarch butterfly wings upon her back and a golden orb behind her head might suggest the form of an angelic saint to some viewers. She is held aloft by a “tower” of symbolically significant images—the heart of a nopal cactus is carefully offered up by large, strong, hard-working hands from a supportive, vibrant community that itself extends from currents of fire, water, and life. These swirl skyward from the solid back of a turtle far below.²⁴

This painting continues the key themes of the 1930s Norton panels, honoring working people. In this case, the work was a communal endeavor of multiple artists, including Marina Castillo, Zamara Cuyún, Aaron Johnson-Ortiz, Gustavo Lira, and more than ten others—all part of the first cohort of the collaborative Latinx Muralism Apprenticeship, a group created by the Minnesota-based nonprofit CLUES.²⁵

The artists focused on women to draw attention to the work and heritage of agricultural workers, North American migration, and the long



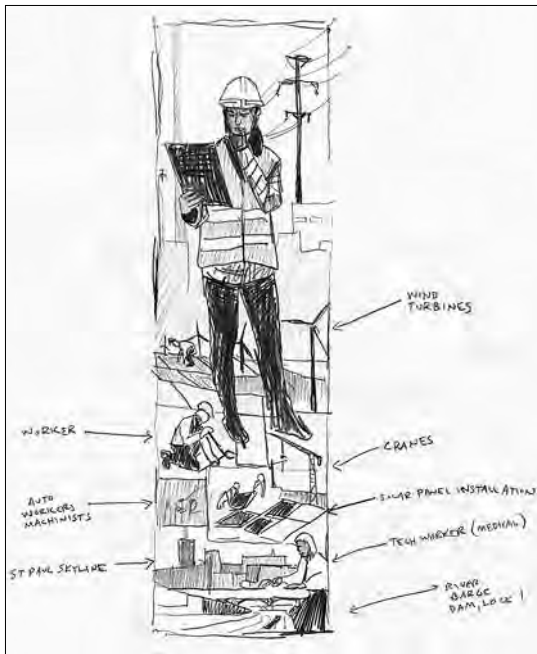
It was important to the CLUES collective to share their ideas and receive feedback from community elders and young women, as this mural is meant to represent and honor the Latinx community at large. *Courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society.*

history (much of which has often been erased or ignored) of Latinx communities in Minnesota.²⁶

Adam Swanson

Adam Swanson’s painting (see image, page 20) references the composition and themes of the original Norton murals while “reinterpreting and connecting with the state’s Native American and environmental activist communities.”²⁷ Representing the contemporary workforce, a woman in a hard hat and a safety vest reviews documents at a work site. Behind her, utility poles and large curvilinear forms recall the train and urban cityscapes in a couple of Norton’s original murals. Swanson illustrates women and men of different races working on twenty-first century clean energy projects. Viewers see wind turbines and the production and installation of

For complete artist statements on the Ramsey County Historical Society website, go to <https://www.rchs.com/news/council-chamber-art-project/>. Scroll to “CHOSEN ARTISTS” section.



Artist and environmental activist Adam Swanson is a member of the Twin Ports Art-Science Collaborative. In his initial sketches, Swanson knew he wanted to “celebrate heroes and friends” who work to secure a sustainable future. *Courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society.*

solar panels. In the lowest register, a medical researcher appears to be analyzing data, with the Mississippi River, bridge, lock, and city skyline cleverly serving as her office workspace. An environmental activist, Swanson purposely “. . . included current industries that will carry Minnesota into a sustainable tomorrow.”²⁸

Leah Yellowbird

Across the room, Leah Yellowbird’s colorful floral design captivates. “Closing the gap between cultures was my goal with this piece,” said Yellowbird, who is of First Nations Algonquin-Metis and Anishinaabe heritage.

The original artworks first placed on these walls were true to the settlers’ daily lives, from the point of view of the original artist [Norton]. I designed my piece from the outlook of an Anishinaabe person who was born and lived in the area during the same time period as these murals. The design is what a Native person would have focused on—the woodlands, where they live and how they live, and what they see and feel comfort in every day.²⁹

The artist, also a beadworker, used bright acrylic paints, including metallic hues, to create the effect of the traditional beadwork found on the original leggings and on many types of Anishinaabe garments, objects, and jewelry. Against a black background, she applied globules of paint to create beautiful organic forms with a lively sense of color and harmonious balance of pigments.³⁰

Emily Donovan

The final piece, *Earth Stewards* by Emily Donovan, is a multimedia landscape celebrating the



Leah Yellowbird’s inspiration came from a pair of vintage Anishinaabe leggings that had been designed and sold at about the same time the Norton murals were installed in the 1930s. *Courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society.*



Emily Donovan’s batik-like presentation of *Earth Stewards* demonstrates that “the once vacant space within our city is now rich with food, color, and togetherness and is a place where we can grow something beautiful.” *Courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society.*

places and traditions of immigrant and Indigenous communities. The artist highlights Ramsey County gardens where community members join and grow food together and experience a shared natural environment. In this terrain of gentle earth colors, figures are gathered in a richly layered and textured space. Gardeners work with one another to plant, water, and tend to the earth, while others enjoy the outdoors. A couple walks toward the horizon holding hands. Birds soar in a dense, cloudy sky.

Donovan employs sources of natural pigment with an emphasis on colors and traditions from local communities. She created the colors by boiling insect and plant materials to make a dye bath, then used a batik-like wax process and overdyeing on paper. Foraged materials include goldenrod for yellow, sumac berries for red, and black walnuts for neutrals, among others. She also references East African henna designs, Hmong embroidery traditions used in story cloths, and Indigenous materials and wild rice harvest practices.³¹

A New Beginning

On August 19, 2020, before a small, masked crowd following COVID-19 safety rules, the new art was unveiled in a public ceremony at the Saint Paul City Hall – Ramsey County Courthouse and online. RCHS President Roberts remarked, “Our purpose for this process . . . is to add new art that

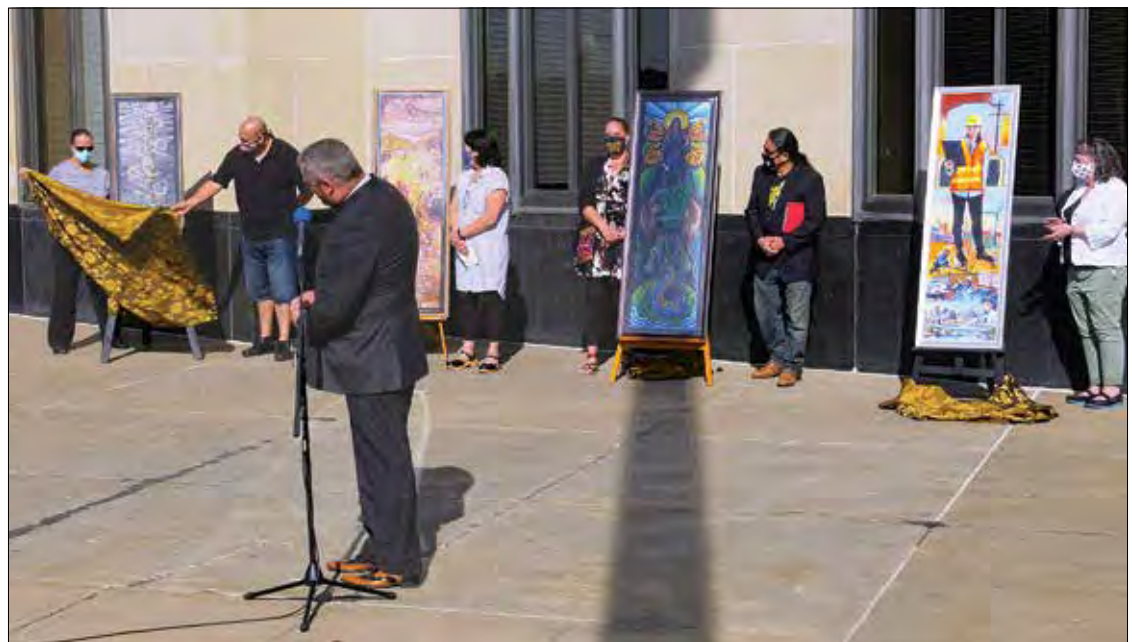
celebrates the people and progress of St. Paul and Ramsey County and to do so in a [manner] that is inclusive of the entire community today in a way that the original murals could not be and are not.”³² The art, seen by most in attendance for the first time, was favorably received. City and county officials and community members involved in the project were enthusiastic and emotionally moved by the results.

Ramsey County Commissioner Jim McDonough was pleased with the outcome and the process, stating, “I was just blown away . . . it changes everything so dramatically.”³³ Saint Paul City Council President Brendmoen found the artwork inspiring, “It’s bright. It’s joyous. It’s feminine. It’s welcoming.”³⁴ Councilmember Noecker, a passionate advocate for more diverse murals, emphasized, “This is not about changing the wallpaper in the council chamber . . . what we are doing here today is we are recognizing that art is powerful. Context is powerful. Whose story we choose to tell and how we choose to tell [it], that matters a ton.”³⁵

More Community Collaboration to Come

The new murals are not the end of the story. As Commissioner Reinhardt said at an August board meeting, “This is not one and done. It is a beginning and a great beginning . . . that goes back many years to Commissioner Ruby Hunt about the need to make changes.”³⁶

Ramsey County Historical Society President Chad Roberts asks that the final original artwork created by Leah Yellowbird be revealed before an audience of about fifty people outside the Saint Paul City Hall – Ramsey County Courthouse. *Courtesy of City of Saint Paul.*



Considering and Reconsidering Public Art

The John Norton murals and the new murals at Saint Paul City Hall – Ramsey County Courthouse are works of public art. But what does that mean, exactly?

Public art is a part of our public history, part of our evolving culture and our collective memory. It reflects and reveals our society and adds meaning to our cities. As artists respond to our times, they reflect their inner vision to the outside world, and they create a chronicle of our public experience.^a

That definition from the Association of Public Art makes sense both for the work Norton created in the 1930s and the work of talented artists in 2020. Public art is meant for all to experience, appreciate, or discuss. Paul Manship's *Indian Hunter and His Dog* (1926) in Cochran Park is public art, as is *The Sacred Dish* (2006) by Duane Goodwin that overlooks the city at Indian Mounds Regional Park. In addition, many public artworks honor veterans. Memorial Hall in the Saint Paul City Hall – Ramsey County Courthouse, with a display of names of the fallen, is one example.

Yet the public is diverse, and not everyone will like or feel comfortable with certain works of art. Public art that engages, challenges, and presents new perspectives can be important conversation starters for better understanding and appreciation of others. What happens, however, when an art installation is extremely hurtful to a group of people as it relates to their history or the history of their ancestors? What about Christopher Columbus statues in the US? Or monuments memorializing Confederate Civil War generals who fought, in part, to continue the practice of enslavement? These examples honor figures or events in our history that have hurt Native Americans and African Americans for generations. In recent decades, it has become more recognized that some public art can traumatize, degrade, or at least prove insensitive to certain communities. What is the path forward?

An example that illustrates people working together to solve a public art issue comes from another artwork at the Saint Paul City Hall – Ramsey County Courthouse. The cherished monument originally named *Indian God of Peace* by sculptor Carl Milles was installed when the building was constructed. It has stood for nearly a century as a statement of pacifism. Over time, some in Minnesota's Native communities were not comfortable with the sculpture's title. In 1994, the work was renamed *Vision of Peace* at a public ceremony attended by many, including members of Native communities who had spoken up.^b This important process of public input and civic leadership resulted in updating artwork to reflect contemporary values.

In San Francisco, recent controversy over murals at George Washington High School recalls issues raised by Norton's murals here. Painted by Victor Arnautoff, *Life of*

Washington includes scenes that reference enslavement, manifest destiny, and genocide.^c On June 25, 2019, the San Francisco Unified School District Board of Education voted to paint over Arnautoff's murals, generating nationwide controversy. By August, the decision was made to preserve the originals and digitize and conceal them under protective covers. Debate and legal challenges continue.^d

In recent years, Norton murals in the Jefferson County Courthouse in Birmingham also generated debate. Depicting the Old and New South, the murals contrast images including enslaved African Americans picking cotton with scenes of industrial laborers, both African American and white, in an Art Deco-style industrial cityscape. In 2015, questions arose about the racist nature of these murals, led by the local NAACP.^e After a process of community collaboration, a new, more inclusive mural by artist Ronald McDowell entitled *Justice Is Blind* was installed alongside Norton's works.^f

Recent conversations about public art followed unrest after George Floyd's killing in Minneapolis in May 2020. Protestors opposed to police brutality and systemic racism targeted Confederate monuments nationwide. By October, approximately sixty monuments had been removed or, in some instances, damaged or destroyed.^g

Activists also confronted imagery related to the genocide of Native peoples. In St. Paul, a Christopher Columbus statue on the Minnesota Capitol grounds was toppled. Although some criticized the action, Governor Tim Walz observed, "This question of symbolism is important."^h Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan, a citizen of the White Earth Nation of Ojibwe and the highest-level elected official of Native ancestry in Minnesota history, stated, "Tonight, I'm thinking of all the Native children who might now feel more welcome on the grounds and in the halls of their state government."ⁱ

Opinions, concerns, and controversies over public art are not new. There will be opinions always—both positive and negative—about this art. Some dialogue will be heated and could, as we have seen, lead to destruction. To preserve controversial artworks, steps could and should be taken. Some historic works may be moved to private institutions. Others may be renamed as an agreed-upon compromise, while still others may remain in place or have new art installed next to them to encourage continued discussion. As Chad Roberts, president of the Ramsey County Historical Society, stated at an early mural meeting in 2018, "Changing these murals [or toppling or removing statues] won't end racism or inequity. Conversations will."^j As we move forward as a community that appreciates and benefits from public art, it's important to respect the views of the public, listen, learn, challenge each other, and work together to find solutions.

NOTE: To learn more about the national debate on public art on the Ramsey County Historical Society website, go to <https://www.rchs.com/news/council-chamber-art-project/>. Scroll to end.

Artist recruitment and community involvement will continue, and additional artworks will be commissioned that may be displayed throughout the building and in other locations. In fact, RCHS is working with the city council and the county board to assemble a standing public art committee that will meet regularly to “ensure diverse community voices and perspectives are presented in public spaces owned and/or operated by Ramsey County and/or the City of Saint Paul.”³⁷

The future process will be fluid and allow representative artwork to be rotated, displayed, and enjoyed. Notes Commissioner McDonough, this ongoing effort is “a living opportunity . . . to reflect our community in so many ways.”³⁸

Rather than a space with fixed imagery, the chambers [and other locations] will be “more like a gallery”³⁹ of rotating artworks that will invite dialogue, examine history, serve the common good, and provide beauty and inspiration.

In the words of former Commissioner Hunt, a great admirer of the Saint Paul City Hall – Ramsey County Courthouse, “even an old building has to be open to change . . . has to reflect the people, and has to be built for posterity.”⁴⁰

Kristina Youso, PhD, is an art historian, editor, and writer based in St. Paul. She recently worked as a historical interpreter at the Ramsey County Historical Society's Gibbs Farm.

NOTES

1. Toni Carter, comments at Ramsey County Board of Commissioners meeting, August 25, 2020.

2. Hunt also worked as a member of the Saint Paul City Council from 1972-1982. She served as a county commissioner from 1983-1995.

3. Paul Gustafson, “Panel wants St. Paul murals to have room for everybody,” *Star Tribune*, March 10, 1989, 25. According to Hunt, “We have had women and minority groups point out that the murals don’t reflect the contributions of all society.”

4. Known today as the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC).

5. “John Warner Norton,” Illinois Historical Art Project, accessed December 28, 2020, <https://www.illinoisart.org/john-warner-norton>.

6. “John Warner Norton,” Illinois Historical Art Project; Manuel Ferreira with Logan Museum of Anthropology, email correspondence with editor, January 4, 2021.

7. Paul D. Nelson, “Courthouse Sculptor Lee Lawrie,” *Ramsey County History* 43, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 1, 6. Relief sculpture and other details throughout the building celebrate working people.

8. John Norton, letter to Thomas Ellerbe, May 10, 1932, in Garrett Norton Collection, cited by James L. Zimmer, Illinois Historical Art Project, <https://www.illinoisart.org/john-warner-norton>.

9. “John Warner Norton,” Illinois Historical Art Project. Despite limited or/and biased views, Norton was progressive by the standards of the era. He admired Indigenous cultures, had a lifelong interest in the Southwest, and was an esteemed art instructor who promoted modernism and internationalism.

10. Kelly Richman-Abdou, “How Diego Rivera Shaped Mexican Muralism, a 50-Year Movement Sparked by the Revolution,” *My Modern Met*, accessed January 1, 2021, <https://mymodernmet.com/diego-rivera-murals/>. Rivera, unlike Norton, included many more diverse im-

ages in most of his works, including in Rivera Hall at the Detroit Institute of Arts. Like Norton, however, some of his work met with resistance. A piece planned to debut in Rockefeller Plaza was scrapped because of Rivera’s pro-leftist leanings.

11. Today, the 111-year-old company is known as Ellerbe Becket.

12. Dane Smith, “The City Hall-County Courthouse And Its First Fifty Years,” *Ramsey County History* 17, no. 1 (1981): 14-16.

13. Amy Brendmoen, interview with author, October 26, 2020.

14. Chad Roberts, interview with author, October 1, 2020.

15. Scott Russell, “Change is coming to racist murals in Saint Paul City Hall,” *The Circle News*, February 5, 2019, 1.

16. Amy Brendmoen, interview.

17. Jim McDonough, interview with author, October 19, 2020.

18. Rebecca Noecker, interview with author, October 15, 2020.

19. Victoria Reinhardt, interview with author, November 5, 2020.

20. Emma Nelson, “St. Paul to Update City Hall Murals,” *Star Tribune*, December 20, 2018, B1-2; Roberts, interview. A first issue addressed was the preservation of the Norton murals themselves. The city hall-courthouse is on the National Register of Historic Places. The murals, significant in artistic quality and representing a major regional artist, continue to present value to people in the community. It was decided that the murals would not be destroyed nor would they be removed for the foreseeable future.

21. Task force membership changed over time. Some members dropped off for various reasons. The task force at the August unveiling included Marilyn Burnett; Tomas Leal; Betsy Mowry Voss; Olivia Mulvey Morawiecki; Bob

Parker; Chad Roberts, Chair; Colleen Sheehy; and Elsa Vega Perez. Additional input came from Christopher Atkins, Julio Fesser, Chai Lee, Oskar Ly, John Poupart, Robyne Robinson, and Rory Wakemup.

22. Chad Roberts, comments at Council Chamber Artwork Presentation, Saint Paul City Hall – Ramsey County Courthouse, August 19, 2020. Recording of event at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQkQTUHodLw>.

23. Mollie Spillman, email correspondence with editor, December 29, 2020.

24. The Latinx Muralism Apprenticeship at CLUES, artist statement, RCHS website, <https://www.rchs.com/news/council-chamber-art-project/>.

25. “About CLUES,” Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio website, accessed December 29, 2020, <https://clues.org/about/>. Founded in 1981, this Latino-led non-profit works toward the continued advancement of social and economic equity and well-being for Minnesota Latinos.

26. The Latinx Muralism Apprenticeship at CLUES, artist statement.

27. Adam Swanson, artist statement, RCHS website, <https://www.rchs.com/news/council-chamber-art-project/>.

28. Swanson, artist statement.

29. Leah Yellowbird, artist statement, RCHS website, <https://www.rchs.com/news/council-chamber-art-project/>.

30. Edna J. Garte, “Living Tradition in Ojibwa Beadwork and Quillwork,” University of Minnesota, Duluth, 1985, 13, accessed December 30, 2020, <https://ojs.library.carleton.ca/index.php/ALGQP/article/view/891/777>. The use of velvet as a background material for beaded garments and bags was common, beginning in the later nineteenth century.

31. Emily Donovan, artist statement, RCHS website, <https://www.rchs.com/news/council-chamber-art-project/>. See extensive list of natural materials used for pigments.

32. Roberts, comments. Roberts added, “We have ensured that the original Norton murals are well-preserved and safe, but they will not be on display for a while.”

33. McDonough, interview.

34. Amy Brendmoen, comments at Council Chamber Artwork Presentation.

35. Rebecca Noecker, comments at Council Chamber Artwork Presentation.

36. Victoria Reinhardt, comments at Ramsey County Board of Commissioners meeting, August 25, 2020.

37. Roberts, interview. One specific goal is to commission work by Dakota artists, vetted by Dakota community members and leadership.

38. McDonough, interview.

39. Brendmoen, interview.

40. Hunt, interview.

Notes to Sidebar on p. 27

a. “What is public art?” Association for Public Art, adapted from Penny Balkin Bach in *Public Art in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

b. “Vision of Peace,” City of Saint Paul, accessed January 20, 2021, <https://www.stpaul.gov/government/city-hall>.

c. Robin D. G. Kelley, “Don’t look now! These murals have been called degrading and triggering. Defenders say they’re an exposé of America’s racist past. Both sides miss the point,” *The Nation*, September 23, 2019, 15. Arnautoff seemed to intend the subject matter of his paintings to be understood critically, “The artist is a critic of society . . . I wish to deal with people, to explain to them things and ideas they might not have seen or understood.” His murals were problematic to students and the source of debate beginning in the late 1960s, yet the nuances of their meanings did not go unremarked. Rather than demanding their removal or destruction, students advocated for additional murals to be painted by a Black artist, Dewey Crumpler. His *Multi-Ethnic Heritage* included images of Civil Rights leaders and histories of African American, Latino, Asian American, and Indigenous people.

d. Kelley, 14, 17. The cost for this destruction would have been \$600,000; Carol Pogash, “San Francisco School Board Votes to Hide, but Not Destroy, Disputed Murals,” *The New York Times*, accessed January 20, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/14/arts/san-francisco-murals-george-washington.html>.

e. Sarah Sascone, “Controversy Rages Over Allegedly Racist Alabama Courthouse Murals,” ArtNet, October 7, 2015, accessed January 20, 2021, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/controversy-allegedly-racist-alabama-courthouse-murals-338268>.

f. Ariel Worthy, “Jefferson County adds ‘inclusive’ mural to downtown courthouse,” *Birmingham Times*, April 24, 2018, accessed January 7, 2021, <https://www.birminghamtimes.com/2018/04/jefferson-county-adds-inclusive-mural-to-downtown-courthouse/>.

g. Alisha Ebrahimji, Artemis Moshtaghian, and Lauren M. Johnson, “Confederate statues are coming down following George Floyd’s death,” *CNN*, July 1, 2020, accessed October 1, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/09/us/confederate-statues-removed-george-floyd-trnd/index.html>.

h. Kristi Belcamino, “Protestors tear down Christopher Columbus statue on Minnesota Capitol grounds,” *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 10, 2020, accessed October 1, 2020, <https://www.twincities.com/2020/06/10/protesters-tear-down-christopher-columbus-statue-on-minnesota-capitol-grounds/>.

i. Belcamino.

j. Scott Russell, “Change is coming to racist murals in Saint Paul City Hall,” *The Circle News*, February 5, 2019, 1. To learn more about the national debate on public art go to <https://www.rchs.com/news/council-chamber-art-project/> and scroll to the end.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future.

The Ramsey County Historical Society's vision is to innovate, lead, and partner in preserving the knowledge of our community, delivering inspiring history programming, and incorporating local history in education. Our mission of *preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future* guides this vision.

The Society began in 1949 when a group of citizens preserved the Jane and Heman Gibbs Farm in Falcon Heights, which the family acquired in 1849. The original programs at Gibbs Farm (listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974) focused on telling the story of the Gibbs family. In 2000, with the assistance of a Dakota Advisory Council, the site also began interpreting Dakota culture and lifeways. RCHS built additional structures and dedicated outdoor spaces to tell the stories of the remarkable relationship between Jane Gibbs and the Dakota people of Heyate Otunwe (Cloud Man's Village).

In 1964, the Society began publishing its award-winning magazine, *Ramsey County History*. In 1978, the organization moved its library, archives, and administrative offices to St. Paul's Landmark Center, a restored Federal Courts building on the National Register of Historic Places. An expansion of the Research Center was completed in 2010 to allow greater access to the Society's collection of historical archives and artifacts. In 2016, the Research Center was rededicated as the Mary Livingston Griggs & Mary Griggs Burke Research Center.

RCHS offers a variety of public programming for youth and adults. Visit www.rchs.com for details of upcoming History Revealed programs, summer camps, courthouse and depot tours, and more. RCHS serves 15,000 students annually on field trips or through outreach programs in schools that introduce the Gibbs family and the Dakota people of Heyate Otunwe. These programs are made possible by donors, members, corporations, and foundations, all of whom we appreciate deeply. If you are not yet a member of RCHS, please join today and help bring history to life for more than 50,000 people every year.

Equity & Inclusion Statement

History informs us, inspires new choices, brings people together, and builds community. Likewise, it can be misused to inspire fear, create division, and perpetuate racism and other injustices. We resolve to present history in accordance with our values of Authenticity, Innovation, Inspiration, Integrity, and Respect. We believe that by doing so, our community will be more informed, more engaged, and will become stronger.

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Growing Up Along the Mighty Mississippi

The Great Depression Through the Eyes of a Young “River Rat”

HARRIETTE PETERSON KOOPMAN, WITH CONNIE KOOPMAN PETTERSEN, PAGE 10



During the Great Depression, Harriette Peterson and several of her siblings lived with their parents in a tar-paper shack along the Mississippi River in St. Paul's West Side Flats. The children grew up with fond memories of wonder and adventure, despite the lean times and hardship.
Courtesy of Kyle Imdieke and Peterson Family Archives.