The UCSF Medical Sciences Building Mural

The 72-foot long and 270-degree panorama of San Francisco has as its focus the history and mission of UCSF. The mural was a collaborative project, bringing together the artist, Douglas Cooper, Andrew Mellon Professor of Architecture at Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA; Gregoire Picher, animator; Judith Modell, an anthropologist; and a team of students from Carnegie Mellon University, with UCSF faculty, staff, former patients, and long-time residents of San Francisco.

The mural presents a panoramic view from Mt. Sutro and the Golden Gate to Mission Bay, with multiple time periods existing side by side. Present-day views of the city are interspersed with buildings, events, and personalities from the past. The team from Carnegie Mellon worked with diverse citizens to set the mural's context: the city of San Francisco. Many of the drawings and memories collected at these interviews have been integrated into the mural in a white on black frieze that arcs in and out of the mural at its base. The mural is unique in its perspective and compilation of both universally shared images and individual experiences.

NORTH WALL

The wall looks north from Mt. Sutro through eucalyptus trees and over the present-day UCSF campus toward Golden Gate Park.

Climbing the stairs up Mt. Sutro at the base of the mural is Ishi, who was identified as the last surviving member of the Yahi tribe of Northern California. Ishi lived on campus from 1911 until his death in 1916. As he walks with Dr. Saxton Pope, he is describing the medicinal uses of the bay leaf. Further up the stairs he is shown ministering to a patient in the men's ward of the first teaching hospital at Parnassus.

The north wall presents other chronological juxtapositions as well. Kezar Stadium is shown as it appeared when it was still the home of the San Francisco 49ers in the 50s and 60s. Near the center of Golden Gate Park, at the location of the present-day Music Concourse, is the Electric Tower — part of the successful 1894 California Midwinter Fair. The only remaining fragment of the Fair is the Japanese Tea Garden. If you look carefully, its steep arch bridge is visible. Off in the distance, along the Pacific coast, is the original Cliff House, which burned down in 1907.

The frieze of black on white drawings at the base of the mural represents the collective memory of the citizenry. Generally, the ones annotated in Chinese refer to places in China remembered prior to emigration. A drawing in the upper left of this frieze is by a former UCSF employee who now lives at St. Anthony's Residence. Her officemate was riding in a UCSF van that was crushed when a section of freeway collapsed during the 1989 earthquake. Her drawing depicts their office.

EAST WALL

The wall begins by looking east, up Parnassus Avenue toward the present-day campus. It presents a collection of UCSF personalities as well as pop figures associated with the Haight over the years. Descending Parnassus are: Dr. Lloyd "Holly" Smith, Jr., Dr. Moses "Mish" Grossman, Professor Keith Yamamoto, Janis Joplin, Robert Crumb (the creator of Fritz the Cat), George Harrison (who visited the Haight in 1967) and a young Jerry Garcia.

The area to the right reveals aspects of UCSF's mission. Moving counterclockwise from in front of Toland Hall (one of the original campus buildings), the mural depicts: 1) basic research — in this case, modeling recombinant DNA; 2) laboratory instruction — exemplified by anatomy professor, Sexton Sutherland explaining the structure of the hip; 3) classroom instruction; and 4) medical practice — fetal surgery, laser dental surgery and other operations. In addition, Dr. Jay Levy is explaining some of the mechanisms of the AIDS virus, and Booker Pullen, developer of the "Booker Box" used in heart surgery, is at work on a new mechanism.

At the center of the view out over the Western Addition is a portrayal of some of the ethnopolitical history of the Fillmore. A Japanese family is shown awaiting transfer to an internment camp in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor. Wielding a wrecking ball from a cloud and uprooting Victorians and replacing them with high-rise buildings is Justin Herman, director of The San Francisco Redevelopment Agency during the 60s. The wholesale clearing of the Fillmore during the late 60s contributed to the displacement of the African-American community from that neighborhood. The
The UCSF Medical Sciences Building Mural, detail from North Wall

foreground represents the Jewish neighborhood that once thrived south of the Fillmore. In keeping with the theme of multiple time periods set by the north wall mural, the 1915 Panama Pacific Exposition appears in the present-day Marina District. Today only Bernard Maybeck's rebuilt Palace of Fine Arts remains.

The foreground of this central portion depicts the Castro and Noe Valley. Assassinated along with Mayor Moscone in 1978, Harvey Milk, the first openly gay member elected to the Board of Supervisors, is depicted walking along Castro Street.

Continuing along the east wall, the view moves downtown. The foreground at the base shows the Mission District. Looking out at Mission Dolores is a UCSF patient who used art therapy through UCSF's Art for Recovery Program. To cope with breast cancer, she drew lush Caribbean scenes through windows which reminded her of her former home overlooking Mission Dolores Park.

Barry Bonds is depicted to the right and above St. Anthony's soup kitchen in the Tenderloin. While research for the mural was conducted in June 2001, Barry was hitting home runs at a record clip overtaking Mark McGwire's record later that summer. Above Bonds is Joe DiMaggio in his San Francisco Seals uniform. Joe played for the Seals before his illustrious career with the New York Yankees. To the right, along with views of older buildings of San Francisco General Hospital, is Bill Schecter, a prominent UCSF surgeon at San Francisco General Hospital.

Above the representation of the Mission is a view of downtown. Again multiple time periods exist side-by-side. Dr. Hugh Toland and Toland Medical College (a forerunner of UCSF) are shown at the college's original location next to Coit Tower.

Near Huntington Park and holding a toy train are two of the original "Big Four" investors in the transcontinental railroad: Mark Hopkins and Collis Huntington. Hotels around the park now bear their names. Lillian Hellman, the playwright, appears with her lover, Dashiell Hammett, author of "The Maltese Falcon," on Russian Hill where they lived. One of the residents at St. Anthony's Residence had been a housekeeper for Hellman and her memory drawing of that house appears at the base of the mural.

SOUTH WALL

At the southwest corner, the mural uses the Bay Bridge as a fulcrum to the south. Above the doorway at the left is a depiction of the 1769 expedition led by Gaspar DePortola overland from San Diego that discovered San Francisco Bay. In a time leap of 200-plus years, modern sports figures (Jerry Rice, Joe Montana, Willie Mays, Juan Marichal, and Willie McCovey) associated with Candlestick Park are intermingled with the expedition.

To the right, the view of the UCSF campus in the background is a composite view combining several points in time. The original campus buildings—for example, Toland Hall—are shown side-by-side with some of the construction of the 60s. Further to the right into Golden Gate Park itself is a depiction of the tented emergency hospitals set up by the San Francisco Department of Public Health in the park following the 1906 earthquake and fire.

The lower left depicts the Haight Ashbury of the 60s. At the base of the mural are two fixtures from the 60s: the Merry Pranksters' bus (Ken Kesey et al.), and the Haight Ashbury Free Clinic. The clinic is shown in full swing during the 60s and with its founder, Dr. David Smith. It continues to this day with UCSF students working there. The south wall concludes with the ubiquitous fog rolling in from the Pacific Ocean.

The mural was produced in the studio of Douglas Cooper in Pittsburgh, PA. The artists used charcoal on paper, which is mounted on panels and coated with acrylic varnishes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Collaborators in San Francisco: Jewish Community Center, St. Anthony's Residence, and the Consortium for Elders and Youth in the Arts (CEYA), a program of the Institute on Aging. Participating sites included Western Park Apartments and On Lok SeniorHealth.

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Photography: Ken Andreyo