



Japanese American
Citizens League
San Francisco Chapter

San Francisco Japantown History Mural Project Proposal January 2023



Peace Plaza Exterior Retaining Wall



Initial Design Concept (example only; subject to change)

The San Francisco Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League (SFJACL) proposes a Japantown History Mural to be located on the exterior retaining wall facing Geary Boulevard, between Laguna and Webster, along the Peace Plaza. The proposed mural will depict the 116-year history of San Francisco Japantown, including images of key people, places, and events that have shaped the oldest and largest Japantown remaining in the nation. The mural will pay homage to the power of community and illustrate the resilience of Japanese Americans in San Francisco.

1. Why a history mural?

The Japantown History Mural is proposed as public art mainly for educational purposes. The National Endowment for the Arts defines public art as "community

Japanese American Citizens League San Francisco Chapter Board of Directors

Judy Hamaguchi, President; David Takashima, Vice President; Emily Murase, PhD,
Secretary; John Hayashi, Treasurer; Board Members: Joyce Nakamura, Elena Nielsen, Merry Nishimura

1765 Sutter Street, 3rd Floor, San Francisco, CA 94115

info@sfjacl.org, www.sfjacl.org

art by, for, and of the community in which it is presented." The impetus for the mural proposal is the preservation of the storied history of a resilient community, a vital cultural enclave in San Francisco despite upheavals and challenges to its survival. As we go further from the first generation (*Issei*) and second generation (*Nisei*) Japanese Americans, there is a clear lack of information on the pioneers of San Francisco Japantown, and how and why this community still exists. The proposed mural's goal is to educate future generations to better understand the path that the *Issei* and *Nisei* had created for San Francisco Japantown.

A major Japantown mural has been an idea floating around the community for many years, but solid planning and funding were elusive until recently. In March 2021 and again in spring 2022, the SFJACL learned about very generous bequests from the estates of long-time SFJACL members Yo Hironaka, Greg Marutani, and Frank Minami. Yo Hironaka was a tireless volunteer who touched many lives with her warm and welcoming approach to community inclusion. Greg Marutani served on the National JACL Education Committee for many years, developing and distributing school curricula about the Japanese American experience. Frank Minami was a retired bank executive who focused on creating new economic opportunities. Inspired by Yo's commitment to inclusivity, Greg's dedication to education, and Frank's contributions to the local economy, the chapter board approved a proposal for a Japantown History Mural on July 16, 2022.

The proposed mural will depict the historical timeline of Japantown, spotlighting 8-10 of the most influential Japanese American leaders who contributed to the building of a cultural neighborhood. The background design will feature various elements depicting historically significant places, activities, and events. The proposed mural is intended to become a destination attraction for local, regional, national, and international visitors that will generate revenue for Japantown businesses, restaurants, and hotels.

The mural is intended to enliven the otherwise blank space and attract visitors and community to learn about the rich history of a community which has survived many disruptions and threats to its existence due to racism, prejudice, and disregard for the importance of cultural enclaves in San Francisco. An educational component will be installed so that viewers can access comprehensive content connected to the images.

2. Who are members of the Design Team?

At its July 16, 2022 board meeting, the SFJACL board voted to partner with Mission Arts 415, Crayone (aka Rigel Juratovac), a legendary graffiti artist who grew up in San Francisco Japantown and has created numerous San Francisco and Bay Area murals to international acclaim, and Wes “Marks” Wong, another celebrated street artist who has collaborated with Crayone on other major mural projects, including for the San Francisco Giants. In its decision to partner with Mission Arts 415, the SFJACL board considered many factors, including reputation, successfully completed large-scale mural projects, and familiarity with community-based culture and history. Brief profiles of the Design Team follows.

Rigel “Crayone” Juratovac, Master Artist

Rigel “Crayone” Juratovac grew up in San Francisco Japantown in the 1980s, often hanging out at the Japantown Bowl. A fascinating interview with Crayone can be found here: [CRAYONE Art Talk](#). He is now revered as a street art legend and respected around the world for his influence in the street art culture. He has transformed the graffiti world from a crime into a well-respected art form with his professionalism, artistic talent, verve and character. Crayone offers an expansive and high-profile client roster over his 40 years of artistic excellence, including Levi Strauss, Ritz Carlton, Harley Davidson, State Farm, Wells Fargo, the San Francisco Giants, the San Francisco Fire Department where he serves as a full-time firefighter, numerous restaurants, cafes, and nightclubs. His international following on various social media platforms makes him one of the most recognized street artists in the world.

Wes “Marks” Wong, Master Artist

Wes “Marks” Wong is a world reknown street artist whose work draws upon a unique mix of 20+ years of exterior murals, interaction design, programming and aerosol techniques to create at a large scale. Past projects have ranged the gamut artistically from illustrative to photorealistic, always guided heavily by concept. His large scale public art can be found across San Francisco and has been photographed thousands of times by locals and tourists, as well as appearing in countless publications. From a half block long mural dedicated to the Summer of Love in the heart of the Haight & Ashbury, a large mural depicting legendary Chinese mythology in Chinatown, and recent murals in and outside of the San Francisco Giants stadium, in collaboration with Crayone.

Lisa Brewer, Project Manager

Lisa Brewer is the President of [Mission Art 415, Inc.](#), co-founder of The Lilac Mural Project, and owner/director of the Mission Art 415 Gallery located in the heart of the Mission District of San Francisco. Lisa has a degree in fine art and design and worked in the professional art world for over 40 years as an international fine art broker before making San Francisco her home. Since 2004, Lisa has offered property owners the solution to graffiti vandalism with amazing works of art. She now manages one of the largest exterior mural projects in the world, covering over 18 city blocks with commissioned street art. She is a member of the San Francisco Department of Public Works "Adopt-A-Street" Program and the San Francisco Board of Supervisors Graffiti Advisory Board. For her dedication to serving San Francisco beautification programs and working with marginalized children providing free art and music classes, Lisa was honored as the Citizen of the Month by the San Francisco Police Department.

Randolph Bowes, Graphic Design Manager

Together with his wife Lisa, Randolph Bowes started the [Lilac Mural Project](#) in 2004 to improve the environment of Lilac Alley which was home to gang violence and drug abuse. The Project provided a safe place for emerging street artists to paint with the express intention of beautifying forgotten and blight-stricken sidestreets and transforming them into open air art galleries. The Lilac Mural Project has become an international tourist attraction and one of the largest exterior mural projects in the world. Expanding the Lilac Mural Project to Mission Art 415 Inc., Randolph and Lisa opened gallery space to street artists, offering them an important way to generate income. With a master's degree in sound engineering and graphic design, Randolph serves as the Mission Art 415 Graphic Design Manager with a broad range of duties including designing mural sketches, managing merchandising, developing promotional materials and artist media kits, video editing, professional photography, and historical research.

3. What is the proposed budget?

The estimated project cost, based on current prices, is \$312,400.

BUDGET INFORMATION

Personnel	
Mural Artists	\$200,000
Mission 415 (15% Commission waived, \$47K)	\$15,000
Paint Supplies & Sealant	\$9,000
Technology/QR Codes	\$50,000
Subtotal for Artwork	\$274,000
Liability Insurance	\$9,500
Copyright	\$500
Subtotal for Legal Expenses	\$10,000
10% Contingency	\$28,4000
Grand Total	\$312,400

The SFJACL has allocated \$100,000 for this project, primarily from the bequests discussed above. SFJACL will look to fundraise the remaining amount (\$212,400) through philanthropy and grants under the guidance of policies of the Department of Recreation and Parks for public-private partnership projects.

4. What is the timeline?

The proposed location for the mural, the Peace Plaza exterior retaining wall at 1610 Geary Boulevard between Laguna and Webster, is the property of the Recreation and Parks Department. Therefore, the mural proposal will need to be approved by the Recreation and Parks Commission. As artwork on public property, the proposal mural will also require the approval of the Arts Commission.

The approval process requires a broad-based community process. The SFJACL is still in the early stages of the proposal approval process. To solicit community feedback on the proposed mural, a series of five community meetings was scheduled: November 1, December 1, December 15, 2022, January 12, and January 30, 2023. If needed, additional meetings will be scheduled for the future. Meeting information can be found at the [SFJACL website Program & Events page](#). Once the proposal is fully approved, the mural painting process is expected to take between 6-12 weeks to complete with the two master artists working together on the project.

UPDATE ON THE CONCEPT DESIGN - SELECTION OF NOTABLES

1. What were the Initial discussions on the concept design?

The SFJACL held 2 meetings in July and August 2022 to brainstorm the theme, important events, and elements to be included on the mural. The SFJACL concluded that the theme of the mural will be honoring San Francisco Japantown “notables.” These notable portraits will be individuals who made a lasting difference in the survival and vitality of our community. They are persons whose determination to build Japantown in the face of exclusion and racism helped to preserve our history and culture, and whose activism, trailblazing and vision continue to guide us today.

2. What was the plan to include public input on the notables?

Since November 2022, the SFJACL has reached out to community members to assist with identifying elements. The artists, SFJACL board members, and advisory committee members created a preliminary timeline and submitted elements ideas. This collection of elements will provide artists with design components. At every public meeting, requests for elements ideas have been solicited. Images of key organizations, institutions, and landmarks possessing cultural and/or historical significance have been collected and continue to be collected. An initial design draft was presented at the December 15 Community Meeting. The SFJACL must determine the notable individuals before artists can place elements in the timeline. Design drafts will be shared with the public via the SFJACL website and community meetings.

3. Is there an advisory committee for selecting the notables?

The SFJACL board invited key community members to serve on a Mural Advisory Committee that would aid the SFJACL board by reviewing nominees and prioritizing among them. The following people accepted the invitation to serve on the Mural Advisory Committee:

- Dr. Ben Kobashigawa, Professor of Asian American Studies (retired after 30 years), San Francisco State University
- Darcy Nishi, Founding member of the Japantown Rainbow Coalition
- Kenji Taguma, President of the Nichi Bei Foundation; Editor-in-Chief, Nichi Bei News.
- Rosalyn Tonai, Executive Director of the National Japanese American Historical Society.

Biographies of the Mural Advisory Committee can be found on the SFJACL website under the Japantown Mural Project

4. What is the process for determining the notables?

The SFJACL developed the following criteria for selecting notables.

- 1. Established and built San Francisco's Japantown and who have made significant contributions to continue to build and preserve it; or*
- 2. Advanced our diverse stories and history through education, the arts and culture; or*
- 3. Played a leadership role in social justice and civil rights issues*

Each criterion should have a significant connection to San Francisco's Japantown.

The SFJACL began collecting nominations for notables from community members and leadership over the summer 2022. The nominations process was opened to the general public via [online form](#) starting on December 1, 2022. The form link was available on the SFJACL website and distributed through chapter social media posts. Nominations closed at midnight on December 31, 2022. The goal is to identify 10-12 notables to be included in the proposed mural.

The initial list of nominees contained 73 names, including individuals both living and deceased. In reviewing nominations, the SFJACL board determined that, to be considered further, candidates should only include deceased individuals. Nominations were posted on the website in advance of the January 12 Community Meeting #4. At the conclusion of that meeting, 27 finalists were announced. The Mural Advisory Committee will determine a final list of 10-12 notables at the January 30 Community Meeting #5.

See separate document for roster of nominees, semi-finalists, and finalists.