

Mural Creation Best Practices

Since 2006, Heritage Preservation's Rescue Public Murals (RPM) initiative has confronted the risks that community murals face by being located in outdoor, public spaces. Murals have been, and are an increasingly, popular public art form that adds vibrancy and vitality to the built landscape. Many communities in the United States, large and small, have mural programs or are actively commissioning murals. Unfortunately, almost every community is also aware of the negative image that a faded, flaking, or vandalized mural creates or the misfortune of an artist's work that has been unjustly removed or destroyed.

While working to ensure the protection and preservation of existing murals, RPM recognizes that many common issues that murals face could have been mitigated with careful planning and preparation. RPM has held conversations and brainstorming sessions with muralists, conservators, art historians, arts administrators, materials scientists, and engineers to document best practices for mural creation. We present these recommendations on this website. Recommendations are not meant to be prescriptive but instead to pose questions and raise issues that should be considered at each stage of creating a mural: planning, wall selection, wall and surface preparation, painting, coating, and maintenance. Each recommendation has been considered both for mural commissioning organizations/agencies and for artists to address their particular needs and concerns. Each section includes links to further reading on the topic.

The recommendations on this website assume that a mural that is painted with careful planning and consideration to technique and materials and that receives regular maintenance could have a lifespan of 20-30 years. However, this may not be the intention of all mural projects. Therefore, one of the key planning recommendations is to establish a realistic estimate of the likely lifespan of the mural before work begins.

While this website mentions some materials and items that have been successfully used by artists and mural programs, the recommendations emphasize how to evaluate materials rather than to endorse specific items.

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Planning

While mural painting is frequently done as a spontaneous act, community murals that are expected to last require deliberate planning. Each party, the commissioning organization/agency, artist(s), building owners, community members, and other partners, should establish what rights and responsibilities they have in the process of creating and maintaining the mural.

Commissioning Organization or Agency

Define the scope of the mural project by asking questions such as: Why is it being commissioned? Where will it be located? How will the subject matter be selected? How will the design be approved? Which community groups should be involved in the project? What is the project budget?

Determine the lifespan for the mural. The recommendations on this website assume that a mural that is painted with careful planning and consideration to technique and materials and that receives regular maintenance could last as long as 20 to 30 years. However, this may not be the intention of your mural project. It also may not be realistic to budget for maintenance or repair for this length of time. Deciding how long the mural is expected to last will inform all the additional choices you make about its creation.

Check local laws and ordinances to determine how the mural project under consideration will comply. For example, permissions may need to be secured for access to the wall, the mural design may need to be approved, and selection of paints and coatings may be limited due to environmental regulations.

Determine all the individuals and groups who will be involved in this project such as artist, client, community members or groups, building owner, adjacent building owners, architect, landscape designers, legal counsel, etc. Involve all those who have a stake in the project budget, design, and implementation but note that too large a team can hamper progress. Define the mission of the team and clearly define each individual's roles. It is important that the artist helps to build this team, and determine its mission and its roles.

Establish an agreement with the building owner. This should address issues such as time frame in which mural will remain on the building, whether an easement should be placed on the building, whether the current owner will add a covenant to the building deed regarding the mural should the building change ownership, implementation of security measures for the mural, maintenance and care of the mural, access to the building during the mural creation or during future maintenance, and insurance and liability.

Determine who will own the mural upon its completion. The artist(s)? The commissioning organization/agency? The building owner? Others? More than one individual or entity?

Does ownership of the mural convey responsibility to repair and maintain the mural, including prompt repair or removal of graffiti? If not, determine which individual(s) and/or entity will assume these roles. Will the party/parties have or be given access to funds to do this work? How are maintenance and repair defined? At what point would a mural be deemed too damaged to repair and who will make this decision?

Will the artist(s) retain rights to the mural after it is completed? The federal Visual Artist Rights Act (VARA) outlines the rights to attribution and integrity that are due to authors of works of art. Since VARA includes all types of work, it is often difficult to apply toward public art and commissioning groups may request artists waive their VARA rights. If this is done, it is recommended that it be replaced with language that specifies terms such as, who will repair or maintain the mural and what will be done if repair or maintenance results in a change in appearance to the mural, if the artist(s) must be notified before a mural is altered, removed, or destroyed, and what accommodations the artist(s) will have to rescue or remove the artwork.

Determine who owns the copyright to the mural, images of the mural, or associated materials (plans, drawing, notes). The artist(s)? The commissioning organization/agency? The building owner? Others? What are terms for reproductions of the image of the mural? May images of the mural be used for commercial purposes?

Establish an agreement with artist(s). This should address all the considerations listed in this section as well as specifying the project timeline, budget (including provisions for cost overruns), deliverables, project documentation, insurance, liability and indemnification, equipment (esp. scaffolding) and supplies, and if signage, lighting, or security measures will be incorporated into the mural.

Artist(S)

If you are initiating a project, define the scope of work by asking questions such as: What is the purpose of the mural? Where will it be located? Will others have input into or need to approve the style, subject matter, or design? What is the project budget? If you are responding to a request for proposals or request for qualifications, be prepared to ask or answer these questions during the process.

What is the intended lifespan for this mural? The recommendations on this website assume that a mural that is painted with careful planning, consideration to technique and materials, and that receives regular maintenance could last as long as 20 to 30 years. However, this may not be the intention of your mural

project. If you are not able or willing to conduct maintenance or repairs to the mural, who will do so? Deciding how long the mural is expected to last will inform all the additional choices you make about its creation.

Check local laws and ordinances to determine how the mural project under consideration will comply. For example, permissions may need to be secured for access to the wall, the mural design may need to be approved, and selection of paints and coatings may be limited due to environmental regulations.

Who else besides yourself will be involved in this project? It is recommended that you involve the building owner(s), adjacent building owners, and community members as their support will help ensure long-term protection of your mural. You may need to consult engineers, architects, landscape designers, or legal counsel depending on the project. A client or commissioning organization or group may want to involve these individuals. Make sure their roles are defined and consider how you will include these individuals in your process.

Establish an agreement with the building owner or ensure the client or commissioning group has done so. You may be involved in or provide your input in the process. An agreement with the building owner should address issues such as timeframe in which mural will remain on the building, whether an easement should be placed on the building, whether the current owner will add a covenant to the building deed regarding the mural should the building change ownership, implementation of security measures for the mural, maintenance and care of the mural, access to the building during the mural creation or during future maintenance, and insurance and liability.

Determine who will own the mural upon its completion. The artist(s)? The commissioning organization/agency? The building owner? Others? More than one individual or entity?

Does ownership of the mural convey responsibility to repair and maintain the mural, including prompt repair or removal of graffiti? If not, determine which individual(s) and/or entity will assume these roles. Will the party/parties have or be given access to funds to do this work? How are maintenance and repair defined? At what point would a mural be deemed too damaged to repair and who will make this decision?

Will the artist(s) retain rights to the mural after it is completed? The federal Visual Artist Rights Act (VARA) outlines the rights to attribution and integrity that are due to authors of works of art. Since VARA includes all types of work, it is often difficult to apply toward public art and commissioning groups may request artists waive their VARA rights. If this is done, it is recommended that it be replaced with language that specifies terms such as, who will repair or maintain the mural and what will be done if repair or maintenance results in a change in appearance to the mural, if the artist(s) must be notified

before a mural is altered, removed, or destroyed, and what accommodations the artist(s) will have to rescue or remove the artwork.

Determine who owns the copyright to the mural, images of the mural, or associated materials (plans, drawing, notes). The artist(s)? The commissioning organization/agency? The building owner? Others? What are terms for reproductions of the image of the mural? May images of the mural be used for commercial purposes?

If the mural is being done as work for hire, establish an agreement with the client or commissioning group that addresses all the considerations listed in this section as well as specifying the project timeline, budget (including provisions for cost overruns), deliverables, project documentation, insurance, liability and indemnification, equipment (esp. scaffolding) and supplies, and if signage, lighting, or security measures will be incorporated into the mural.

Further reading:

Americans for the Arts, [Public Art Network](#):

[Public Art Network Best Practice Goals and Guidelines](#)

[Abridged Call for Artists Guidelines](#)

[Conceptual Design Development Agreement](#)

[Design Development Agreement](#)

[Letter of Agreement for Concept Consultancy](#)

[Public Art in Private Development Contract](#)

[Public Art in Private Development Resource Guide](#)

Arts Council of New Orleans, Ashlye M. Keaton, Esq., [Visual Artists Rights Act 101 Webinar](#), 2012.

Canadian Conservation Institute, Debra Daly Hartin, [Planning a New Mural](#)

Chicago Public Art Group, [Community Public Art Guide](#)

City of Albuquerque, [Public Art Handbook](#)

Forecast Public Art, [Public Art Toolkit](#)

Edmonton (Alberta, Canada) Arts Council

- [Care and Longevity of Public Art, Best Practices for Artists](#), David Turnbull
- [Edmonton Public Art](#) (includes master plan, public policies, transitory public art, graffiti zone)

Garfinkle, Ann. [The legal and ethical consideration of mural conservation: Issues and debates](#). Paper presented at the Getty Conservation Institute symposium, "Mural Painting and Conservation in the Americas," 2003.

Philadelphia Murals Arts Program, [Community Engagement](#)

Regional Art and Culture Council (Portland, Oregon)

- [Public Art Murals Program](#)
- [Public Art Policies and Guidelines](#)
- [Mural Easement Form](#)

Stevens, Greg, [From Start to Finish: How to Create and Operate a Mural Project](#). Global Mural Arts and Cultural Tourism.

Wall Selection

Often the decision to paint a mural comes from a desire to fill a specific blank wall with art. For example, murals are painted on the side of a building to brighten a park or school yard, on a local business so that it is seen along a busy thoroughfare, or in a location that is relevant to the person or historical event it commemorates. While these are all valid reasons for selecting the location for a mural, the wall may not have the physical qualities necessary to allow it to accept and hold paint for an extended period. This section discusses steps that both commissioning organizations, agencies, or artists should take before a mural project proceeds.

Assess security considerations for the wall under consideration. Is there regular foot traffic? Is the area enclosed by a fence that is locked at night (such as in a park or a school) or is it well lit at night? Is the community aware that a mural is to be painted? Are they supportive of it?

If the wall under consideration is exposed to high levels of vehicular traffic (such as an underpass) exhaust and other pollutants will cause deterioration. It may be necessary to plan for additional maintenance.

North facing walls are less exposed to direct light, which may minimize fading of mural paint. If it is not possible to select a north facing wall, observe the light on the wall during different times of day and, if possible, different seasons. If the wall is exposed to direct sunlight much of the day, the mural will deteriorate more quickly.

If the wall is part of an occupied building, what activities happen in that side of the building? Are there industrial ovens, refrigerators, air conditioning units, bathrooms, or other functions that would cause the wall to fluctuate in temperature and/or humidity? Do any of the building functions exit through the wall, such as water pipe run-off or steam vents? Any of these factors will affect how paint may adhere to the wall. Even unused elements, especially those made of metal, could be an issue if they will rust or deteriorate over time. Consider having them removed.

Inspect the wall during rain and immediately after heavy rain. Does water flow off the top of the structure with guttering or by some other means? Does water stream down the wall? Ideally the top of the structure will be extended slightly over the wall or have eaves, flashing, or capping on a parapet that will cause water to flow in front of the wall but not down it. How quickly does the wall dry? Is the wall damp during periods where it is not rainy (e.g., rising damp)? Staining, streaking, or salts on the wall may be a sign that excess moisture has been a factor with the wall and that it may not be a good choice for a mural.

Inspect vegetation around the wall. Will any trees, plantings, or weeds need to be trimmed or removed? Will they be permanently removed or will this need to be an ongoing maintenance

activity for the mural? If the wall has vines on it or has evidence that it was once covered in vines, it may have weakened the masonry, surface coats (such as stucco), or mortar.

What is the history of the building and wall? If it is more than 50 years old or located in a historic district, it may be a protected historic structure and local and/or the State Historic Preservation Office may need to be contacted for approval or advice.

If the muralist does not plan to paint directly onto the wall, but rather to use some type of fabric substrate (e.g., “parachute cloth” or a nonwoven fabric), it may be advisable to test the process on a small area on the wall to see how it performs over a period of time.

To overcome structural issues with a wall or to ensure the mural may be removed in the future, it may be possible to use an affixed panel made of plywood, masonite, aluminum, polystyrene, corrugated plastic, or other materials. Consider the weight of these materials and how they will be affixed to the wall. If using metal hardware, consider stainless steel to prevent rust. If using epoxy or other adhesive how well will it perform outdoors? Will water or moisture be able to flow behind the panels? If the panels trap moisture behind them, it will be damaging to the wall and to the panels. Many of these considerations will vary depending on the intended lifespan of the mural.

Consult an architect, engineer, an experienced building contractor, or other expert to inspect the wall for signs of structural instability, cracking, weak or missing mortar, excessive moisture, or other flaws that might impact a potential mural whether it is painted or on affixed panels. You will also want to discuss the impact of the local climate on the current and future condition of the wall, how paint may adhere to it and whether surface preparations (such as masonry conditioner) should be applied before paint.

Further reading:

Canadian Conservation Institute, Debra Daly Hartin, [Planning a New Mural](#)

Chicago Public Art Group, Bernard Williams, [Techniques of Community Murals](#)

Durgin, Susan, [Fabric Mural Basics](#). Carlisle, PA: Pennsylvania Art Education Association, 2005.

Golden Artist Colors, [Painting Exterior Murals](#)

Graves, Kiernan, *An investigation into the technology and behaviour of contemporary murals executed on Portland cement-based supports*. London: Courtauld Institute of Art. Conservation of Wall Painting Department, 2007. (Not available online, click [here](#) for library reference.)

Mayne, Donna, [Working with Aluminum Composite Panels](#). Windsor, Canada: City of Windsor Art Studio.

Mural Routes, [Mural Arts Practices Survey](#), October 2010.

NovaColor, [Tips for Painting an Exterior Mural Using Acrylic Paint](#)

Torraca, Giorgio, [Lectures on Material Science for Architectural Conservation](#). Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, J. Paul Getty Trust, 2009.

Wall or Surface Preparation

In addition to taking care in selecting a physically stable and secure wall, it is important to prepare the wall to accept paint or other materials. It should be decided which of the following steps will be undertaken by the commissioning organization or agency or the artist(s) before a mural project begins.

Thoroughly clean the wall to remove surface dirt or salts, debris, and pollution residue and allow the wall to dry thoroughly. Note any loose mortar, stucco, plaster, and repair as necessary. Some of these repairs may require drying or curing time.

If there was previously paint or other materials on the wall, additional efforts may be necessary to remove it such as power washing, sanding, or wire brushing. Make sure that you select the gentlest method first and only increase the vigor of the cleaning if tests of the technique in a small area of the wall indicate that it is non-damaging.

Photograph the clean wall, especially areas of repair.

Consider painting the mural higher than eight feet off the ground to deter graffiti.

Select a primer that is compatible with the paints, coatings, or (in the case of a mural painted on fabric) adhesives that will be used for the mural. If a paint system has not yet been selected for the mural, it is advised that this be done before preparing the wall. Muralists have reported that murals painted with the same type of products and from the same manufacturer for the primer, pigment, and coating layers have been less prone to flaking, bubbling, and fading.

Before selecting a primer, it may be advisable to contact the manufacturer for specific advice in using the product for an outdoor mural.

Carefully read manufactures' directions and ensure that the primer is applied in the manner and under the conditions it recommends.

Primer and paint should only be applied in temperatures warmer than 50°F (ideally between 65-85°F) and only in dry weather and to a wall that is thoroughly dry.

Apply primer to the wall using a brush rather than spray equipment to ensure the primer penetrates the top surface of the wall and any cracks and crevices. Make sure the coat is even.

If panels are going to be used for the mural, they may require preparation and a primer layer depending on their material (e.g., wood, metal, plastic, fiberglass). Depending on the material, it may be necessary to prime all sides and edges to protect it from outdoor conditions.

If the mural is to be painted on a masonry or concrete wall, the primer should not be a vapor barrier. It will be necessary for moisture to escape through the surface of the mural or it will cause paint loss.

Photograph the primed wall and document the product(s) used and method and conditions of application.

If using a fabric substrate, it will need to be prepared with a primer layer(s).

Further reading:

Beswick, Jay. [*Leaving a Legacy to the Next Generation*](#). Los Angeles: Mural Conservancy of Los Angeles Newsletter, vol. 1, nos. 2 and 3, 1988.

Canadian Conservation Institute, Debra Daly Hartin, [*Planning a New Mural*](#)

Chicago Public Art Group, Bernard Williams, [*Techniques of Community Murals*](#)

Durgin, Susan, [*Fabric Mural Basics*](#). Carlisle, PA: Pennsylvania Art Education Association, 2005.

Golden Artist Colors, [*Painting Exterior Murals*](#)

Keim Mineral Coatings of America, [*Exterior Primer Products*](#)

Mack, Robert C. FAIA and Anne E. Grimmer, [*Preservation Brief 1: Assessing Cleaning and Water-Repellent Treatments for Historic Masonry Buildings*](#), Technical Preservation Services, National Park Service, 2000.

Mural Routes, [*Mural Arts Practices Survey*](#), October 2010.

Mural Routes, [*Tips and Techniques*](#)

NovaColor, [*Tips for Painting an Exterior Mural Using Acrylic Paint*](#)

Paint Quality Institute, [*The Painting Essentials: Prep, Prime and Paint*](#)

Painting

While it is likely that the artist(s) will be primarily responsible for the painting of the mural, commissioning organizations or agencies should be familiar with the following steps and discuss them with the muralist in planning the project.

As noted in the wall preparation section, not only the paint layer is important. Consider using the same manufacturer and type of paint for the primer, paint, and coating layer of the mural to avoid adverse reactions and to protect the color layer as much as possible. Many manufacturers provide information about their products online, but it may be advisable to contact the manufacturer for specific advice in using the product for an outdoor mural. Ask if they have tested their products outdoors and get their recommendation on what products to use. Check with the manufacturer even if you have used a product before—their formulations may have changed.

Because the long-term appearance of a mural depends on careful paint selection, be wary when using leftover paint from a previous project, especially if it means that a mural will be painted with products from different manufacturers. Again, the intended use and lifespan of the mural will dictate how cautious you need to be.

Carefully read manufacturers' literature on paint and various pigments and note any information they provide on the color fastness of the colors. Colors that conform to "ASTM I" are ideal, but "ASTM II" are also acceptable. If using acrylic dispersion paints, the statement "conforms to D5098" is an indication of colorfastness.

In addition to artist paints, some muralists working today have had good results with architectural finish or paints used for marine applications. Others artists prefer spray applications using a paint sprayer or aerosol can. In the past, muralists have used oil-based sign paint. This is the artist(s)' choice, but there may be less research available on the colorfastness of these paints, especially being used outdoors. Also verify whether the selected paint meets local regulations that restrict the use of products with Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs).

Some research has indicated that colors mixed with titanium oxide (white) have a greater tendency to fade unless the coating on the mural is well maintained. Likewise, cadmium reds and yellows and ultramarine blue have tended to fade outdoors. Avoid using fluorescent paints or those marked ASTM III. Because some pigments may have a higher failure rate outdoors than others, use caution when mixing paint. When possible, note the mix or save a small sample of it.

It is increasingly popular to paint murals on a thin, nonwoven fabric, similar to parachute cloth (brand names include Pelon and PolyTab). It allows muralists to paint in their studio without weather restrictions and install the mural when it is complete, saving on lengthy scaffold or lift equipment rentals. However, proper technique must be used in preparing the cloth and in selecting paint to use (typically acrylic). When installing the fabric on the wall, it should be done

with slight overlaps, or lifts, so that water cannot seep behind the panels. While there are murals painted in this manner that are now more than 20 years old, there have not been formal studies on the long-term durability of the fabric.

Paint on days where the temperature is warmer than 50°F (ideally 60-85°F). If it is necessary to paint on a cooler day, make sure the temperature is at least 45°F and paint in the middle of a sunny day so the wall has a chance to warm up. Painting on a cold or frozen wall will prevent the paint from properly adhering and may trap moisture underneath the paint layer, which will cause a greater likelihood of flaking, degradation, and fading in some pigments. For the same reason, do not paint on a day when it is raining or the wall is damp.

Work from the top to the bottom of the mural so that paint does not drip onto finished areas of the mural.

Document all paint selections and gather and save the printed literature on the paint products selected. Provide a copy of this information to the commissioning organization or agency, if applicable. This documentation may be needed if the mural needs to be retouched or repainted. Consider noting the Colour Index term as well as the manufacturers' name for the color of paint.

Further reading:

[The Artist Materials Information and Education Network](#) (AMIEN) (online artist forum for information and networking about materials with a particular focus on light-fastness of mural paints)

American Society for Testing and Materials, [ASTM D5098 - 05a\(2010\), Standard Specification for Artists' Acrylic Dispersion Paints](#) (publication available for purchase)

Canadian Conservation Institute, Debra Daly Hartin, [Planning a New Mural](#)

Chicago Public Art Group, Bernard Williams, [Techniques of Community Murals](#)

Durgin, Susan, [Fabric Mural Basics](#). Carlisle, PA: Pennsylvania Art Education Association, 2005.

Getty Conservation Institute, [Outdoor Painted Surfaces Project](#) (ongoing research on contemporary materials used outdoors, especially paints and coatings)

Getty Conservation Institute, [Modern Paints](#) (ongoing research on modern paints with an emphasis on how best to preserve them)

Golden Artist Colors, [Painting Exterior Murals](#)

Golden, Mark. [Mural paints: Current and future formulations](#). Paper presented at the Getty Conservation Institute symposium, "Mural Painting and Conservation in the Americas," 2003.

Keim Mineral Coatings of America, [Exterior Paint and Coating Products](#)

Mural Routes, [Mural Arts Practices Survey](#), October 2010.

Norbutus, Amanda J. Ph.D., [New approaches for the preservation of outdoor public murals: The assessment of protective coatings for mural paintings and painted architectural surfaces](#). University of Delaware, 2012.

NovaColor, [Tips for Painting an Exterior Mural Using Acrylic Paint](#)

Society of Dyers and Colourists and the American Association of Textile Chemists and Colorists, [Colour](#)

[*Index International*](#) (online database available by subscription)

Thorn, Andrew, [*Titanium Dioxide: a Catalyst for Deterioration Mechanisms in the Third Millennium*](#). Paper presented at the International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, London, 2000.

University of Delaware, Art Conservation Department, [*Research on Exterior Mural Paints and Coatings*](#), 2008-2010.

Coating

While it is likely that the artist(s) will be primarily responsible for the doing the work to coat the completed mural, commissioning organizations or agencies should be familiar with the products and procedures used in coating (or topcoat). Reapplication of a mural coating is a possible maintenance activity so it should be discussed whether the artist or the commissioning group will do this work and who will assume the cost. Coatings are most often used to aid in graffiti removal, although some topcoats also provide protection from ultraviolet fading and may provide protection to the paint layer from deterioration. Additionally, the coating may be applied for aesthetic reasons. However, some muralists have experienced issues with clear coatings—they can become cloudy, yellow, or chip and flake. The function of the coating should be taken into consideration when selecting the material to be used, as this may differ depending on the primary purpose of the coating. More than one coating may be applied, and compatibility of the different coatings and the paint should also be considered. Research on this topic is ongoing but the following recommendations may be of assistance.

Coatings are most effective and much less prone to failure if they are made by the same manufacturer and are in the same product line as the paint used for the mural. Discuss your need for a coating when you select the mural paint. Ask how long the mural coating should last in an outdoor environment.

If a coating fails and has to be removed, consider the costs of doing so and what solvents may need to be used. Confirm whether these solvents may be used given local ordinances restricting products that have Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs). There may be instances where a deteriorating coating cannot be removed without damage to the underlying paint.

When selecting a coating, especially an anti-graffiti coating, the coating should be removable if necessary without damaging the underlying paint layer, using solvents or other methods of removal. If the mural is at a high risk for graffiti, test a small area of the mural with a coating and then do test graffiti on the area to see how easy it is to remove and what solvents are necessary. If possible, conduct these tests over a series of weeks to see how difficult it is to remove graffiti that is not removed immediately.

Considering the risks that outdoor murals face and the time and expertise it takes to paint a mural, it may be better to apply a coating that may fail or need reapplication than to risk not applying one.

Ideally wait one to two weeks to apply the coating. Apply it to a small area of the mural as a test—some coatings go on cloudy and then dry clear. Follow the manufacturer's directions in applying the coating. Apply it in neat, thin layers and avoid drips. Consider brushing on the coating if the mural surface is textured. Consider two coats.

Some formulations in varnishes include ultraviolet inhibitors which can protect the mural color. Check the specifications on varnishes and talk to the manufacturer to see if their product has this feature as it may help the mural stay vibrant longer.

Consider surface finish when selecting a coating. Some coatings are available in glossy or matte. Glossy may reflect too much light, matte may attract dirt.

If a wax-based anti-graffiti coating is used, it should be noted that this type of coating typically needs to be re-applied every three-five years, may attract dirt, and are difficult to remove from textured surfaces.

Leave a small portion of the mural uncoated in a location where it is easily observed. Mark and photograph this area. This uncovered area will make it easier to observe whether the coating is clouding, yellowing, or failing in the future.

Document the coating selection and gather and save the print literature on the products selected. Provide a copy of this information to the commissioning organization or agency, if applicable. This documentation may be needed if the mural needs to be recoated in the future.

Further reading:

[The Artist Materials Information and Education Network](#) (AMIEN) (online artist forum for information and networking about materials with a particular focus on light-fastness of mural paints)

Canadian Conservation Institute, Debra Daly Hartin, [Planning a New Mural](#)

Chicago Public Art Group, Bernard Williams, [Techniques of Community Murals](#)

Fine Arts Conservation Lab, Scott Haskins, [Restoration of Jim Morphesis Monument by Kent Twitchell](#).

Getty Conservation Institute, [Outdoor Painted Surfaces Project](#) (ongoing research on contemporary materials used outdoors, especially paints and coatings)

Golden Artist Colors, [Painting Exterior Murals](#)

Keim Mineral Coatings of America, [Exterior Paint and Coating Products](#)

Mural Routes, [Mural Arts Practices Survey](#), October 2010.

Norbutus, Amanda J. Ph.D., [New approaches for the preservation of outdoor public murals: The assessment of protective coatings for mural paintings and painted architectural surfaces](#). University of Delaware, 2012.

NovaColor, [Tips for Painting an Exterior Mural Using Acrylic Paint](#)

University of Delaware, Art Conservation Department, [Research on Exterior Mural Paints and Coatings](#), 2008-2010.

Maintenance

A faded, flaking, or vandalized mural is a poor reflection on the neighborhood or city and detracts from quality of life. It can be challenging to raise funds for conservation, so it is much more cost effective at the start of a project to select materials that are designed to withstand the environment and to begin a schedule of regular maintenance that can cost a fraction of a complete restoration. In addition, a well maintained mural is less likely to be a target for vandalism. These recommendations are applicable to commissioning organizations or agencies as well as artists. However, during the planning stage, ongoing maintenance tasks and expenses should be discussed and included in contracts. Regular inspections should be assigned to one or more parties. Guidelines about who may make repairs or repainting should be defined, and if it is not to be the artist, they should specify if the artist or their representative should be contacted for advice and/or permission.

Signage that is included in the mural design or erected near the mural should provide contact information for reporting graffiti or vandalism of the mural. If community members have been involved in planning the mural and celebrated its completion, it increases the likelihood that they will be good stewards of it.

Set a schedule for regular inspection of the mural. Ideally this should be twice a year, once after the winter and once after the summer—the two times of year with the most weather extremes. See the further reading section for sample forms. Annual checks of a large mural may be done with the aid of binoculars, but depending on the mural's condition, every three to five years it may be advisable to examine it using a lift or scaffolding.

Maintenance activities may include removing or trimming vegetation, removing surface dirt (especially along the base of the mural), and reapplying coating. Price and budget these costs accordingly.

Photograph any damage to the mural before any cleaning, graffiti removal, or repairs are attempted.

Any washing of the mural should be done as gently as possible without detergents and with minimal water pressure. A plan for washing should be discussed with the artist(s) and instructions documented. Test an area before beginning any cleaning project.

Further reading:

[Americans for the Arts, Public Art Network](#) (Member listserv, newsletter, and conferences often discuss public art maintenance issues.)

Cambridge (Mass.) Arts Council, [Conservation and Maintenance of Contemporary Public Art](#)
Canadian Conservation Institute, Debra Daly Hartin,

[Condition Report and Inspection Record](#)

[Planning a New Mural](#)

Golden Artist Colors, [Painting Exterior Murals](#)

Heritage Preservation, [Rescue Public Murals Assessment Form](#)

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