



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

National Register Nomination Case Report

HEARING DATE: JANUARY 17, 2018

1650 Mission St.
Suite 400
San Francisco,
CA 94103-2479

Reception:
415.558.6378

Fax:
415.558.6409

Planning
Information:
415.558.6377

Date: January 17, 2018
Case No.: **2017-015688FED**
Project Address: **1 Telegraph Hill Blvd. (Coit Memorial Tower)**
Zoning: P-Public Zoning district,
OS (Open Space) Height and Bulk district
Block/Lot: 0086/012
Project Sponsor: California Office of Historic Preservation
1725 23rd Street, Suite 100
Sacramento, CA 95816
Staff Contact: Shannon Ferguson – (415) 575-9074
shannon.ferguson@sfgov.org
Reviewed By: Timothy Frye – (415) 575-6822
tim.frye@sfgov.org
Recommendation: **Send resolution of findings recommending OHP approve nomination amendment of the subject property to the National Register of Historic Places**

BACKGROUND

In its capacity as a Certified Local Government (CLG), the City and County of San Francisco is given the opportunity to comment on nominations to the National Register of Historic Places (National Register). Listing on the National Register provides recognition by the federal government of a building's or district's architectural and historical significance.

In 2008, Coit Memorial Tower, located at 1 Telegraph Hill Blvd., was listed on the National Register under Criterion C in the area of art at the local level of significance. This nomination amends the 2008 National Register nomination in order to document Coit Memorial Tower at the national level of significance. The nomination amendment materials for Coit Memorial Tower were prepared by Katherine T. Petrin, Robert W. Cherny and Jon Golinger on behalf of the Protect Coit Tower organization.

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

Designed in the Art Deco style by noted architect Arthur Brown, Jr. as a commemorative monument and observation tower, Coit Memorial Tower was completed in October 1933 during the Great Depression. Its construction was largely financed by a bequest to the City and County of San Francisco from Lillie Hitchcock Coit.

Situated within the boundaries of Pioneer Park, Coit Memorial Tower is located atop Telegraph Hill. Pedestrian access to Pioneer Park is provided by staircases on Filbert and Greenwich streets. Vehicle access is provided by Telegraph Hill Blvd which winds around the hill and terminates at the summit in

the circular parking lot in front of Coit Tower. A monumental staircase to Coit Tower ascends from the south side of the parking lot to a landscaped plaza that leads to the tower's entrance. Walkways from the landscaped plaza extend around the tower's east and west side and converge at the rear. At 182 feet in height, the unpainted reinforced concrete tower has a three part cylindrical composition of a fluted shaft, arcaded belvedere, and open air lantern that rises from a squared, cubic base. At the interior, wide corridors form a squared "O" plan on the first floor and curving stairs lead to the second floor.

Coit Tower's interior walls at the first and second floors, as well as the winding stairway that connects both floors, are covered in twenty-seven murals. In all, the artwork covers 3,691 square feet of interior wall space. Titled *Aspects of Life in California, 1934*, the murals were produced by many noted Bay Area artists for the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). Visually, the individual mural designs and their execution were unified by the medium of fresco, a consistent earth-toned palette, figurative content, and the overall influence of the Mexican mural movement of the 1920s. All use the same intense saturated colors, an earthen color palette, rounded forms, two-dimensional overlappings, and standardized scale. The content of the murals depicts variations on the theme of the contemporary American Scene in four major areas: agriculture, industry, city life, and recreation and leisure in California, especially the Bay Area, in 1934. The scenes depict social, political, and economic concerns of the 1930s as well as San Francisco bay landscapes. The murals are grouped by theme, and experienced by the viewer sequentially.

For descriptions of the individual murals, please see Section 7, page 9 of the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.

NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA

The National Register is the official list of the Nation's cultural resources worthy of preservation. The National Register's criteria for evaluating the significance of properties were designed to recognize the accomplishments of all peoples who have made a contribution to the Nation's heritage. The following four National Register criteria are designed to guide state and local governments, federal agencies and others in evaluating potential entries into the National Register:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Criterion A (Event): | that are associated with events that have made significant contribution to the broad patterns of history; or |
| Criterion B (Person): | that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or |
| Criterion C (Design/Construction): | that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or |
| Criterion D (Information Potential): | that yielded, or may likely yield, information important in prehistory or history. |

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The amendment updates and expands on the 2008 nomination. New information includes descriptions of each individual mural, the artist and the technique used to paint the mural; biographies of selected artists; and a chronology of building alterations and mural conservation efforts. It documents the contemporaneous events, local, national and international, and prevalent political mood that informed the content of the murals. The amendment also includes a summary of contemporary art criticism and subsequent scholarship on the murals.

According to the amendment's statement of significance, Coit Memorial Tower is significant at the national level under National Register Criterion C in the area of art, and meets Criteria Consideration F for Commemorative Properties.

National Register Criterion C

Coit Tower is intrinsically associated with the extraordinary permanent exhibition of federally funded art created through the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). The Coit Tower mural project was the single largest PWAP venture in the country and the most ambitious test of whether federally funded arts programs could work. Its success served as a model for an array of New Deal arts programs that followed. The Coit Tower murals possess exceptional value in interpreting the themes of the Great Depression and New Deal idealism and in showcasing the work of twenty-five of the region's finest artists, including four women. This extensive fresco undertaking, titled *Aspects of Life in California, 1934*, is an unusual example of a large group of muralists working in unison. The murals' content and expression were directly influenced by Diego Rivera. They comprised the most extensive use of fresco technique up to that time, which until then had been rare.

Criterion Consideration F

The nomination also states that Coit Memorial Tower meets the requirements of Criterion Consideration F for commemorative properties. A property primarily commemorative in intent can be eligible if design, age, tradition, or symbolic value has invested it with its own historical significance. In general, properties that are commemorative in nature, such as Coit Tower, are not considered eligible for the National Register. A commemorative property will qualify if it can demonstrate its own exceptional significance apart from the value of the person memorialized by the monument or property.

Originally designed and intended as a commemorative civic monument, Coit Tower was named in honor of a historical figure, Lillie Hitchcock Coit, whose wealth financed its construction. Constructed after her death, it is not directly or primarily associated with her productive life or a specific event in her life. Rather, Coit Tower derives its significance from its association with the Coit Tower murals, which possess exceptional value in interpreting the themes of the Great Depression and New Deal idealism. Coit Tower is the site of the country's most impressive permanent exhibition of federally funded art created through the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP).

The period of significance is 1933 to 1934 and encompasses construction of the tower, completion of the frescoed murals, and public inauguration of the building.

The Department agrees that the property is nationally significant under National Register Criteria C in the area of art for its murals and meets the requirements of Criterion Consideration F for commemorative properties.

ACTION REQUESTED

- Review the completed National Register of Historic Places Registration Form Amendment;
- Provide comments on whether Coit Memorial Tower meets the criteria of significance of the National Register; and
- Recommend or not recommend the Coit Memorial Tower National Register Amendment.

BASIS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- The property is eligible for national listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria C and meets Criterion Consideration F for commemorative properties.

RECOMMENDATION: Send resolution of findings recommending SHPO approve the Coit Memorial Tower National Register Amendment

Attachments:

Draft Resolution

Letter from Julianne Polanco, State Historic Preservation Officer

National Register of Historic Places Registration Amendment Form

2008 National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Historic Preservation Commission Resolution No. XXX

HEARING DATE: JANUARY 17, 2018

1650 Mission St.
Suite 400
San Francisco,
CA 94103-2479

Reception:
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Case No. 2017-015688FED
Project: 1 Telegraph Hill Blvd. (Coit Memorial Tower)
National Register Nomination Amendment
Action: Adopting findings and recommendations to
State Historic Preservation Officer
Staff Contact: Shannon Ferguson (415) 575-9074
shannon.ferguson@sfgov.org
Reviewed By: Tim Frye – (415) 575-6822
tim.frye@sfgov.org

ADOPTING FINDINGS RECOMMENDING TO THE STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER THAT 1 TELEGRAPH HILL BLVD. (AKA COIT MEMORIAL TOWER), ASSESSOR'S BLOCK NO. 0086 LOT 012, BE NOMINATED TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES AND THAT THE OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROCESS THE NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION AMENDMENT.

PREAMBLE

WHEREAS, On November 29, 2017, Julianne Polanco, State Historic Preservation Officer, forwarded a request to the San Francisco Planning Department (hereinafter "Department") for Historic Preservation Commission review and comment on the amendment of the nomination of 1 Telegraph Hill Blvd., also known as Coit Memorial Tower, Assessor's Block No. 0086, Lot 012, to the National Register of Historic Places (hereinafter "National Register").

WHEREAS, Pursuant to the Certified Local Government Agreement between the Office of Historic Preservation (hereinafter "OHP") and the City and County of San Francisco, the Historic Preservation Commission (hereinafter "Commission") has a forty-five (45) day review and comment period to provide written comments to the OHP before the State Historical Resources Commission takes action on the above-stated National Register nomination.

WHEREAS, The National Register is the official list of the Nation's cultural resources worthy of preservation. The National Register's criteria for evaluating the significance of properties were designed to recognize the accomplishments of all peoples who have made a contribution to the Nation's heritage in the areas of Events, Persons, Design/Construction, and Information Potential. The four National Register criteria are designed to guide state and local governments, federal agencies and others in evaluating potential entries into the National Register.

WHEREAS, At its hearing on February 17, 2018, the Commission, acting in its capacity as San Francisco's Certified Local Government Commission, reviewed the National Register nomination amendment of 1 Telegraph Hill Blvd., also known as Coit Memorial Tower, Assessor's Block No. 0086, Lot 012.

WHEREAS, In reviewing the nomination, the Commission had available for its review and consideration reports, photographs, and other materials pertaining to the nomination contained in the Department's case file, and has reviewed and heard testimony and received materials from interested parties during the public hearing on the Project.

WHEREAS, According to the nomination's summary, 1 Telegraph Hill Blvd. is nationally significant under National Register Criterion C in the area of art for its association with the mural *Aspects of Life in California, 1934*, which is the single largest exhibition of federally funded art created through Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) in the country and the mural possesses exceptional value in interpreting the themes of the Great Depression and New Deal idealism.

WHEREAS, According to the nomination's summary, 1 Telegraph Hill Blvd. meets the requirements of Criteria Consideration F for commemorative properties as it demonstrates its own exceptional significance apart from the value of the person it memorializes, Lillie Hitchcock Coit, and is primarily nationally significant for its intrinsic association with the mural.

WHEREAS, The Commission agrees that the property is nationally significant under National Register Criterion C in the area of art; and meets the requirements of Criteria Consideration F for commemorative properties.

WHEREAS, Properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places are automatically included in the California Register of Historical Resources and afforded consideration in accordance with state and local environmental review procedures.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby supports the nomination amendment of 1 Telegraph Hill Blvd.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby **recommends** that the property located at 1 Telegraph Hill Blvd., also known as Coit Memorial Tower, Assessor's Block No. 0086, Lot 012, be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, and that the Office of Historic Preservation process the National Register nomination amendment.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby directs its Recording Secretary to transmit this Resolution, and other pertinent materials in the case file 2017-015688FED to the State Historic Preservation Officer.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was **Adopted** by the Historic Preservation Commission on January 17, 2018.

Jonas P. Ionin
Commission Secretary

AYES:

NAYS:

ABSENT:

ADOPTED: January 17, 2018

**OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION**

1725 23rd Street, Suite 100
SACRAMENTO, CA 95816
(916) 445-7000 Fax: (916) 445-7053
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MEETING NOTICE

FOR: State Historical Resources Commission Quarterly Meeting

DATE: Friday, February 2, 2018

TIME: 9:00 A.M.

PLACE: State Resources Building—Auditorium
1416 9th Street
Sacramento, California 95814

This room is accessible to people with disabilities. Questions regarding the meeting should be directed to the Registration Unit (916) 445-7008.



DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Lisa Ann L. Mangat, Director

Julianne Polanco, State Historic Preservation Officer
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November 29, 2017

Tim Frye, Historic Preservation Officer
San Francisco Planning Department
1650 Mission Street, Suite 400
San Francisco, California 94102

**RE: Historic Preservation Commission Review and Comment on the Nomination of
Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment) to the National Register of Historic Places**

Dear Mr. Frye:

Pursuant to the Certified Local Government Agreement between the Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) and your governmental entity, we are providing your historic preservation commission with a sixty (60) day review and comment period before the State Historical Resources Commission (SHRC) takes action on the above-stated National Register of Historic Places (National Register) nomination at its next meeting. Details on the meeting are enclosed.

As a Certified Local Government under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, your commission may prepare a report as to whether or not such property, in its opinion, meets the criteria for the National Register. Your commission's report should be presented to the Chief Elected Local Official for transmission, along with their comments, to California State Parks, Attn: Office of Historic Preservation, Julianne Polanco, State Historic Preservation Officer, 1725 23rd Street, Suite 100, Sacramento, California 95816. So that the SHRC may have adequate time to consider the comments, it is requested, but not required, that OHP receives written comments fifteen (15) days before the SHRC's meeting. If you have questions or require further information, please contact the Registration Unit at (916) 445-7009.

As of January 1, 1993, all National Register properties are automatically included in the California Register of Historical Resources and afforded consideration in accordance with state and local environmental review procedures.

Supplemental information on the National Register is available at our website at the following address: www.ohp.parks.ca.gov.

Thank you for your assistance in this program.

Sincerely,

Julianne Polanco
State Historic Preservation Officer

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

DRAFT

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)

Other names/site number: Coit Tower

Name of related multiple property listing: _____

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 1 Telegraph Hill Boulevard

City or town: San Francisco State: California County: San Francisco

Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A B C D

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title : State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☐
Public – Local ☒
Public – State ☐
Public – Federal ☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☒
District ☐
Site ☐
Structure ☐
Object ☐

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: monument/marker

RECREATION AND CULTURE/work of art

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: monument/marker

RECREATION AND CULTURE/work of art

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT: Art Deco

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Reinforced Concrete

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Coit Memorial Tower, more popularly referred to as Coit Tower, is located at 1 Telegraph Hill Boulevard, in San Francisco. Designed in the Art Deco style by noted architect Arthur Brown, Jr. as a commemorative monument and observation tower, it was built during the Great Depression, largely financed by a bequest to the City and County of San Francisco from Lillie Hitchcock Coit. At a height of 182 feet, the unpainted, reinforced concrete tower is a three-part cylindrical composition (shaft, belvedere, and lantern) that rises from a squared, cubic base. The basic form, the fluted shaft, rises to two upper elements that both function as observation decks. Coit Tower is located atop Telegraph Hill, within the boundaries of public Pioneer Park. The tower's immediate setting is defined by mature trees and greenery, staircases, terraces and walkways, and views in all directions. Coit Tower's interior walls at the first and second floors, and in the winding stairway that connects both floors, are covered with twenty-seven murals that comprise a large-scale, fresco, New Deal art project titled *Aspects of Life in California, 1934*. Coit Tower retains a high level of integrity on both the exterior and interior.

Narrative Description

Site Description

Within the boundaries of the public 4.89-acre Pioneer Park, Coit Tower is located atop Telegraph Hill, historically an important and strategic vantage point. Pedestrians access Pioneer Park from

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

the residential neighborhoods east and west of the site via staircases on Filbert and Greenwich Streets; the staircases are of concrete, brick, or rough-hewn stone. Vehicles access the site via Telegraph Hill Boulevard, a narrow, two-lane paved road that winds around the hill and terminates at the summit in the circular parking lot in front of Coit Tower. The parking area is bounded by a sidewalk, a low wall measuring 18" in height, and bands of concrete, terraced (bleacher) seating on the east that separates the public area from the planted downward slopes. At the center of the parking lot is a large, raised planting bed encircled by a curb and railing above; at the center is a statue of Christopher Columbus, erected in 1957.

A monumental staircase to Coit Tower ascends from the south side of the parking lot to a landscaped plaza that leads to the tower's entrance. Mounted to the base of the staircase, facing north is a bronze plaque, spanning 16' 8", which provides historical information and acknowledges donors; it was installed circa 1995. Walkways from the landscaped plaza extend around the tower's east and west sides and converge at the rear (south). On the south side of the tower, exits lead to an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible terrace, the South Lawn, and the south-facing viewing points beyond, where a generally quieter, garden-like feeling prevails.

Minor site features not counted as resources within the nominated property boundary (the City parcel lot lines) include a utility outbuilding on the hill's west slope, and a foot-operated water fountain on the monumental staircase landing. Both features date to the original 1933 construction. The drinking fountain was produced and installed by the Murdock Manufacturing and Supply Co. of Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1933.¹

According to the general description of the building in the 1932 project specifications by architect Arthur Brown, Jr., Coit Tower was built as designed. Coit Tower retains its original appearance as described in the project specifications. Minor modifications have been made to meet accessibility requirements.

Coit Tower, Description of Exterior and Overall Organization

At a height of 182 feet, the unpainted, reinforced concrete tower is a three-part cylindrical composition (shaft, belvedere, and lantern) that rises from a squared, cubic base. The basic form, the fluted shaft, rises to two upper elements that both function as observation decks: an arcaded composition (the Belvedere Level), which is topped by an open-air circular crown (the Lantern Level). The interior of the tower is formed by two concentric cylinders housing a series of curved stairways and an elevator shaft at the center. The elevator accesses the second floor and the Belvedere Level.

A motif of arched openings is at play at the tower's upper levels. Distinguishing the Belvedere Level are eight, high arched openings and a pre-cast concrete balustrade, which fronts the narrow

¹ In 2015, the Murdock Company repaired, restored and re-installed the drinking fountain. At that time, the City realigned the water and drain line connections.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)

Name of Property

San Francisco, California

County and State

observation walkway behind. Stairs that ascend from the elevator landing on the Belvedere level access the Lantern Level. From the Lantern Level it is another 32 feet to the top of the tower.

The 32-foot high cubic base is comprised of a segmental colonnade on three sides (east, south, and west), each side containing 4 ornamental columns separated by floor to ceiling glazing in the form of steel framed windows and doors. The north side is the location of the entrance portico. The wide staircase from the parking lot leads to a north-facing, recessed principal entrance within the portico, which is flanked by a pair of fluted columns. The south side is the location of a rear entrance where three pair of steel-framed doors open onto a raised deck.

Around the base of the tower are a series of exterior steps, walkways, terraces and broad landings. Their design is well integrated with the landscaped planting beds and provides a transition to the mature trees and vegetation surrounding the base.

Materials

The tower is built with reinforced concrete throughout, including foundations, walls, floors, stairways, and terraces. The exterior concrete surfaces are finished with a dash coat of white cement. Interior finishes are wood and plaster with a concrete stairway. During construction, the outer reinforced concrete surfaces of Coit Tower were shaped with plywood forms, a new technique of the time that facilitated the creation of the curving flutes of the tower. According to the original specifications, the concrete was strengthened by adding diatomaceous earth.²

Flat roof decks at the second floor, Belvedere Level, and Lantern Level were finished with 6"x 9" quarry roofing tiles. Fenestration includes steel windows at the first floor gallery and Lantern Level; narrow, casement type, slit windows illuminating the corners of the main floor, upper stair landings, and storage rooms; and, round pivot windows at the elevator machine room and the stairway to the Lantern Level. Steel railings are located along the entrance steps, at the south terrace, and elsewhere at the tower base.

Decorative Exterior Elements

Decorative elements at the exterior of Coit Tower include an original 1933 bronze commemorative plaque by sculptor Haig Patigian mounted to the north wall east of the main entrance. Over the entry is a cast, high relief tablet by sculptor Robert Boardman Howard, brother of architect Henry Temple Howard, which depicts a phoenix, the mythical Greek bird rising from the ashes, a symbol of San Francisco since the 1850s.³ Flanking the phoenix are two bundled fasces, traditional symbols of republican government, dating to Roman times.

² Architectural Resources Group, *Coit Memorial Tower Historic Structure Report*, June 2012, 5.

³ Four members of the Howard family were involved at Coit Tower, including Robert and Henry as noted. Jane Berlandina, wife of Henry Howard, painted *Home Life*. John Langley Howard contributed *California Industrial Scenes*. In 1988, eight members of the Howard family were the subject of a major exhibit at the Oakland Museum of California, titled *The Howards: First Family of Bay Area Modernism*. The show documented the family's profound and lasting effect on the development of the San Francisco Bay Area art community.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)

Name of Property

San Francisco, California

County and State

Bronze signage (circa 1995) that spans the base of the monumental stair at the parking lot level is a non-historic element.

Coit Tower Interior

The tower's primary public spaces are located at the first floor interior, where wide hallways or corridors, forming a squared "O" in plan, serve as circulation spaces and galleries that wrap the tower shaft. The hallways, or galleries, on the east, south, and west are almost fully glazed and capture natural light. Other spaces on the first floor include an elevator lobby, gift shop, and mechanical room; a pair of compact restrooms flanks the main entry lobby. Curving stairs lead from the elevator lobby to the second floor, location of another gallery, the former Keeper's Quarters, and access to the roof deck over the base of the tower. Used as an office, the former Keeper's Quarters was a three-room apartment that is partially built over the main entrance at the north. The curving stairs and storage spaces continue to ascend, encircling the elevator shaft, with landings at ten additional floor and mezzanine levels before terminating at the Lantern Level. Original steel-framed and Kalamein doors remain in use. The steel-framed doors were originally coated in aluminum paint, and now exhibit many layers of paint. The motif of arched openings recurs, and can be seen in recessed niches, wall planes, openings, and windows.

Decorative Interior Elements

Apart from the murals, Coit Tower's other decorative interior features include original interior ceiling-mounted light fixtures and sconces throughout and a double elevator door patterned with ornamental, geometric fretwork. At the east side of the north wall is a bronze plaque placed by Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) commemorating the inner signal station on Telegraph Hill (1849) and the first western telegraph station (1853).

Description of Murals

Coit Tower's interior walls at the first and second floors, and in the winding stairway that connects both floors, are covered with twenty-seven murals. The murals were produced by a group of twenty-five master artists (four women and twenty-one men), seventeen assistant artists (thirteen men, four women), seven laborers (three men, four women), and two plasterers (both men), all enlisted by the Public Works of Art Project, Region 15, to depict variations on the theme of "the contemporary American Scene in all its various aspects."⁴ In all, the artwork covers 3,691 square feet of interior wall space.

Unifying Elements, Fresco Technique, Palette, Mexican Influence

Visually, the individual mural designs and their execution were unified by the medium of fresco, a consistent earth-toned palette, figurative content, and the overall influence of the Mexican mural movement of the 1920s. Twenty-three of the twenty-seven murals are frescoes carried out in the *fresco buono* technique in which the images are painted directly onto fresh plaster. The resulting artwork is integrated with the walls and is more durable.⁵

⁴ Masha Zakheim, *Coit Tower, San Francisco: Its History and Art*, 1983 (Reprint, Volcano, CA: Volcano Press, 2009), 22; *Public Works of Art Project, Region No. 15 Report by Walter Heil, December 1933 to 1934*, Archives of American Art.

⁵ Murals not carried out in the fresco technique are those in the elevator lobby, which are oil on canvas. One mural

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Most Coit Tower artists painted in the style of the Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco, utilizing the same intense saturated colors, an earthen color palette, rounded forms, two-dimensional overlappings, and standardized scale.

Themes and Content

Titled *Aspects of Life in California, 1934*, the murals are organized around four major themes: agriculture, industry, city life, and recreation and leisure in California, especially the Bay Area, in 1934. The scenes depict social, political, and economic concerns of the 1930s as well as San Francisco bay landscapes. The murals are grouped by theme, and experienced by the viewer sequentially, with rural illustrations on the east side of the ground floor, industrial depictions on the west, city life on the south and along the staircase to the second floor, and recreation and home life on the second floor.

The ground floor was designated for California agriculture, industry, and the “city life resulting from both.”⁶ The four largest locations are on the interior walls and were assigned to experienced fresco muralists. Eight smaller murals were done on the exterior walls, and tall figures were painted on either side of the three windows. From the tower’s main entrance, agricultural scenes are on the left, including dairy farming, cattle raising, and meatpacking. Maxine Albro’s large mural featuring viticulture, fruit and vegetable raising, and flower cultivation faces the east window. A department store lunch counter and wine shop, on the east wall of the southeast corner, and the Grain Exchange on the south wall of the southeast corner provide a transition from agriculture to the urban consumption of agricultural produce. The murals on the south wall depict banking, the stock market, the law, science, and a public library. Victor Arnatoff’s large mural of city life faces the south window. Newspaper publishing, on the west wall next to the public library, provides the transition to California industries, including oil refining, metal working, and food processing in Ralph Stackpole’s large mural facing the west window, along with smaller murals depicting railroad and maritime transportation and an oil field, a hydroelectric dam, and mining.

The content of many of the scenes was also informed by contemporaneous events, local, national and international. The vast majority of art at Coit Tower shows “everyday life without incident.”⁷ For example, the murals illustrate people toiling or at a lunch counter, a fashionable downtown crowd, collegians at sport, and campers. The murals capture San Francisco and the Bay Area at a specific moment. San Francisco’s hotels, cable cars, restaurants, newspaper headlines, and billboards convey a keen sense of events in early 1934.

The muralists, many of whom lived in the North Beach area and were affiliated with the California School of Fine Arts (later the San Francisco Art Institute) on nearby Russian Hill, drew inspiration and ideas from places within walking distance of Coit Tower. For example, the salami factories of North Beach, the offices and printing presses of the *San Francisco Chronicle*

on the second floor is executed in egg tempera on plaster.

⁶ Zakheim, *Coit Tower*, 22.

⁷ Zakheim, *Coit Tower*, 38.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)

Name of Property

San Francisco, California

County and State

newspaper building at 5th and Mission Streets, and financial district scenes provided artists with subjects for sketching. Other muralists roamed the city, sketchpad in hand.

Controversial Content

Consistent with the prevalent mood of the era, several artists incorporated into their murals more overt political messages and provocative images of labor. Although the Coit Tower murals became associated with political controversy, this was somewhat overstated, even at the time. One local art critic called it “the tempest in the Coit Memorial teapot.”⁸ The legacy of the Coit Tower murals’ political controversy reappeared throughout later New Deal art programs nationwide as administrators closely supervised federal art projects to avoid such controversies.

Description of Individual Murals

The architectural symmetry of the ground floor interior and the variety of wall planes was advantageous for dividing surfaces for individual murals. Thematically unified and interrelated, the content of the murals is presented sequentially and logically as the viewer moves around the gallery, viewing rural scenes on the east side of the ground floor, urban life on the south, and industrial depictions on the west.

The murals are described in counterclockwise sequence, following the visitors’ path of travel, beginning at the north (main) entrance, moving from right to left, north to west to south to east, around the ground floor of the tower.⁹

North Wall (mural facing north)

Animal Force & Machine Force by Raymond Sceptre Boynton (1883-1951)

Technique: *fresco buono*

Upon entry, this capacious mural (10’ x 36’) is important because it introduces visitors to the artwork. As such, this fresco was designed to carry out several important functions. It depicts two major themes throughout, the rural and the industrial scenes of California in 1934. It also subtly orients visitors to the physical division of subject matter with rural illustrations on the east side of the ground floor and industrial depictions on the west. This north-facing mural also serves as the thematic counterpart to Arnautoff’s south-facing *City Life* located on the opposite side of the tower.¹⁰ A boy painted into an existing alcove holds a book with text that introduces the visitor to “Coit Tower 1933” and the “Public Works of Art Project 1934.” Some scholars have suggested that the somewhat drooping, over-scaled eyes painted over the arched lobby entrance at the center are those of artist Diego Rivera, implying a larger-than-life figure symbolically overseeing the project.

North Wall (mural facing south)

California Industrial Scenes by John Langley Howard (1902-1999)

Technique: *fresco buono*

⁸ Junius Cravens, *San Francisco News*, July 7, 1934, 8.

⁹ Information on mural content and interpretation is largely synthesized from Masha Zakheim, *Coit Tower, San Francisco: Its History and Art* pages 41-112.

¹⁰ Zakheim, *Coit Tower*, 42.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)

Name of Property

San Francisco, California

County and State

Located at the northwest corner, the dimensions of this mural are 10' by 24'. The mural depicts industry of the State such as construction, oil-well drilling, mining, hydroelectric power, and orchard enterprises. In addition to industrial scenes, the mural conveys powerful social statements and juxtaposes contrasting figures, the affluent alongside a poor, migrant family. Included in the mural is one of two African Americans in the Coit Tower project, a worker toward the front of a phalanx of laborers. This mural was one of two Coit Tower murals that was altered by city officials before Coit Tower was opened to the public. As painted by the artist, this mural included an image of the *Western Worker*, a Communist Party newspaper, tucked under the arm of a man participating in a demonstration on May Day, a traditional international labor holiday. Without the artist's knowledge or consent, the words "Western Worker" across the top of the newspaper were painted over before the tower was opened to the public.¹¹

West Wall (mural facing east)

Railroad and Shipping by William Jürgen Hesthal (1908-1985)

Technique: *fresco buono*

Located at the northwest corner, the dimensions of this mural are 10' by 10'. The artist depicts the sluggish transportation industry in the 1930s symbolized by a ship in port and an idle train, both going nowhere, and attended to by several workers. Some of the workers are clearing the tracks of weeds and a flagman seems to be warning of the imminent approach of the train, perhaps an invocation of the coming economic revival under the New Deal. The Third Street Bridge at China Basin was completed in 1933 and appears in the background.

West Wall (mural facing east)

Surveyor and Ironworker by Clifford Seymour Wight (1891-1961)

Technique: *fresco buono*

Located on the west wall, flanking the window wall and colonnade, the two figures presented on these 10' x 4' panels offset the *Cowboy and Farmer* on the east wall. Here a surveyor stands near a tripod mounted with a level looking in the direction of an ironworker weighed down by heavy equipment and other tools. The areas immediately above these frescoes originally contained other small murals by Wight, including a hammer and sickle, that were deemed by the government to be controversial and were no longer visible when Coit Tower officially opened to the public in October 1934.

West Wall (mural facing west)

Industries of California by Ralph Ward Stackpole (1885-1973)

Technique: *fresco buono*

Measuring 10' x 36', this mural's assemblage of vignettes of industrial activities is the thematic counterpart to Maxine Albro's expansive mural depicting a range of agricultural activities. Stackpole's mural depicts male and female laborers as chemical workers, steel workers, and sugar and food processing employees, all major components of California's industrial economy at the time. This mural is one of three (see also *Powell Street* by Lucien Labaudt and *California*

¹¹ *California Art Research*, Volume 17. WPA Project, 1937, 69-78.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)

Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Industrial Scenes by John Langley Howard) that includes representations of individuals of color. Stackpole painted canning plant workers who appear to be Asian American or of Asian descent.

In this mural Stackpole created what Masha Zakheim describes as “large modeled shapes in the industrial pipes, barrels, storage tanks, and machinery characterized by the convoluted plastic forms reminiscent of Diego Rivera’s in Detroit”—the *Detroit Industry* frescoes, which portray the automotive business.¹² Other scholars have noted similarities to Rivera’s Detroit project, which is not surprising since the two men were close. Stackpole was largely responsible for bringing Diego Rivera to San Francisco in 1930 and hosted Rivera at his studio on Telegraph Hill while he stayed in the city.

Assistant artist Helen Clement Mills appears in Stackpole’s mural, as does artist William Hesthal. The logo of the National Recovery Administration, a blue eagle, appears here as well as in the murals by Maxine Albrow and Suzanne Scheuer.

West Wall (mural facing east)

Newsgathering by Suzanne Scheuer (1898-1984)

Technique: *fresco buono*

The theme of this 10’ by 10’ mural has to do with all aspects of newspaper production. To understand the process, the artist sketched at the offices and printing plant of the *San Francisco Chronicle* on Mission Street. Starting in the lower right corner of her mural and moving counterclockwise, the artist illustrates the complexity of the newspaper production process in 1934—gathering information, writing stories, typesetting pages, printing the papers, and selling them on the street. She painted the window alcove in the middle of her mural with the four-color process used to produce a comic strip. The mural includes a headline about the completion of the Coit Tower murals dated April 1934—before the longshoremen’s strike and disturbances related to Coit Tower delayed its inauguration. Assistant artist Hebe Daum collaborated on this mural.¹³

South Wall (mural facing north)

Library by Bernard Baruch Zakheim (1896-1985)

Technique: *fresco buono*

On a wall opposite the law library fresco, and measuring 10’ by 10’, this mural speaks to the concepts of freedom of expression based on a scene in a public library reading room. The scene is crowded with well-known figures, book spines, and bold newspaper headlines about such timely topics as the destruction of Rivera’s fresco at Rockefeller Center, a commission for sculptor Benjamin Bufano, mortgage foreclosures, and other issues of the day. The muralist included likenesses of artist Fred Olmsted and William Gerstle, a local arts patron and civic leader. The mural abounds with likenesses of Zakheim’s colleagues, friends, and family, specifically the artist’s young daughter, Ruth, and his assistants for this mural, Julia Rogers and Shirley Staschen. A figure, artist John Langley Howard, removes a copy of Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital* from the library shelves. Col. Harold Mack of the PWAP supervisory committee stands

¹² Zakheim, *Coit Tower*, 54.

¹³ Hebe Daum later married the photographer Peter Stackpole, son of Ralph Stackpole.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)

Name of Property

San Francisco, California

County and State

in front, carefully monitoring the entire scene. Overall, the library scene pays homage to literature, education, and political awareness.

South Wall (mural facing north)

Stockbroker and Scientist-Inventor by Harold Mallette Dean (1907-1975)

Technique: *fresco buono*

Two tall 10' by 4' panels are located on the south wall on either side of the southern window wall and exits. Similar in scale, form, proportion, and subject matter, the artist depicts a pair of looming, icon-like single figures, a stockbroker and a scientist-inventor. Both figures are modeled on actual individuals. The stockbroker resembles local financier A. P. Giannini, founder of the Bank of America. The scientist-inventor resembles Nobel prizewinning physicist Albert Michelson. The artist demonstrated his own inventiveness by painting a small-scale observatory behind Michelson's right leg, transforming an existing light switch plate into the observatory door.

South Wall (mural facing south)

City Life by Victor Mikhail Arnautoff (1896-1979)

Technique: *fresco buono*

One of the liveliest Coit Tower frescoes, this panel measures 10' by 36' and depicts the dynamic street life of San Francisco, showing many significant landmarks and making numerous cultural and architectural references including City Hall, the main branch of the San Francisco public library, and the Pacific Coast Stock Exchange fronted by the statues done by Ralph Stackpole. This busy urban scene is formed by a series of vignettes of downtown San Francisco locations surrounding a well-stocked newspaper stand where many figures are gathered, including the artist (a self-portrait) and his son, painted as a newsboy. A signpost marks the corner of Montgomery and Washington Streets, the northern end of the Financial District and location of the famed "Monkey Block," a building that was the center of San Francisco's art scene and had housed artists' and writers' studios for over 100 years. It was demolished in 1959. An image of the former city produce market on the mural's east side connects thematically to the fresco depicting agriculture just around the corner. Similarly, a group of industrial workers on the mural's west side connects to *Industries of California* around the corner to the left.

South Wall (mural facing north)

Banking and Law by George Albert Harris (1913-1991)

Technique: *fresco buono*

Measuring 10' by 10', the mural illustrates the themes of finance and law, depicting the District 12 Federal Reserve Bank, the Grain Exchange, a stock ticker with a graph of plummeting stock prices, and a law library. The books that line the shelves of the law library have curious titles, some serious, some satirizing the muralist's fellow artists and hinting at inside jokes with names of Coit Tower artists (his included) as authors of various books. The muralist included likenesses of artist Fred Olmsted and arts patron William Gerstle.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)

Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

East Wall (mural facing west)

Department Store by Frede Jensen Vidar (1911-1967)

Technique: *fresco buono*

This mural at the southeast corner marks the transition from agriculture (the panels to its left, on the north side) to the *City Life* section, as the theme of food production shifts to food consumption and consumerism. This panel measures 10' by 10' and illustrates the interior of a typical 1930s department store with a soda fountain, fabric counter, toyshop, and music and clothing departments. The scene is peopled with customers and sales clerks. Other symbols that reflect the politics and events of the time are a Star of David on the cap of the lunch counter waitress, and mentions of Hitler, the Civil Works Administration, and the destruction of the Rivera mural in the newspaper. At the lunch counter, a menu describes typical 1934 dishes and prices. The artist takes advantage of a recessed window alcove to illustrate the shelves of a wine shop, perhaps a comment on the end of Prohibition, which occurred just a few weeks before the artists began their work.

East Wall (mural facing west)

Farmer and Cowboy by Clifford Seymour Wight (1891-1961)

Technique: *fresco buono*

On two panels, each measuring 10' by 4', the artist depicts two solitary figures, a cowboy and a farmer, on either side of a large expanse of east-facing window wall. Both are dominant figures of California rural life. The figures correlate to *Stockbroker and Scientist-Inventor* on the south wall and *Surveyor and Ironworker* on the east wall, also by Wight. The cowboy figure is thought to be a self-portrait of Wight.

East Wall (mural facing east)

California Agriculture by Maxine Albro (1903-1966)

Technique: *fresco buono*

This expansive fresco, measuring 10' by 42', depicts a well-balanced and bucolic scene of farm workers, mostly dressed in white, happily harvesting crops in almond orchards, apricot trees, and fields of cultivated flowers. The logo of the National Recovery Administration (NRA) on the boxes of oranges is the only indication that this scene exists in the middle of the Great Depression. Fellow artists portrayed by Albro are Ralph Stackpole, the artist's future husband Parker Hall, and assistant artist Helen Clement Mills. The incorporation of calla lilies, a symbol associated with Diego Rivera, is likely a gesture acknowledging Albro's appreciation of the Mexican muralist and perhaps a subtle reference to the destruction of Rivera's Rockefeller Center mural, an event that took place in February 1934 as the Coit Tower artists were in the early stages of their work.

East Wall (mural facing west)

Meat Industry by Raymond Clarence Bertrand (1909-1986)

Technique: *fresco buono*

The focus of this 10' x 10' fresco is the butchering of hogs and the curing of salami and sausages, processes that occurred nearby in the 1930s in North Beach's well-known Italian salami factories. A large, butchered hog dominates the composition as a worker uses a flame to

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)

Name of Property

San Francisco, California

County and State

sing the skin. The artist takes advantage of a recessed window alcove to create a symmetrical smokehouse hung with sausages.

North Wall (mural facing south)

California Agricultural Industry by Gordon Langdon (1910-1963)

Technique: *fresco buono*

The artist used his family ranch at Olema, California, and the surrounding Point Reyes landscapes as the inspiration for this mural. Measuring 10' x 27', the mural depicts the timber and dairy industries incorporating images of a lumber mill, forests, a dairy barn and cows. As Masha Zakheim points out, "In the distance one sees a dairy truck, more forest, then sky, as if to suggest the infinite riches of agricultural California."¹⁴ As in other Coit Tower murals, artist Langdon included likenesses of his fellow artists, in this case, Lucien Labaudt, John Langley Howard, Fred Olmsted, assistant artist Tom Hayes, Ralph Stackpole, and himself.

North Wall (mural facing south)

Power by Frederick Erskine Olmsted, Jr. (1911-1990)

Technique: *fresco buono*

Located within a three-foot panel above the main entrance, the mural depicts a powerful clenched fist (a left-handed fist) bursting through flames to symbolize power. The mural serves as a transition between the two murals on either side, *California Industrial Scenes* (to the west) and *California Agricultural Industry* (to the east).

The following artwork is located in the circular elevator lobby on the ground floor. All were painted offsite, on canvas and installed as finished works, as opposed to the fresco technique used for other murals within Coit Tower. All illustrate scenes of the bay landscape.

San Francisco Bay by Otis Oldfield (1890-1969)

Technique: oil on canvas

This painting is an oil on canvas, set within a recessed niche measuring 9' x 54". Oldfield uses a device, treating the canvas as a window from which the viewer's vantage point would give way to this actual bay view. The view from the top of Telegraph Hill depicts boat traffic, docked ships at the waterfront, the Easy Bay hills in the distance—with the faint campanile marking the campus at the University of California, Berkeley, and the northern tip of Yerba Buena Island in the middle of the bay. This view predates construction of the Golden Gate and Bay Bridges and the artificial Treasure Island (1936-1937) at the northern end of Yerba Buena Island.

This bay vista would have been quite familiar to Oldfield as his home and studio were also located on the eastern slope of Telegraph Hill below Coit Tower and shared the same view. The building at the lower right hand corner of Oldfield's painting is likely his home and studio at 1405 Montgomery Street. The two small girls standing next the house are Oldfield's daughters, Jayne and Rhoda.

¹⁴ Zakheim, *Coit Tower*, 83.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)

Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

San Francisco Bay, North by Jose Moya del Pino (1891-1969)

Technique: oil on canvas

Designed in tandem with Oldfield's *San Francisco Bay*, this canvas forms the other half of a diptych, with a matching concept and perspective, arrangement of elements, composition, color, and dimension, 9' x 54". Both employ the window device to showcase an actual bay view, in this case a more northerly vista from the top of Telegraph Hill. The view depicts warehouses at the base of the hill, the waterfront piers, ships at sea, the eastern end of Alcatraz, and the Marin hills in the distance. As in Oldfield's piece, the viewer sees two figures from behind, looking outward, in the lower right hand corner. The artist, Moya, pictured himself and his friend and colleague Otis Oldfield (at left) at work, capturing the view.

Bay Area Hills by Rinaldo Cuneo (1877-1939)

Technique: oil on canvas

This pair of arched canvases depicts the rich farmlands of the Santa Clara Valley and the East Bay hills. The canvases show blossoming trees, vineyards, and in each canvas, a solitary figure in the foreground. The paintings are set within recessed niches and each measure 9' x 54".

Seabirds and Bay Area Map by Otis Oldfield (1890-1969)

Technique: oil on canvas

These three paintings, all oil on canvas, in the shape of lunettes, fill the arched, semi-circular spaces above door openings. Two depict scenes of bay birds—seagulls and pelicans—in flight. The third is a stylized bay map, designed around a central compass that is the elevator floor indicator.

The largest single fresco at Coit Tower, *Powell Street*, painted as two 6' x 32' panels, was executed along both sides of the curving stairway to the second floor. Because of its location, it is available for viewing only as part of specially supervised mural tours and by special appointment.

Powell Street by Lucien Adolphe Labaudt (1880-1943)

Technique: *fresco buono*

Depicting a Powell Street streetscape crowded with people, buildings, and typical activities, this view rises steeply toward the top of Nob Hill as the visitor ascends to the second floor. Labaudt specifically requested the curving walls on both sides of the staircase to carry out his concept. Representing a snapshot of life in fashionable San Francisco, the fresco is full of rich detail and recognizable San Francisco landmarks, such as architect Timothy Pflueger's 450 Sutter Street, the artist's own studio, the Bank of America branch at Powell and Market, cable cars, and, many popular restaurants and hotels. The mural is singular for the depiction of so many figures, with almost every face representing an actual individual, a colleague or well-known personality, including many of the Coit Tower artists. Portraits of Eleanor Roosevelt and Edward Bruce convey Labaudt's way of thanking these influential supporters of the PWAP. The mural also includes an Asian figure and one of two African Americans in the entire Coit Tower project. The figures represent fellow Coit Tower muralist, Takeo Edward Terada, and a hotel bellhop carrying suitcases. Assistant artists Cletus Fisher and Merlin Hardy collaborated on this mural.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

The second floor murals depict recreation, sports, children at play, hunting, outdoor life, and home life. Because of their sensitive location, these murals are available for viewing only as part of specially supervised mural tours and by special appointment. The three rooms on the second floor, originally used as the Keeper's Quarters (later offices), were left undecorated.

Children at Play by Ralph Alexander Chessé (1900-1991)

Technique: *fresco buono*

This mural measures 9' x 6' and depicts a children's playground set in a park with rolling hills, elongated trees, a pond, and a sandbox, all connected by a winding gravel path. The figures of children are scattered throughout the scene, focused on various toys or undertaking activities, sailing boats, sliding, jumping rope, digging in sand. The faces of the children are notable for their adult features and expressions.

Collegiate Sports by Parker Lee Hall (1898-1982)

Technique: *fresco buono*

Filling a corner, this fresco measures 9' by 13' and depicts numerous vignettes of teams and individuals partaking in a variety of campus sports, badminton, tennis, swimming, baseball, and basketball. Over a stairway arch, a football game is in progress between longtime rivals Stanford University and the University of California, Berkeley, a local tradition known as the Big Game.

Sports by Takeo Edward Terada (1908-1993)

Technique: *fresco buono*

Like the adjacent mural depicting collegiate sports, this mural of similar dimensions, 9' by 10', fills two walls of a corner and depicts scenes of Olympic athletes, golfers and polo players on horseback. A full round sun, above a door opening, separates these two sports-themed murals.

Outdoor Life by Benjamin Frazier Cunningham (1904-1975)

Technique: *fresco buono*

Depicting a scene of outdoor recreation with various individuals and placid animals in a wooded landscape of stylized trees, other flora, and fauna, this fresco measures 9' by 22'. The symmetrical arrangement, carefully composed, is formed by a series of vignettes surrounding the central element, a creek-side picnic table amid a grove, formally set for a seated group of friends. Secondary figures undertaking activities span the lower half of the mural. These include a woman with a book napping against a tree trunk, a photographer, a boy wading in a creek, a woman bending over a camping stove, a man with a flute, and others. Cunningham used the existing door opening to form a base for the picnic table. Overall, the mural is said to have aesthetic qualities of a tapestry—reflecting Cunningham's training as a weaver.

Hunting in California by Edith Anne Hamlin (1902-1992)

Technique: *fresco buono*

Illustrating the theme of hunting as outdoor recreation, this fresco measures 9' by 12'. The mural shows a tracking dog at the ready, a duck hunter with his prize, wild geese flying free over a

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)

Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

calm water inlet, and graceful deer in a landscape of golden hills. This artwork was arranged on both sides of the elevator door opening.

Home Life by Jane Berlandina (1898-1970)

Technique: *fresco secco*, egg tempura

Berlandina's piece stands in contrast to all other murals that define the Coit Tower project. The mural was not done in fresco, rather it is executed in egg tempera, a technique in which pigments are mixed with egg yolk as a binder and applied to a specially prepared dry wall. Deviating in technique, palette, design, and feeling, this mural covers four walls of a second floor room apart from the other murals. While it is consistent with the theme of Californians at play, it doesn't connect or flow the way the other work does. Depicting scenes of domesticity and leisure, each wall is painted as a different room in the home of an affluent family. Strikingly different in tone from the solid and serious frescoes and oils in the rest of Coit Tower, this solitary room has a charmingly light spirit and may have been conceptualized as something of a fantasy that was remote from the reality of most Californians in 1933-1934.

Chronology of Building Alterations and Mural Conservation Efforts

Conservation of the Coit Tower murals appears to have occurred following cyclical patterns of recurring problems and damage generally caused by water infiltration at the ceilings and window openings, etched graffiti, and, general wear and impact from visitors and building users resulting in areas of design loss. In general, the building has endured some periods of insufficient maintenance. Mural restoration and conservation efforts have been documented in 1960, 1975, 1988-1992, and 2012-2014.

1950s

Traces of early retouchings seem to indicate that minimal work may have been undertaken to address minor damage. Records of this work are scant.¹⁵

1960s

A 1960s campaign by well-regarded artists, including several of the original artists, was undertaken to restore the murals and repair damage. The work was primarily undertaken by artist Dorothy Puccinelli Cravath and plasterer John Wong; restorer Henry Rusk supervised repairs.¹⁶ While the effort was acceptable at the time, the methodology was to cover visual disturbances rather than addressing the root causes of deterioration. With regard to the mural restoration of 1960, artist Maxine Albro stated:

Dorothy Puccinelli did the repair work and I think it is the most wonderful piece of repairing that I have ever seen in any form of artwork... Here these things were frescoes

¹⁵ Anne Rosenthal, "Murals Assessment" in *Coit Memorial Tower Historic Structure Report* by Architectural Resources Group, June 2012, 19.

¹⁶ Emmy Lou Packard, *Report on the Restorations in Coit Tower*. Prepared for the City of San Francisco Department of Public Works, August 1975, Section 8.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

and the color of a fresco mellows and changes from year to year a little bit, you know.
But her colors... were exactly the same...¹⁷

In 1963, artist Suzanne Scheuer restored and repaired scratches to her own mural and “took the liberty to change the name [of the newspaper she painted] back to *Chronicle*.”¹⁸ Shortly after refurbishing the murals, Scheuer said:

Oh, a few scratches, yes, very slight. But Dorothy demanded such a meticulous job that it did take some time to do.¹⁹

In the years following the 1960s restoration, water seepage, graffiti, and visitor traffic continued to be problematic.²⁰

1975

In 1975, artist, muralist, and former assistant to Diego Rivera, Emmy Lou Packard was retained by the City of San Francisco Department of Public Works to clean and repair the murals. Packard’s scope of work included all first and second floor murals. The methodology for her work included extensive research and consultation with numerous institutions and individuals including Mexican muralist Pablo O’Higgins (1904-1983) who also served as assistant to Diego Rivera.²¹

1988-1992

In 1988, fine art conservator Anne Rosenthal led an assessment of damage to the frescoes. As the first phase of a two-phase effort, the most pressing concerns were remediated, such as removing efflorescence, strengthening plaster in eroded areas, and securing flaking paint. The San Francisco Arts Commission supervised the effort. The second phase, a comprehensive project to conserve, repair, and fully document the first and second floor frescoes, was completed in 1992. This effort generated photographs, reports, and line drawings, which established a baseline of conditions by which to measure future condition changes. The conservation work consisted of removing superfluous old retouchings, filling plaster losses, and inpainting by adding color to areas of loss while retaining all original surfaces.

Prior to the 1992 mural restoration work, a series of building repairs was completed that addressed major structural deficiencies including concrete cracking and spalling, decay of roofing membranes, repair of rusting rebar embedded in the concrete, and electrical system upgrades. The original exterior dash coat was removed by sandblasting and a new dash coat was applied. At the Belvedere level, the original cast stone balustrade was removed and a new

¹⁷ Oral history interview with Maxine Albro and Parker Hall, 27 July 1964, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁸ Oral history interview with Suzanne Scheuer, 29 July 1964, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Rosenthal, 19.

²¹ Emmy Lou Packard, *Report on the Restorations in Coit Tower*, prepared for the City of San Francisco Department of Public Works, August 1975.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

pre-cast balustrade was installed. Composite roofing was installed at the Belvedere and Lantern levels.²²

Despite the efforts, some of the leakage problems returned within a few years, as evidenced by recurring efflorescence and staining on the frescoes near the ceiling of the first floor, especially in the southern part of the east wall.

Also at that time, a barrier system was needed to protect the frescoes from visitor impact. The City commissioned a professionally designed barrier on the first floor. Replacing the former rope and stanchion system, the barrier is comprised of brass rails. Brass plates were installed at several of the doorways protecting fragile corners of the frescoed walls. Plexiglass panels protect vulnerable areas adjacent to the main door.²³

2012-2014

The City's Recreation and Parks Department initiated a comprehensive \$1.7 million rehabilitation of Coit Tower following voter approval of Proposition B, a Coit Tower preservation policy, in June 2012. This building rehabilitation and art restoration project necessitated the closing of Coit Tower for six months in late 2013. Completed in May 2014, the overall scope of work included re-roofing with a major focus on waterproofing the building—a problem that dated to the original construction and posed a problem even while the artists were working in 1934. Besides the waterproofing and the roof repairs, other work included an upgrade to the tower's aging plumbing and electrical systems and accessibility improvements, in addition to exterior repairs, door and window rehabilitation, re-painted interior finishes and tile repair, restroom upgrades, and mechanical and electrical improvements. The retail gift shop and commercial space was rehabilitated for a new concession operator, with improvements to exit signage and ADA signage. Exterior lighting was improved.

Mural restoration accounted for \$250,000 of the overall project amount. Fine art conservator Anne Rosenthal returned to complete a condition assessment of the murals for the San Francisco Art Commission at the start of the project. A team of art restoration experts did touchup and repair work on the murals. Other teams restored the stucco that frame the murals, and replastered and repainted the interior ceiling. Layers of paint on other painted surfaces (not murals) were removed to expose the first, original paint layer, actually revealing the original coating.

All work met the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* and was approved by the City of San Francisco Planning Department and Historic Preservation Commission. All art conservation work followed museum standards of practice, as outlined by the American Institute of Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC.)

Integrity

Coit Tower was constructed in 1933. There have been no major alterations to the building since it was constructed. No changes have been made to the form of the tower. All original physical

²² Architectural Resources Group, *Coit Memorial Tower Historic Structure Report*, June 2012, 5.

²³ Rosenthal, 20.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)

Name of Property

San Francisco, California

County and State

features of the tower are intact. Various campaigns of maintenance and repair have occurred over time. In general, this category of work has been carried out with attention to building code compliance, upgrades to building systems, and replacement of deteriorated materials such as roofing. Apart from repair and maintenance, changes over time have largely been limited to the setting, including the parking area, site features, landscaping, and modifications to address improved accessibility for disabled visitors. Since the original construction, no structural changes have been made to alter the ground floor interior circulation or circulation pattern, which is integral to reading and understanding the themes of the murals.

Despite several periods of insufficient maintenance since 1934, the Coit Tower murals retain a high degree of integrity in all seven aspects: location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, association, and feeling. Mural restoration and conservation efforts in 1960, 1975, 1989, and 2012-2014 have well served the artwork. Periodic mural restorations have been carried out by several of the original artists, by Rivera's former assistant, Emmy Lou Packard, and by certified fine art conservators. The frescoed plaster wall surfaces have never suffered any significant structural destruction. Recurring problems of water infiltration, graffiti, and visitor impacts were successfully addressed in 2014. The murals remain in remarkably good condition.

Coit Tower retains a high degree of integrity in all seven aspects: location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, association, and feeling. Though Coit Tower has endured some periods of deferred maintenance over time, it retains a high level of integrity on both the exterior and interior. The murals remain publicly accessible and much appreciated, a permanent testament to the lasting power of an investment made by a nation in its artists and their art. The murals at Coit Tower draw the attention of hundreds of thousands of visitors annually because they showcase the talents of American artists collaborating together to depict the reality of American life during the Great Depression.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☒ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ART

Period of Significance

1933-1934

Significant Dates

1933
1934

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Brown Jr., Arthur

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)

Name of Property

San Francisco, California

County and State

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

This nomination amends the 2008 National Register nomination in order to document Coit Memorial Tower at the national level of significance. Coit Memorial Tower is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C in the area of Art. Coit Tower, as it is more popularly known—a commemorative monument and observation tower constructed in 1933—rises to the national level of significance because it is intrinsically associated with the extraordinary permanent exhibition of federally funded art created through the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). The Coit Tower mural project was the single largest PWAP venture in the country and the most ambitious test of whether federally funded arts programs could work. Its success served as a model for an array of New Deal arts programs that followed. The Coit Tower murals possess exceptional value in interpreting the themes of the Great Depression and New Deal idealism and in showcasing the work of twenty-five of the region's finest artists, including four women. This extensive fresco undertaking, titled *Aspects of Life in California, 1934*, is an unusual example of a large group of muralists working in unison. The murals' content and expression were directly influenced by Diego Rivera. They comprised the most extensive use of fresco technique up to that time, which until then had been rare. Because Coit Tower is the location of this exceptional New Deal financed art project, the property is eligible at the national level of significance. The period of significance, 1933 to 1934, encompasses construction of the tower, completion of the frescoed murals, and public inauguration of the building. Originally designed and intended as a commemorative civic monument, Coit Tower was named in honor of a historical figure, Lillie Hitchcock Coit, whose wealth financed its construction. As a property exceptionally significant apart from the value of the person memorialized by the monument, Coit Memorial Tower satisfies Criteria Consideration F: Commemorative Properties.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Site History

Historically, the summit of Telegraph Hill has been an important vantage point and was the site of a nautical semaphore or marine telegraph in 1850. After destruction of the telegraph, civic leaders purchased the four, vacant 50-vara lots in 1876 for the purpose of maintaining open space and establishing Pioneer Park.²⁴ In 1923, John McLaren, San Francisco's first Superintendent of Parks, approved a major improvement plan for Pioneer Park and Telegraph Hill. The plan designed by architect G. Albert Lansburgh provided Telegraph Hill with a paved roadway that circled the hill and ascended to the summit terminating in a circular parking lot, a walkway and balustrade at the parking lot perimeter, stepped terraces for viewing, and an esplanade, the open leveled space at the summit that later became the site of Coit Tower.

²⁴ David F. Myrick, *San Francisco's Telegraph Hill*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: City Lights Foundation, 2001), 69.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Coit Tower's setting was further improved in the mid-1930s by a project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which landscaped the site and resulted in the construction of rubble walls, concrete retaining walls, red rock coping, concrete sidewalks and paths, and the planting of shrubs. In 1939, Assistant City Engineer Clyde E. Healy stated that Telegraph Hill,

is now one of the most attractive observation points in San Francisco with its beautiful Coit Tower, landscaped walks and slopes held in place by huge rocks set in place as if by the hand of Nature. The rock steps, walls, paths and landscaped embankments make a safe retreat and a picture of rare beauty. As an example of artificial landscaping this has excited the admiration of eminent landscape architects.²⁵

Design and Construction of the Tower

Completed in October 1933, Coit Memorial Tower was made possible by the generosity of Lillie Hitchcock Coit, who died in 1929. Coit bequeathed a third of her estate, nearly \$100,000, to the City of San Francisco to be used for city beautification.²⁶ Contrary to many published accounts, Coit Tower was not intended to be a memorial to the City's firefighters, although some have chosen to celebrate it as such over the years.²⁷

To carry out Coit's intent, an advisory committee was formed and led by financier Herbert Fleishhacker. Fleishhacker was also politically well connected and a member of both the Park Commission and the newly created Art Commission. It was decided that a monument would be constructed on Telegraph Hill.²⁸

Coit Tower was designed by the noted San Francisco architectural firm Arthur Brown Jr. and Associates. Brown was responsible for the design concept, rendered by Henry Temple Howard. Much thought was given to the tower concept, its form and silhouette. According to the architects, it was important that the tower have the same profile when viewed from all directions.

²⁵ Clyde E. Healy, *San Francisco Improved: Report of Clyde E. Healy, Assistant City Engineer, City of San Francisco and Coordinator of W.P.A. Projects, October 10, 1935 to August 31, 1939* (San Francisco: [n.p.], 1939), 53. It is worth noting here that the *City of San Francisco General Plan Urban Design Element*, Policy 2.7, defines "Outstanding and Unique Areas" as being those that retain "unique characteristics for which the City is famous in the world at large." These are "areas so astounding they ought to be specially recognized in urban design planning and protected ... it is the combination and eloquent interplay of buildings, landscaping, topography and other attributes that makes them outstanding." The *Urban Design Element* includes Telegraph Hill as one of only five "outstanding and unique areas" found in the City of San Francisco, describing "a hilltop park with the highly visible green of trees from which Coit Tower rises above all else."

²⁶ Lillie Coit's bequest also stipulated that a statuary monument be erected to the City's original volunteer fire department, active 1849-1866. Though originally intended to be located at Coit Tower, the statue by sculptor Haig Patigian was erected in Washington Square Park in 1933 and remains in its original location.

²⁷ National Register of Historic Places, *Coit Memorial Tower*, San Francisco, California, National Register #07001468, 2008, Section 7-1. The nomination's statement that the tower was constructed "as a memorial to the volunteer firemen who died in the five major fires in San Francisco's history" is inaccurate.

²⁸ Susan Wels, *San Francisco: Arts for the City: Civic Art and Urban Change, 1932-2012* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2013), 31-33; Zakheim, *Coit Tower*, 4-11; Jeffrey T. Tillman, "The Construction of Coit Memorial Tower," in Zakheim, *Coit Tower*, 116-120.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)

Name of Property

San Francisco, California

County and State

A polygonal form approaching the round, at least above the base, was therefore considered advisable. The arched loggia motif at the top was designed to provide protected observation points and at the same time a fine terminal for the shaft. At the base the entrance was logically placed at the north because the road reached the top of the hill at that side.²⁹

Much thought was also given to the tower's function and architectural expression.

It is intended to be dignified without austerity: monumental without utilitarian function... A massive base was provided to raise the shaft above the trees and carry the eye upward. This high base is in reality an enclosed terrace protected from the wind, but affording interesting vistas out over the city and bay. [Regarding treatment of the shaft] it was found that shallow flutes gave a sturdier effect and one which [*sic*] contrasted better with the system of arches at the top. The effect attained by the play of light and shade in these arches combined with the glimpses of the sky through the openings in the top ring is perhaps the most original element of the whole composition.³⁰

The original concept for Coit Tower included several elements that were eliminated during the design phase due to cost. These included a restaurant, an enlarged terrace (or courtyard) at the south, a grander, vaulted entry, and a portico. Coit Memorial Tower was dedicated in October 1933, and opened to the public upon completion of the murals one year later.

Tower Construction

Builders Young & Horstmeyer oversaw the tower construction, which cost a total \$125,000, including landscaping and architectural design fees. Construction required 175 tons of reinforcing steel, 5,000 barrels of cement, 350,000 feet of lumber, and 3,200 cubic yards of concrete. Four water tanks were incorporated into the tower's interior.³¹

New Deal, Federal Emergency Relief and the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP)

In May 1933, Congress created the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) to provide work relief to the unemployed. With the approach of winter in late 1933, concerns arose that funds were not flowing quickly enough to the unemployed, so FERA monies were used to set up the Civil Works Administration (CWA) to provide direct federal work relief through the winter months. The creation of FERA and CWA coincided with a new governmental approach to the arts.³²

²⁹ Howard, Henry T. "The Coit Memorial Tower" in *The Architect and Engineer of California and the Pacific Coast States*. Vol. 115, No. 3. December 1933, 13.

³⁰ Howard, Henry T., 15.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Robert W. Cherny, professor *emeritus*, San Francisco State University, has made available his extensive research on the New Deal, the PWAP, the Coit Tower murals, and the artists. His work informs the paragraphs that follow and the nomination overall. His published work on the subject includes *Victor Arnautoff and the Politics of Art*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017, and "The Controversy at Coit Tower, 1934: Communist Conspiracy or Tempest in a Teapot," *The Argonaut* 28:1 (Summer 2017), 68-91.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)

Name of Property

San Francisco, California

County and State

In 1933, artist George Biddle suggested to his former classmate, newly inaugurated President Franklin D. Roosevelt, that artists be hired nationwide to paint murals depicting the social ideals of the new administration and contemporary life on the walls of public buildings. Biddle had traveled in Mexico with artist Diego Rivera in the late 1920s and returned enthusiastic about the work of Mexican artists in transforming public buildings with bold murals. Previously a small percentage of the cost of federal buildings had been allocated for art, typically in the classical style and depicting historic events. Biddle persuaded Roosevelt that his administration should promote contemporary art and images in public buildings. The result was the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP).

President Roosevelt connected Biddle with Edward Bruce at the Treasury Department. Edward Bruce, a lawyer, art collector, and painter from California, was appointed to administer the six-month PWAP, with the intent that artists be put to work as quickly as possible.³³ Together Biddle and Bruce established a first-of-its-kind federal arts program. The goals of the PWAP were to support professional artists and thereby create quality art, to educate the public to appreciate professional artists, and to please the patron without threatening patriotism or violating conventional art traditions.

In effect between December 1933 and June 1934, the PWAP was the first New Deal program to employ artists and to fund public arts projects. During those six months, the PWAP engaged more than three thousand artists across the nation to beautify public buildings with figurative murals and other artworks depicting everyday life.

Bruce asked Dr. Walter Heil, director of San Francisco's De Young Museum, to take charge of PWAP Region 15 covering northern California and to act quickly to commission works of art and locate appropriate public buildings where art might be installed.³⁴ Heil immediately created a committee for northern California, composed of prominent citizens, and an advisory committee that included architect Arthur Brown, Jr.

Coit Tower Murals, Breaking New Ground for Public Art

The Coit Tower murals have been incorrectly referred to as a pilot program of the PWAP.³⁵ More accurately, the Coit Tower murals were the first project in PWAP Region 15 and were executed concurrently with art projects in all the PWAP regions across the country. In addition, the Coit Tower mural project was the single largest PWAP venture in the country, the most high profile, and an ambitious test of whether federally funded arts programs could work. Its success served as a model for an array of New Deal arts programs that followed, such as the Works

³³ Raymond L. Wilson, "The Northern Scene," originally published in *American Scene Painting: California, 1930s and 1940s*, eds. Ruth Westphal and Janet Blake Dominik (Irvine, CA: Westphal Publishing, 1991), online at <http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/3aa/3aa52.htm> (accessed September 3, 2011); Wels, 33, 36.

³⁴ Bruce to Heil, telegram, December 10, 1933, Region 15 papers, National Archives.

³⁵ National Register of Historic Places, *Coit Memorial Tower*, City and County of San Francisco, California, National Register #07001468, dated 2008. Section 7-2.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Progress Administration's Federal Art Project and the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Art.

By late 1933, renowned artists Thomas Hart Benton and Grant Wood had attracted national attention with their paintings of American scenes. Directives from Washington specified that the subject matter of all PWAP art was to be "the American scene in all its aspects," potentially a broad topic. Many American Scene painters depicted events from U.S. history. The PWAP Region 15 advisory committee directed that the Coit Tower murals should depict contemporary California, something unusual for a public building up to that time.³⁶ By focusing on contemporary life and drawing upon the techniques of the Mexican muralists, the Coit Tower artists were breaking new ground for public art. A few Coit Tower artists also included social criticism in their work, expanding the boundaries of what had been acceptable in public art. Both of these themes became prominent in later New Deal art projects.

While this nomination benefits overall from the contributions of Robert W. Cherny, professor *emeritus* of history at San Francisco State University and the author of books and articles on the history of California and the West, the following sections draw closely upon his book on Victor Arnautoff and article on Coit Tower, both published in 2017.³⁷

Coit Tower Artists

In San Francisco, the availability of PWAP funds coincided with the completion of Coit Tower. The Coit Tower interior was originally intended to be undecorated; it was proposed to house an exhibition of artifacts and works of art from pioneer days. When it was proposed as a site for murals, the tower's architect, Arthur Brown, Jr., reluctantly agreed.³⁸ Ultimately, the tower interior, including all of the first floor walls, the spiral staircase upstairs, and the second floor walls were adorned with twenty-seven paintings created by twenty-five California artists and nineteen assistant artists depicting variations on a contemporary California version of "The American Scene."

As the head of PWAP Region 15, Walter Heil, with advice from prominent artist Ralph Stackpole, chose the participating artists and assistant artists. Stackpole was well positioned to

³⁶ Walter Heil to Edward Rowan, January 12, 1934, Region 15 papers, National Archives. Fleishhacker declined to serve; see Fleishhacker to Bruce, telegram, December 13, 1933, Region 15 papers, National Archives; Wilson, "Northern Scene"; Zakheim, *Coit Tower*, 14-15.

³⁷ Cherny, Robert W. *Victor Arnautoff and the Politics of Art* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017); see Chapter 6. See also "The Controversy at Coit Tower, 1934: Communist Conspiracy or Tempest in a Teapot," *The Argonaut* 28:1 (Summer 2017), 68-91.

³⁸ Jeffrey T. Tillman, *Arthur Brown Jr.: Progressive Classicist* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 187-191.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

advise—as an older artist he was something of a father figure to many of the younger painters, some of whom had been his students as well.

The Coit Tower artists' group included some of the region's best-known artists of the day, a large majority of whom had a connection to the California School of Fine Arts (later the San Francisco Art Institute). Artists Ralph Stackpole, Ray Boynton, Bernard Zakheim, Maxine Albro, and Clifford Wight had visited Diego Rivera in Mexico and observed his practice; consequently, most had also executed murals in the fresco technique. Artist Victor Arnautoff completed one of the larger murals, and was also designated as the project's technical coordinator, probably because he had spent the most time working with Rivera and was the most experienced working with large-scale fresco murals. All those chosen were familiar with Rivera's local works at the addition to the Pacific Coast Stock Exchange and at the California School of Fine Arts. According to Heil, "the artists established for themselves one scale and also one palette consisting of elementary earth colors"—much the same palette used by Rivera.³⁹

As the project was overseen by the Art Commission, its Committee on Architecture reviewed both scaled drawings of the proposed murals (one inch: one foot) and, for the fresco painters, all detailed, full-scale drawings of the murals *in situ* prepared by individual artists. The artists produced preliminary sketches in mid-December and transferred them to the walls in January.⁴⁰

While the murals were being executed, the tower was a busy and crowded place. In addition to the lead artists and the assistants—all of whom were artists in their own right—there were two plasterers, seven laborers, and several Park Department employees, nearly sixty people in all.⁴¹ Three Coit Tower artists (Otis Oldfield, Jose Moya del Pino, and Rinaldo Cuneo) preferred to paint their scenes using oil on canvas; they worked in their studios and only visited the tower occasionally.

Collegiality Among the Artists

Much of the enthusiasm and *esprit de corps* among the artists at Coit Tower seemed to be generated by the opportunity to work in fresco.⁴² Some artists had not worked with the medium

³⁹ Nadia Lavrova, "Forty-Six Artists—One Palette," *Christian Science Monitor*, Weekly Magazine Section, August 1, 1934, 8-9; Oral history interview with Otis Oldfield, 1965 May 21, Archives of American Art, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-otis-oldfield-13601> (accessed March 31, 2017); Oral history, John Langley Howard and Mary Howard, September 5, 1991, Archives of American Art. See also Cherny, "Controversy at Coit Tower."

⁴⁰ Public Works of Art Project, Region No. 15, a mimeographed report of artists, their work, costs, etc., December 1933 to 1934; Walter Heil Papers, Archives of American Art, hereinafter PWAP Region 15 final report; minutes of the Art Commission of the City and County of San Francisco, 1934 <http://archive.org/stream/minutesofartcomm1934sanf#page/n0/mode/1up> (accessed March 31, 2017), 159, 161, 179.

⁴¹ PWAP Region 15 final report.

⁴² Zakheim, *Coit Tower*, 17

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

before the project. Artist Ray Boynton, the leading proponent and practitioner of *fresco buono* in the West, had been teaching classes in fresco at the California School of Fine Arts for some years prior to the Coit Tower project. Considered a pioneer in fresco art, Boynton revived the art of fresco in California in 1917. At least eight of the Coit Tower painters had been Boynton's students at the California School of Fine Arts.⁴³

The Coit Tower artists followed the ancient Italian tradition as the Mexican artists interpreted it. In this process, fine marble dust is mixed with slaked lime to create the painting surface. In *fresco buono*, the plasterer prepares the painting surface with layers of cement and rough lime plaster, a day's worth of work; the artist applies the color as long as the surface remains moist.⁴⁴ As the plaster dries, the painting becomes part of the wall. Because the *fresco buono* technique is demanding, the role of the assistant artist was critical. One assistant artist, Farwell Taylor, mixed all pigments, assuring overall uniformity for the entire project.⁴⁵

Shirley Staschen, one of the assistant artists, remembered that work hours were quite casual and that the lead artists often painted for five or six hours—about the time it took to complete one square yard of wet plaster—and then left to prepare for the next day's work.⁴⁶

As further proof of the collegiality among the Coit Tower artists, many of the murals depict the artists themselves as they frequently used each other as models. Given the number of people in the tower, the artists had no difficulty finding models for their human figures—they frequently used the people in the building, their friends, and their own and other artists' family members. Ralph Stackpole's likeness appears in several murals, and Lucien Labaudt included nearly every artist in his. Several of the artists, including Arnautoff, also included self-portraits.⁴⁷

The Coit Tower mural project elevated the professional reputations of a number of the participating artists and assistant artists. Many achieved regional and national recognition because of their association with the project and continued to receive federal art assignments. In 1942, Stackpole was appointed to the U.S. Art Commission, the first artist from the West to have a seat on the commission.

⁴³ Evelyn Seeley, "A Frescoed Tower Clangs Shut," *Literary Digest*, Aug. 25, 1934, 24.

⁴⁴ Zakheim, *Coit Tower*, 18.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Shirley Staschen Triest, *A Life on the First Waves of Radical Bohemianism in San Francisco*, oral history, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1996, 65. Otis Oldfield was shown in the *San Francisco Examiner* putting the finishing touches on one of his canvases before February 11; see "Marine Murals for Coit Tower," *Examiner*, February 11, 1934, 8W.

⁴⁷ Zakheim, *Coit Tower*, 41-111, identifies many of the figures modeled on identifiable individuals.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Coit Tower Artists and the Destruction of the Rivera Murals at Rockefeller Center

In early 1934, with the Coit Tower mural project underway, a national uproar arose in response to the sudden destruction of Diego Rivera's mural *Man at the Crossroads* in New York City's Rockefeller Center. Work on Rivera's mural had been halted prior to its completion because he had included a portrait of Lenin and an unflattering depiction of patron John D. Rockefeller, Jr. in the composition. Rockefeller paid Rivera his commission and had the fresco covered months earlier. Then, at midnight, on February 9, 1934, Rockefeller's workers smashed Rivera's fresco to pieces.

As part of a nationwide protest, the San Francisco Artists and Writers Union, a newly formed group with about 350 members, spoke out. On February 14, 1934, the group held a protest meeting on the steps in front of Coit Tower. A newspaper photograph shows about twenty-five people in attendance, mostly Coit Tower artists and assistant artists. According to the *San Francisco News*, the meeting was convened at "the instigation of artists working on the Coit Memorial Tower frescoes and other artists employed on federal public works of art projects." Muralist Maxine Albro, an executive committee member of the union, presented a resolution condemning the destruction of the Rivera work as "outrageous vandalism and political bigotry."⁴⁸ Vidar and Zakheim incorporated references to the destruction of the Rivera mural in the newspapers in their Coit Tower murals. More subtly, Albro included a large stand of calla lilies in her mural, likely in reference to Rivera's repeated use of the calla lily in his paintings.⁴⁹

Delayed Unveiling of the Murals

Completion of the Coit Tower mural project continued largely without incident and the July 1934 unveiling was much anticipated as the exceptional quality of the artwork was being realized. Harold Mack, an influential member of the PWAP supervisory committee, was highly enthusiastic about the entire Coit Tower project. In a letter to President Roosevelt dated May 3, 1934, he described it as "unique in the art history of the United States." Mack quoted Jo Davidson, a prominent sculptor, as confirming that, "the results achieved in this building surpass anything heretofore accomplished in this country."⁵⁰

Because PWAP funding was set to expire at the end of April 1934, that date was also chosen as the target date for the completion of the murals. Sixteen of the twenty-five lead artists had completed their work by the end of April. The larger murals required more hours. Lucien Labaudt's, the largest in terms of square footage, was not finished until late June. For those artists who had not completed their work by the end of April, Heil secured additional funds from the State Emergency Relief Administration, itself funded by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. The Art Commission and the Parks Commission scheduled Coit Tower for a grand opening to the public on July 2, 1934.

⁴⁸ "Destruction of Rivera Mural in N.Y. Termed 'Murder,'" *San Francisco News*, February 14, 1934, 5.

⁴⁹ Lozano, Luis-Martin and Juan Rafael Coronel Rivera, *Diego Rivera: The Complete Murals* (Hong Kong: Taschen, 2008), 147.

⁵⁰ Mack to Roosevelt, May 3, 1934, Region 15 papers, National Archives.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Dockworkers Strike and Controversy

Growing labor unrest on San Francisco's waterfront, the strike by West Coast dockworkers that began on May 9, 1934, and the subsequent general strike, July 16-19, 1934, led to increasing conflict and tensions that postponed Coit Tower's opening. A citywide "red scare" that began with the dockworkers strike and escalated dramatically during the general strike had significant consequences for Coit Tower.⁵¹

Heil's records of payments to the artists indicate that sixteen of the twenty-five Coit Tower artists had completed their work before May 9, 1934, the day longshoremen walked off the docks. While many of the Coit Tower artists were deeply affected by the struggles on the docks, two-thirds of them had completed their artwork before the strike began, so there was little opportunity to refer to the strike in their artwork even if the artists had been inclined to do so.

Though all the artists had presented detailed, scaled drawings of their proposed murals for approval in January 1934, for several artists the process of creating their murals was more dynamic. Zakheim's mural depicted people reading newspapers with dramatic headlines. He later recalled that he selected the headlines based on what he saw in the press the day before; his headlines range from mid-February to late March.⁵² John Langley Howard also recalled later that he had made changes as he developed his mural.⁵³ Most of the artists kept quite close to their approved sketches. At a late date, artist Clifford Wight incorporated political symbolism in the form of a dollar sign, the blue-eagle logo of the NRA, and a hammer and sickle.

When some officials saw the completed Coit Tower murals in late June, in the context of the city's ongoing red scare, they became concerned that some artists had incorporated material into their murals "which might be interpreted as communistic propaganda," especially Wight's hammer and sickle. In a letter to Heil and the Art Commission, Wight insisted that his work was not propaganda, and instead represented "the paramount issue of today . . . social change," and that his hammer and sickle was "in no way exhortation or propaganda," but instead "an existing condition," that is, the existence of a legal Communist Party.⁵⁴

July 5, 1934, was a day of terrible conflict on the waterfront, culminating in the deaths of two waterfront workers, killed by police. That same day, the *San Francisco Examiner* published a photograph superimposing Wight's hammer and sickle image over Zakheim's depiction of a man reaching for *Das Kapital*, as if it were part of the same painting. The accompanying story alleged that the murals were part of a communist plot.

⁵¹ The standard treatment of the strike is that by David F. Selvin, *A Terrible Anger: The 1934 Waterfront and General Strikes in San Francisco* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996).

⁵² Zakheim interview, 1964; the earliest headline, at top right, "Thousands Slaughtered in Austria," is about the rebellion of the left against the Dollfuss regime in mid-February, and the latest headline, at bottom right, "Magnates Arrested, Break N.R.A. Code," is about oil company executives arrested in late March.

⁵³ John Langley Howard and Mary Howard oral history, 1991.

⁵⁴ "Artists Wrath Stirred by Charges" in *Call Bulletin*, July 2, 1934.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Incited by the doctored newspaper photo, the San Francisco Park Commission and Art Commission locked the doors to Coit Tower and cancelled the public opening, demanding that three of the artists—Wight, Zakheim, and Howard—remove items from their murals. Subsequently, the demands were reduced to just Wight. In August, after the strikes were over and the red scare had subsided, a special committee of the Art Commission unanimously recommended “for artistic reasons, in order to conform with the major motive of the general scheme” that all the artwork over the east, south, and west windows, including Wight’s hammer and sickle, be removed. When the tower opened in October 1934, the Art Commission’s recommendations had been heeded. The artwork over the windows was removed. Also removed was the *Western Worker*, a local Communist Party newspaper, banner from Howard’s mural. There were no other changes. After months of closure, Coit Tower finally opened its doors to the world on October 12, 1934.

Contemporary Art Criticism and Subsequent Scholarship

Contemporary critical response to the Coit Tower murals recognized several aspects as remarkable. First was the overall size and scale of the project. Second was the use of fresco as a medium. Third was the influence of Diego Rivera and the Mexican mural movement. In 1934, Junius Cravens, the accomplished art critic for the *San Francisco News*, reviewed the project, stating “the tower decorators have done remarkably fine work. . . . even the worst mural faults are of minor importance as compared to the merits of the job as a whole.” He described Wight’s four tall figures as “superb,” Arnautoff’s mural as “outstanding” and “finely executed,” and Cunningham’s mural as having, “most successfully achieved rhythmic decorative pattern on a very difficult wall.” Cravens called out the murals by Cuneo, Moya del Pino, Oldfield, and Langdon as “notable,” and described Howard’s depiction of hydraulic power as “the outstanding artistic achievement of the lot.”⁵⁵

In the national media, Nadia Lavrova published a long description and critique of the murals, along with several illustrations, in the *Christian Science Monitor* of August 1, 1934; her article says nothing about the controversy. Like Cravens, she complimented Wight’s tall figures as among the most distinctive elements in the tower, and she praised Arnautoff’s mural as having “all the elements that go toward making an outstanding fresco: rhythm and movement, achieved by a contrast of light and dark patterns, by varying the intensity of colors and by a clever handling of masses, which lead the eye from one end of the painting to the other.”⁵⁶

Evelyn Seeley probably reached the largest number of readers nationwide with a long, illustrated article in the *Literary Digest*, one of the most influential general publications at the time. She called the project “one of the greatest produced under the PWAP” and agreed with Lavrova that the extensive use of fresco made the project unique in the country. Like Cravens and Lavrova, she gave special attention to the tall figures by Wight and added those by Dean. Seeley praised the murals by Boynton, Stackpole, Vidar, Arnautoff, Labaudt, and Terada. She singled out Albro’s mural as the “richest and most vivid.” Though Seeley fully recounted the controversy

⁵⁵ *News*, October 20, 1934, 9.

⁵⁶ Lavrova, “Forty-Six Artists—One Palette.”

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

that closed the tower, she concluded that the artists “have presented California as powerful and productive, its machines as well-oiled, its fields and orchards bountiful, its people—happy in the sun. They have left out of the picture, as some realists have mentioned, such aspects as the Mooney case, or strikes, or lynchings.”⁵⁷

To reiterate the appraisal of sculptor Jo Davidson, “the results achieved in this building surpass anything heretofore accomplished in this country.”⁵⁸ Further acclaim for the murals was expressed by Diego Rivera when he visited the site with artist Emmy Lou Packard in 1940. Rivera specifically noted his appreciation for Arnautoff’s mural.⁵⁹

Subsequent art historians have been equally positive about the Coit Tower mural project. In the 1980s, Francis V. O’Connor commented both on the overall quality of the murals and on the uniqueness of it as a group project.

At Coit Tower the PWAP sponsored a mural environment that can be ranked with the finest wall paintings created in the government’s subsequent art programs—the Treasury Department’s Section of Painting and Sculpture, and the WPA Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP). Most murals are painted by individuals; large groups of muralists working in unison are rare in the history of American art.⁶⁰

In 1982, Karal Ann Marling suggested that Arnautoff’s “catholic portrayal of the variousness of the urban scene, with wholesome and unsavory details given equal weight, stemmed from [Thomas Hart] Benton,” whose American scene paintings had begun to attract wide attention in the late 1920s.⁶¹

Bruce Bustard, in his 1997 study of New Deal art programs, identifies five central themes in all New Deal art, three of which are prominent at Coit Tower: a “preoccupation with” and celebration of ordinary, often working-class, people; a celebration of New Deal programs; and promotion of social change and embrace of “left-wing political causes.”⁶²

Belisario Contreras, in his 1983 study of New Deal art, drew attention to the Coit Tower artists’ “influence of Diego Rivera’s brilliant color, simple modeling, and refined brushwork,” and noted the “theme of social consciousness” in the Coit Tower works. Contreras characterized the artwork at Coit Tower as the first large-scale New Deal art project, and noted that it vividly demonstrates the three central characteristics he ascribed to all subsequent New Deal art: the

⁵⁷ Lavrova, “Forty-Six Artists—One Palette”; Seeley, 24, 31.

⁵⁸ Mack to Roosevelt, May 3, 1934, Region 15 papers, National Archives.

⁵⁹ Emmy Lou Packard, *Letter to Ken Maley, Coit Tower Preservation Fund*, City of San Francisco Department of Recreation and Parks. July 10, 1990.

⁶⁰ Essay by Francis V. O’Connor, in *Coit Tower, San Francisco: Its History and Art*, ed. Masha Zakheim, 121.

⁶¹ Karal Ann Marling, *Wall-to-Wall America: A Cultural History of Post-Office Murals in the Great Depression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 47.

⁶² Bruce J. Bustard, *A New Deal for the Arts* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 21-22. The two themes identified by Bustard not present at Coit Tower are a rediscovery of American history, which was ruled out by the decision to focus on contemporary California, and a focus on the practicality and usefulness of the arts.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

influence of the Depression (more prominent in some of the Coit murals than others), the centrality of the American scene (previously developed by such artists as Thomas Hart Benton and Grant Wood), and the influence of the Mexican mural movement of the 1920s.⁶³

Biographical Information on Selected Coit Tower Artists⁶⁴

The daughter of artist Bernard Zakheim, Ruth Zakheim Gottstein, who was eleven years old when her father was painting his mural at Coit Tower, later recalled,

They were artists... first and foremost. Not politicians, not intellectuals, not economists. They came from vastly different backgrounds... Via their murals, this eclectic group of artists was able to capture the rich tapestry of an emerging California in the 1930s. This was their San Francisco and their California—their hopes for a positive future for many generations to come.⁶⁵

Though a few of the artists at Coit Tower were well known before the start of the undertaking, the Coit Tower project served to launch most of the others on productive careers. Many of them went on to produce more public art under New Deal art program auspices, and several of them developed quite distinguished careers as artists. The following paragraphs briefly summarize their contributions.

Maxine Albro (1903-1966)

Albro grew up in Los Angeles and after graduating from high school, she moved to San Francisco where she began working as a commercial artist to raise funds for her formal education at the Art Students League in New York and Paris and at the California School of Fine Arts. She traveled widely in Mexico and painted many scenes of Mexican life. Although she did not study formally with Diego Rivera, she painted many murals and was influenced by his style. She received later commissions for New Deal art projects including a mosaic mural (no longer extant) at San Francisco State College and a mural for a high school. After Coit Tower, Albro married fellow Coit Tower artist Parker Hall. They moved to Carmel, California and became leaders and highly influential members of the Carmel artists' colony.

Victor Arnautoff (1896-1979)

Arnautoff was a native of Russia, where he returned during the 1960s after living in the United States for more than thirty years. He studied at the California School of Fine Arts in the late 1920s, then went to Mexico, where he assisted Diego Rivera for two years. He returned to San Francisco in 1931. As technical coordinator for the Coit Tower mural project, he painted the mural *City Life* and advised his fellow artists. He produced the most New Deal art of any of the

⁶³ Belisario R. Contreras, *Tradition and Innovation in New Deal Art*. (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1983), 20-25.

⁶⁴ This section benefits from the biographical research undertaken on individual artists by Jon Golinger, Protect Coit Tower, done in preparation for an exhibit titled *The Coit Tower Mural Artists*, on exhibit at the San Francisco Public Library in May 2015.

⁶⁵ Ruth Gottstein, "Who Were the Artists Who Painted the Murals at Coit Tower?" in *The Semaphore*, a publication of the Telegraph Hill Dwellers, Issue 198, Spring 2012, 4.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)

Name of Property

San Francisco, California

County and State

Coit Tower artists: a large mural at the Protestant chapel at the Presidio of San Francisco (part of the National Historic Landmark District), thirteen panels on the life of George Washington at George Washington High School, San Francisco (local landmark nomination pending), and five post office murals (College Station, Texas; Linden, Texas; Pacific Grove, California; Richmond, California; and South San Francisco, California). He also produced public murals at the Old Cathedral of the Holy Virgin (City of San Francisco Landmark No. 28), the National Register-listed Palo Alto Medical Clinic (also listed in the Palo Alto Historic Buildings Inventory), and the San Francisco Art Institute (City of San Francisco Landmark No. 85). Toward the end of his life, he also produced three large mosaic murals in Mariupol, Ukraine. He taught at the California School of Fine Arts briefly and at Stanford University for twenty-four years.⁶⁶

Jane Berlandina (1898-1970)

Born in France, Berlandina studied in Paris and arrived in California in 1931. As the wife of architect Henry Temple Howard, she married into a prolific family of artists. She was especially known for her modernist watercolors. At Coit Tower, her work is quite abstract compared to the prevalent American Scene style and was painted using egg-based tempura, rather than the technique and the palette used by the others.

Ray Boynton (1883-1951)

Boynton came from the farms of Iowa, and after studying art in Chicago, he traveled west to make his mark. He created California's first large scale mural in a building open to the public at Mills College in Oakland. By virtue of Boynton's expertise and seniority, he became known as the "dean of the fresco painters" at Coit Tower, where younger artists sought his expert advice. His subsequent New Deal-funded projects included thirteen murals at the post office in Modesto, California. Later, Boynton became a well-regarded teacher at the University of California, Berkeley.

Ralph Alexander Chessé (1900-1991)

Born in New Orleans, Chessé moved to Southern California in 1923. Self-taught as an artist, he was a sculptor, painter, and puppeteer. His Coit Tower mural, *Children at Play*, presents its characters in an almost puppet-like manner. Following the Coit Tower project, Chessé became the official director of puppetry for the San Francisco, Oakland, and Los Angeles districts of the WPA. Chessé also worked on the Federal Theater Project on Treasure Island for the Golden Gate International Exposition in 1939-1940. Chessé, along with his son Bruce, worked extensively for decades as a professional puppeteer, creating and performing the marionettes for the pioneering Bay Area children's television show "Brother Buzz."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Robert W. Cherny, professor *emeritus*, San Francisco State University, provided biographical information on artist Victor Arnautoff. Professor Cherny published an extensive biography chronicling Arnautoff's life and work: *Victor Arnautoff and the Politics of Art*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017.

⁶⁷ Lettie Connell Schubert and Randal J. Metz, "An Incomplete History of the San Francisco Bay Area Puppeteers Guild" (1996, rev. 2010) <http://www.sfbapg.org/about/history/> (accessed May 30, 2017).

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Benjamin Frazier Cunningham (1904-1975)

Ben Cunningham was born in Colorado. He produced murals for the San Francisco Assessor's Office, the post office at Ukiah, California, and the Golden Gate International Exposition. He also served as the supervisor of mural painting for the Northern California WPA arts program. He later moved to the New York City area where he taught in several prominent art schools. His work was acquired by the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim, and the Whitney.⁶⁸

Edith Hamlin (1902-1992)

Born in Oakland, Edith Hamlin attended the California School of Fine Arts from 1922 to 1924 and later Columbia University Teacher's College in New York City. After the Coit Tower project, she executed two large murals at Mission High School, San Francisco (City of San Francisco Landmark No. 256); three murals at the Tracy, California post office; and a mural, jointly with her husband, artist Maynard Dixon, at the Martinez, California post office. She and Dixon then moved to Tucson, Arizona where she painted four public murals, along with one in Phoenix, between 1947 and 1952. Following Dixon's death, Hamlin returned to San Francisco.⁶⁹

William Hesthal (1908-1985)

Born in San Francisco, Hesthal began attending classes at the California School of Fine Arts at age nine and first exhibited at age ten. Following the Coit Tower project, was one the of six Coit Tower muralists that art patron Albert Bender commissioned in 1936 to decorate the Anne Bremer Library at the California School of Fine Arts, later the San Francisco Art Institute. Hesthal later completed a mural for a high school through the WPA/FAP program.

John Langley Howard (1902-1999)

Born in New Jersey, Howard moved as an infant with his parents to California. At the University of California, Berkeley, he majored in engineering and English and then enrolled at the Oakland College of Arts and Crafts. Later he continued his studies at the Art Students League in New York City. As the son of architect John Galen Howard and brother to architect Henry Howard and sculptor Robert Boardman Howard, he was part of a large and talented family well known for their contribution to the arts. Imbued with socialist ideas, he was convinced that he could contribute to the advancement of society through his art. During the Depression, he documented the stalwart laborers, the timeworn unemployed, and the bewildered people drowning in the everyday pressures of the times. In the 1930s, he dedicated himself to working for social change by depicting conditions in his canvases.⁷⁰

Lucien Labaudt (1880-1943)

A native of Paris, France, Labaudt already had a career in the U.S. as a costume designer, artist, and teacher at the time he was chosen for the Coit Tower project. The experience marked a change of direction for him and he then focused on mural painting. Essentially self-taught as an

⁶⁸ Obituary of Benjamin Cunningham in *New York Times*, April 6, 1975.

⁶⁹ Phil Kavinick and Marian Yoshiki-Kovinick, eds., *An Encyclopedia of Women Artists of the American West* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 123-124.

⁷⁰ Stacy Moss and Sally Woodbridge, *The Howards: First Family of Bay Area Modernism* (Oakland: The Oakland Museum, 1988), 59.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

artist, he later did two murals for the National Register-listed Los Angeles Courthouse and Post Office; one mural at George Washington High School, San Francisco; and murals covering all the walls of the first floor of the Beach Chalet, San Francisco (City of San Francisco Landmark No. 179). He taught at the California School of Fine Arts. He died in WWII while on assignment as an artist war correspondent.

Gordon Langdon (1910-1963)

Born in San Francisco, Langdon left his studies at Stanford to train at the California School of Fine Arts. He shared a studio with his mentor, artist Ralph Stackpole, twenty-five years his senior. Langdon's family's ranch at Olema, California was the subject of his Coit Tower mural in which he painted his own likeness as well as that of Lucien Labaudt (with cow) and Stackpole (peeking in the window). Langdon later painted a fresco mural funded by the WPA/Federal Arts Project at George Washington High School and was one of six of the Coit Tower artists to paint frescoes inside the Anne Bremer Memorial Library at the California School of Fine Arts.

Jose Moya del Pino (1891-1969)

A native of Spain, Moya del Pino later painted murals in the post offices in Lancaster, California; Alpine, Texas; and Redwood City, California.

Frederick Olmsted (1911-1990)

Olmsted was born in San Francisco and was the great nephew of Frederick Law Olmsted, the landscape architect who designed New York's Central Park. He was educated at Stanford University and studied with Ralph Stackpole. A painter and sculptor, the twenty-three-year-old Olmsted initially came to the Coit Tower project as an assistant artist to Frede Vidar, George Harris, and John Langley Howard. Howard later assigned him a three-foot panel above the main entrance to Coit Tower where Olmsted created his mural *Power* depicting a fist bursting through flames. Olmsted later completed a mural now at San Francisco City College and two sculptures at San Francisco City College, both done initially as part of the "Art in Action" exhibition at the Golden Gate International Exposition. Olmsted eventually abandoned his art career and became a successful biophysicist, specializing in designing medical and oceanographic equipment.

Suzanne Scheuer (1898-1984)

Scheuer was born in San Jose, California, and studied at the California School of Fine Arts and the California College of Arts and Crafts. Her mural *Newsgathering* on the tower's west wall was restored by the artist herself in 1963, twenty-nine years after she first painted it. She took the initiative to change the name of the fictional newspaper she painted in the mural back to *Chronicle*. She later did three post office murals, in Eastland, Texas; Caldwell, Texas; and Berkeley, California.

Ralph Stackpole (1885-1973)

Stackpole grew up in Oregon, coming to San Francisco after the turn of the century. As a sculptor, muralist, etcher, and educator, Stackpole was one of the city's leading artists during the 1920s and 1930s. He was already quite prominent as an artist before the Coit Tower project, based on his sculptures at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in 1915, his sculptures at

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

the remodeled Pacific Coast Stock Exchange (1932), and his teaching at the California School of Fine Arts. In addition to his Coit Tower mural, he also did a mural at George Washington High School, San Francisco, before returning to sculpture including an eighty-foot-high sculpture, *Pacifica*, for the Golden Gate International Exposition (1938-41) and a large bas relief sculpture of John Wesley Powell for the U.S. Department of the Interior Building in Washington, D.C. (1940). He served on the U.S. Commission on Fine Arts in 1941-1945, the first person from the West Coast to do so. He once wrote that he wanted to see frescos spread all over the city, and hoped San Francisco would be called "The City of Frescoes." As a friend of many of the Coit Tower artists, his portrait appears in the murals many times, including those of Albro, Zakheim, Langdon, and Labaudt. Stackpole was primarily responsible for bringing Diego Rivera to San Francisco in 1930.

Takeo Edward Terada (1908-1993)

Terada immigrated to California in 1922. He studied briefly at the University of California, Berkeley, then at the California School of Fine Arts. Terada returned to Japan in 1935 settling in Tokyo where he became a leading force in the Japanese art world.

Clifford Wight (circa 1900-1961)

Wight was born in England and immigrated to Canada where he became a Mountie before fighting in WWI. In California and Mexico in the 1920s, Wight reinvented himself as a sculptor in the company of artists Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. He arrived in San Francisco with Rivera to work as his assistant on a mural at the San Francisco Art Institute. In the 1930s, Wight left the U.S. because of his leftist political leanings. He later had a career as a secretary in the British House of Commons.⁷¹

Bernard Zakheim (1896-1985)

Zakheim arrived in San Francisco in 1920 seeking political asylum from his native Poland after World War I. He found work as a furniture maker while he continued to look for opportunities to pursue art.⁷² In 1929, Diego Rivera, to whom Zakheim had sent some sketches, invited him to Mexico City for six months to collaborate with Rivera and to study Aztec and Mayan fine art in the National Museum of Mexico.⁷³ In 1932, Zakheim spent a year in Europe studying art and learned to paint fresco murals during that time. Upon his return to San Francisco, he won a competition to create a fresco in the courtyard of the city's new Jewish Community Center.⁷⁴ He later painted a ten-panel mural and a two-panel mural at what became the University of California, San Francisco, attracting national attention. He also produced a mural at Alemany Health Center, San Francisco, and post office murals at Rusk and Mineola, Texas. In later life, he turned to sculpture and produced six wooden sculptures commemorating the Holocaust.⁷⁵

⁷¹ See <https://swindonlibraries.wordpress.com/2015/03/20/clifford-wight-an-extraordinary-life-a-talk-by-julian-baker/> (accessed March 31, 2017).

⁷² "Bernard Zakheim," abstract from *California Art Research: Maxine Albro, Chin Chee, Bernard, Zakheim, Andree Rexroth, Chiura Obata*, ed. Gene Hailey, (San Francisco: California Art Research Project, 1936), 46-48.

⁷³ Ibid., 50-52.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 58.

⁷⁵ Elizabeth M. Boone, "'Something of his Own Soil': Jewish History, Mural Painting, and Bernard Zakheim in San Francisco," in *American Jewish History* 90.2, 2002: 123-140.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Further Federally Funded Work for the Coit Tower Artists

The Coit Tower mural project elevated the professional reputations of a number of the participating artists and assistant artists. Many Coit Tower artists and assistant artists continued to receive commissions for federally funded art projects, some until the New Deal arts programs ended during World War II. Representative examples are Lucien Labaudt's murals at San Francisco's Beach Chalet and Edith Hamlin's prestigious WPA commission for two 8' x 24' murals at Mission High School. Suzanne Scheuer did several New Deal post office murals. Victor Arnautoff, Ralph Stackpole, Gordon Langdon, and Lucien Labaudt all created large-scale frescos at San Francisco's George Washington High School, a project completed in 1936 with funding from the WPA Federal Art Project.

Other Coit Tower artists also participated in public art programs funded by various federal agencies during the New Deal, including assistant artist Hebe Daum, who painted one mural at San Francisco State College; Harold Mallette Dean, who did a post office mural; and George Harris, who also did a post office mural. Some of the artists and assistant artists from Coit Tower were later assistants for other New-Deal art projects including Arnautoff's mural at the Presidio of San Francisco and his *Life of Washington* sequence at George Washington High School.

Biographical Information on Other Relevant Individuals

Lillie Hitchcock Coit (1843-1929)

One of San Francisco's best-known historical figures, Lillie Hitchcock Coit is permanently associated with both Coit Tower, whose construction her estate funded, and with San Francisco's early volunteer fire brigade, which she championed. In 1851, seven-year-old Lillie Hitchcock and her wealthy parents moved from Kentucky to California.⁷⁶ Young Lillie was deeply and personally affected by a series of fires, one of which nearly claimed her life. Soon after arriving in San Francisco, Lillie watched two of her friends burn to death when a building they were playing in suddenly caught fire. Lillie was rescued from the flames by John Boynton, a volunteer member of Knickerbocker Engine Company Number 5. Boynton chopped a hole in the roof of the building, let himself down on a rope, put Lillie on his back, and climbed to safety.⁷⁷ Lillie immediately and permanently became a friend and vocal supporter of the firefighters of Knickerbocker Engine Co. No. 5. In October 1863, she was made an honorary member of the Number 5 engine company, and given an official certificate of membership and a personalized fire helmet.⁷⁸ Thereafter, Lillie always signed her name "Lillie Hitchcock Coit 5" and assumed a prominent place in festivities and parades celebrating the city's firefighters.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Helen Holdredge, *Firebelle Lille: The Life and Times of Lillie Coit of San Francisco* (New York: Meredith Press, 1967), 38.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 66-68.

⁷⁸ Frederick J. Bowlen, Battalion Chief, San Francisco Fire Department, "Lillie Hitchcock Coit: A Steadfast Love for California," 1939, <http://guardiansofthecity.org/sffd/people/coit.html> (accessed April 7, 2017).

⁷⁹ Floride Green, *Some Personal Recollections of Lillie Hitchcock Coit—5* (San Francisco: The Grabhorn Press, 1935), 19-21.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Victor Arnautoff's Coit Tower mural *City Life* includes a fire truck with a prominent number 5, likely intended as homage to Lillie's connection to Knickerbocker Engine Co. No. 5. Lillie was considered colorful and eccentric—gambling, smoking cigars, and wearing trousers before it was socially acceptable for women to do so. She married wealthy businessman Howard Coit in 1863 and was widowed upon his death in 1885. When Lillie died in 1929 at the age of 85, she left one-third of her estate to the City of San Francisco “for the purpose of adding to the beauty of the city which I have always loved.”⁸⁰ Lillie's bequest paid for both the construction of Coit Tower and for a sculpture placed in nearby Washington Square Park to commemorate San Francisco's volunteer firefighters. The sculpture, by Haig Patigian, depicts three volunteer firefighters at work. One of them is carrying a distressed young girl to safety.⁸¹

Architect Arthur Brown, Jr. (1874-1957)

Architect Arthur Brown, Jr. was born in Oakland. Brown graduated from the University of California, Berkeley in 1896 where he and his future partner John Bakewell Jr. (1872-1963) were both protégés of architect Bernard Maybeck. Brown graduated from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1901 before returning to San Francisco to establish his practice with Bakewell in 1905. By 1906, his firm was well positioned to play an important role in the reconstruction of San Francisco after the earthquake and fire. The firm's commissions included the opulent interior of the City of Paris department store in San Francisco and Berkeley City Hall. They won the competition for San Francisco City Hall, which was completed in 1915. In collaboration with architect G. Albert Lansburgh, Brown also designed the War Memorial Opera House and Veterans Building of 1932. Having developed a San Francisco-based practice, his firm designed many of San Francisco's landmark buildings, as well as important large-scale civic and religious buildings around the State.

Like Coit Tower, most of Brown's later San Francisco works employed a stripped-down classicism. With regard to the PWAP murals at Coit Tower, Brown stated, “The primitive nature of Coit Tower would lend itself better to that sort of thing than other public buildings.”⁸² Diego Rivera included a likeness of Brown among the designers and craftsmen in his 1931 fresco titled, *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City*. Brown's last works were primarily at University of California, Berkeley, where Brown served as campus planner and chief architect from 1936 to 1950.

Henry Temple Howard (1894-1967)

Architect Henry Temple Howard, eldest son of architect John Galen Howard, was born in New York City and raised in Berkeley. Henry attended the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris from 1919 to 1921. From 1931 to 1934, Henry worked for the architectural firm Bakewell and Brown, specifically on the design of Coit Tower. For the rest of the decade, with the economy suffering from the Great Depression, Henry designed houses and apartment houses around the Bay Area, including his own residence on Jackson Street and his brother's studio on Francisco Street in North Beach. Henry designed several San Francisco defense and public housing projects,

⁸⁰ Bowlen.

⁸¹ Zakheim, 7; Holdredge, 295.

⁸² Tillman, *Arthur Brown Jr.*, 187-191.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

including the Ping Yuen Housing Project in Chinatown (with architect Mark Daniels), in addition to many important projects in the Modernist vein throughout Northern California.⁸³ Although Henry Howard headed the design team in charge of the tower, the family's participation was not based on nepotistic selection. Rather, it was "certainly the communal tradition of the WPA; and, if the San Francisco art community was needed to work on a project, one would expect to find the Howards well represented."⁸⁴

Criteria Consideration F: Commemorative Properties

A property primarily commemorative in intent can be eligible if design, age, tradition, or symbolic value has invested it with its own historical significance. In general, properties that are commemorative in nature, such as Coit Tower, are not considered eligible for the National Register. A commemorative property will qualify if it can demonstrate its own exceptional significance apart from the value of the person memorialized by the monument or property. Such is the case with Coit Tower.

Originally designed and intended as a commemorative civic monument, Coit Tower was named in honor of a historical figure, Lillie Hitchcock Coit, whose wealth financed its construction. Constructed after her death, it is not directly or primarily associated with her productive life or a specific event in her life. More than for its association with its patron, Coit Tower's significance rises to the national level because it is intrinsically associated with the Coit Tower murals, which possess exceptional value in interpreting the themes of the Great Depression and New Deal idealism. Coit Tower is the site of the country's most impressive permanent exhibition of federally funded art created through the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP).

Comparable Properties

1) The *Detroit Industry* Murals, Detroit, Michigan

Completed in March 1933, the *Detroit Industry* murals at the Detroit Institute of Arts were executed by muralist Diego Rivera. The *Detroit Industry* murals are considered among the finest, modern monumental artworks in the United States, as well as the most complex representation of American industry. In 2014, the *Detroit Industry* murals were listed as a National Historic Landmark (NHL).

The NHL nomination states that Rivera's influence was, among other factors, responsible for the reintroduction of fresco painting into modern art and significantly impacted the concept of public art in the United States. It further states that Rivera's fresco technique, his portrayal of American life within public buildings, and the 1920s Mexican mural program itself directly led to and influenced the New Deal mural programs of the 1930s and 1940s.

2) U.S. Department of Justice Building, Washington, D.C.

The U.S. Department of Justice building was completed in 1935. Between 1935 and 1941, 68 murals were painted throughout the building interior, including a twenty-panel mural by artist Maurice Sterne in the double-height Law Library. Representing the work of fourteen artists, the

⁸³ Moss and Woodbridge, 27.

⁸⁴ Moss and Woodbridge, 39.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

building's extensive murals depict scenes of daily life from throughout American history and symbolic interpretations or allegorical themes relating to the role of justice in society. Other notable artworks include a multi-panel tempera titled *Great Events and Figures of Law* by Boardman Robinson (1938) and a tempera mural *Contemporary Justice and Man* by John Ballator (1937). In 1966, the building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site.

Art historian Belisario Contreras noted a similarity between the group murals in the Justice Department building and the broad iconography of the earlier Coit Tower Project. He also compared the Justice Department undertaking as similar to the Coit Tower cooperative in that both schemes were designed as a single project and a select group of artists was assigned mural spaces to depict broad phases of the American scene.

3) Rincon Annex, former U.S. Post Office, Spear and Mission Streets, San Francisco, California
Constructed in 1940, the Rincon Annex building is a former U.S. Post Office originally designed by architect Gilbert Stanley Underwood. The lobby features a monumental art project comprised of twenty-seven brilliantly colored murals, separate panels done in casein paint, measuring approximately 460' in length and 8' high. The murals were painted by the Russian immigrant artist Anton Refregier between 1941 and 1948 and are titled *History of California*. The work was completed as part of the Federal Art Project of the Work Projects Administration. Carried out in the Social Realism style, the murals depict the role of San Francisco from its discovery until the establishment of the United Nations. At the time of completion, the murals generated sufficient controversy to eventually reach the U.S. Congress, where critics called for the murals to be destroyed. The property was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.

4) Post Office Terminal Annex, Los Angeles, California
Funded by the Treasury Department Section of Fine Arts and completed in 1944, the fresco in the Post Office Terminal Annex lobby consists of eleven semi-circular, tempera on plaster lunettes by artist Boris Deutsch. Titled *Cultural Contributions of North, South and Central America*, the artwork represents indigenous peoples from the Americas, as well as scenes of science and industry. Scholars note the dichotomy between the Indian past and the European-American present and future. Of the eleven lunettes, six illustrate past views of native cultures of South America, Mexico, and California, while the other five depict European Americans engaged in scientific, industrial pursuits in a more modern light. These include representations of Western pioneers, high-powered telescopes, telephone communications, a physics class, and the modern military.⁸⁵ The property was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985.

With the exception of the Detroit murals, these properties were done under other New Deal programs, not the PWAP. As indicated by critical review contemporary with the unveiling of the Coit Tower artwork, no other PWAP project is comparable in terms of the scale of undertaking and its legacy.

⁸⁵ The Living New Deal, <https://livingnewdeal.org/projects/los-angeles-post-office-terminal-annex-murals-los-angeles-ca/> (accessed June 2, 2017).

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Conclusion

The Coit Tower murals depict the high ideals and social values of the 1930s as expressed in WPA art projects; they represent the collective effort of individuals in creating an exceptionally important artwork, one that focused on the reality of American life during the Great Depression while drawing upon the techniques of the Mexican muralists. Several Coit Tower artists broke new ground for public art, expanding the boundaries of what had been previously acceptable.

The Coit Tower project preceded numerous federally funded public art projects. Many that followed depicted contemporary themes and subjects; some included a component of social criticism. Historians have noted that federal officials' experience with Wight's hammer-and-sickle symbol contributed to a cautious approach by the Treasury Section that administered funds for later art in federal buildings. Instead of the after-the-fact censorship that took place at Coit Tower, later artists had to submit, and sometimes resubmit, detailed drawings of all aspects of their work and were not to begin to paint until they received approval from Washington.⁸⁶

The Coit Tower project was also a forecast of later New Deal projects in other ways. Contreras believed that the artists at Coit Tower "had carefully developed an iconography of the American scene that was relevant to PWAP throughout the country" and pointed to the significance of their "broad conceptual scheme," which, he said, "was to be used by artists in subsequent New Deal Art programs."⁸⁷

Given the high-profile nature of the Coit Tower murals, the national publicity, and the acclaim for the quality of the artwork and use of fresco, the murals' technique and content were influential on subsequent New Deal programs and public art in the United States.

⁸⁶ Marling, 47-49 and Ch. 5; Andrew Hemingway, *Painting on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926-1956* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 96-97.

⁸⁷ Marling, 47; Contreras, 46, 44.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

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Name of Property

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Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

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Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☒ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other

Name of repository: San Francisco History Center at the San Francisco Public Library;
Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, California Palace of the
Legion of Honor (drawings)

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.13 acres

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

1. Latitude: 37.802619

Longitude: -122.405806

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundaries of the property are consistent with the lot on which Coit Tower was constructed, City Block 0086, Lot 012. The parcel is roughly rectangular in shape. The parcel area measures 49,275 square feet, which equates to 1.13 acres.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

Coit Tower occupies City Block 0086, Lot 012.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Katherine T. Petrin, Robert W. Cherny, Jon Golinger
organization: Protect Coit Tower
street & number: P.O. Box 330476
city or town: San Francisco state: CA zip code: 94133
e-mail petrin.katherine@gmail.com
telephone: _____
date: September 2017; Revised November 2017

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)

Name of Property

San Francisco, California

County and State

Photo Log

Name of Property: Coit Memorial Tower
City or Vicinity: San Francisco
County: San Francisco
State: California
Photographer: Shayne E. Watson
Date Photographed: Photos 1-8: September 15, 2017
Photos 9-25: November 8, 2017

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 25 Parking lot and north elevation, camera looking south.
- 2 of 25 North elevation and stairs, camera looking south.
- 3 of 25 South lawn and south elevation, camera looking northwest.
- 4 of 25 South elevation, camera looking northeast.
- 5 of 25 South elevation detail, camera looking northeast.
- 6 of 25 West elevation, camera looking north.
- 7 of 25 West elevation detail, camera looking north.
- 8 of 25 East elevation, camera looking southwest.
- 9 of 25 Detail, drinking fountain on main stairs, camera looking east.
- 10 of 25 Detail, utility outbuilding on west slope, camera looking southeast.
- 11 of 25 Interior, first floor, west side, camera looking south.
- 12 of 25 Interior, first floor, west side, camera looking northeast.
- 13 of 25 Interior, first floor, south side, camera looking east.
- 14 of 25 Interior, first floor, south side, camera looking northwest.
- 15 of 25 Interior, first floor, south side, camera looking west.
- 16 of 25 Interior, first floor, east side, camera looking north.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)

Name of Property

San Francisco, California

County and State

- 17 of 25 Interior, first floor, east side, camera looking southwest.
- 18 of 25 Interior, first floor, north side, camera looking west.
- 19 of 25 Interior, first floor, north side, camera looking to northwest corner.
- 20 of 25 Interior, first floor, north side, camera looking southeast toward elevator lobby.
- 21 of 25 Interior, first floor, elevator lobby, camera looking east.
- 22 of 25 Interior, first floor, base of stairwell, camera looking southeast.
- 23 of 25 Interior, second floor, camera looking southeast toward top of stairwell.
- 24 of 25 Interior, second floor, camera looking west.
- 25 of 25 Lantern level, east side, camera looking west.

Index of Figures

- Figure 1 View of completed Coit Tower looking from Washington Square Park from "The Coit Memorial Tower" in *The Architect and Engineer of California and the Pacific Coast States*, December 1933, 15.
- Figures 2-12 Mural details, 1983; Don Beatty Photographer.
Source: Volcano Press.
Permission expressly requested and provided.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Location Map 1

Latitude: 37.802619 Longitude: -122.405806

COIT TOWER

Latitude: 37.802619

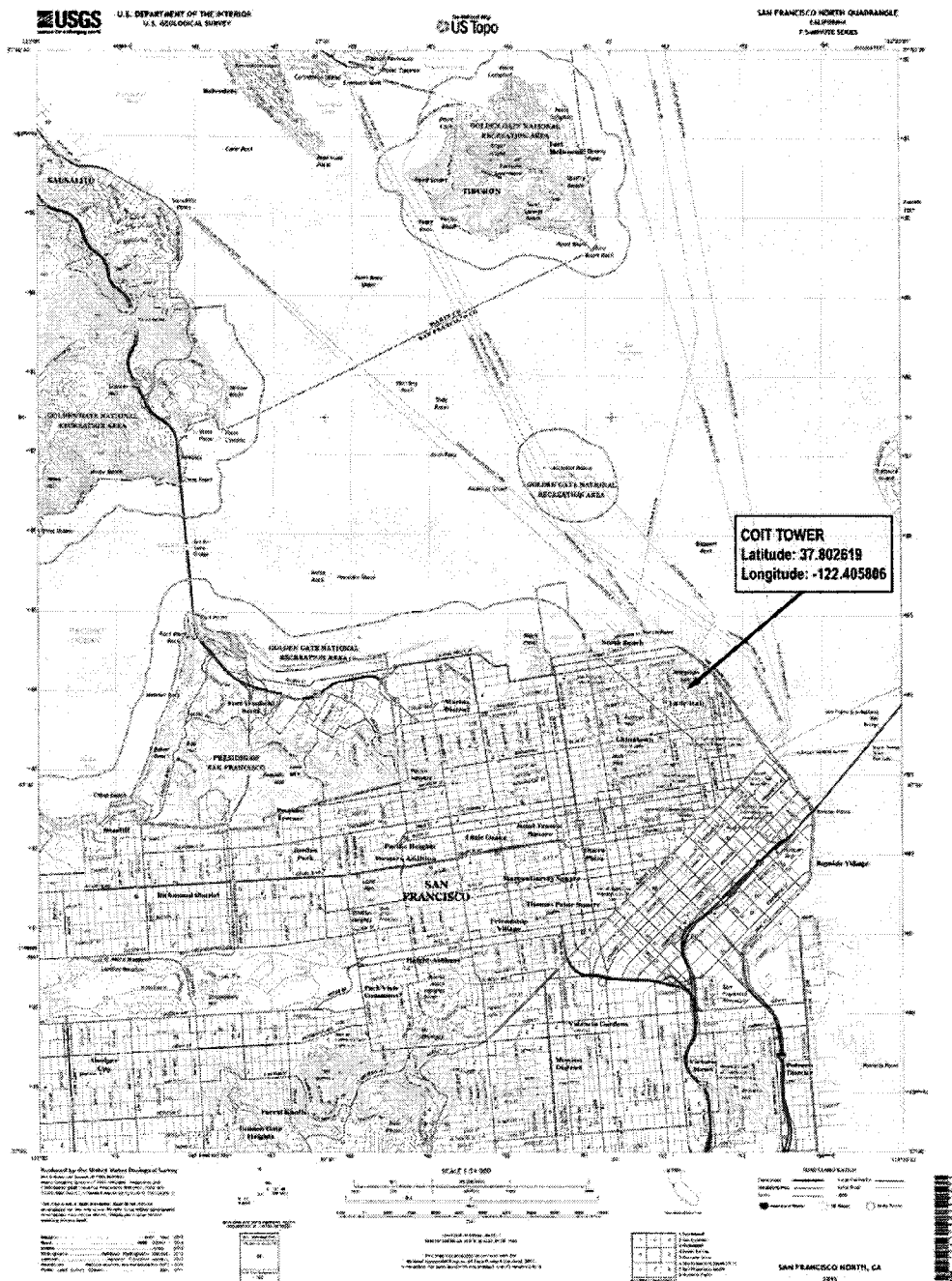
Longitude: -122.405806



Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Location Map 2 (USGS Map)



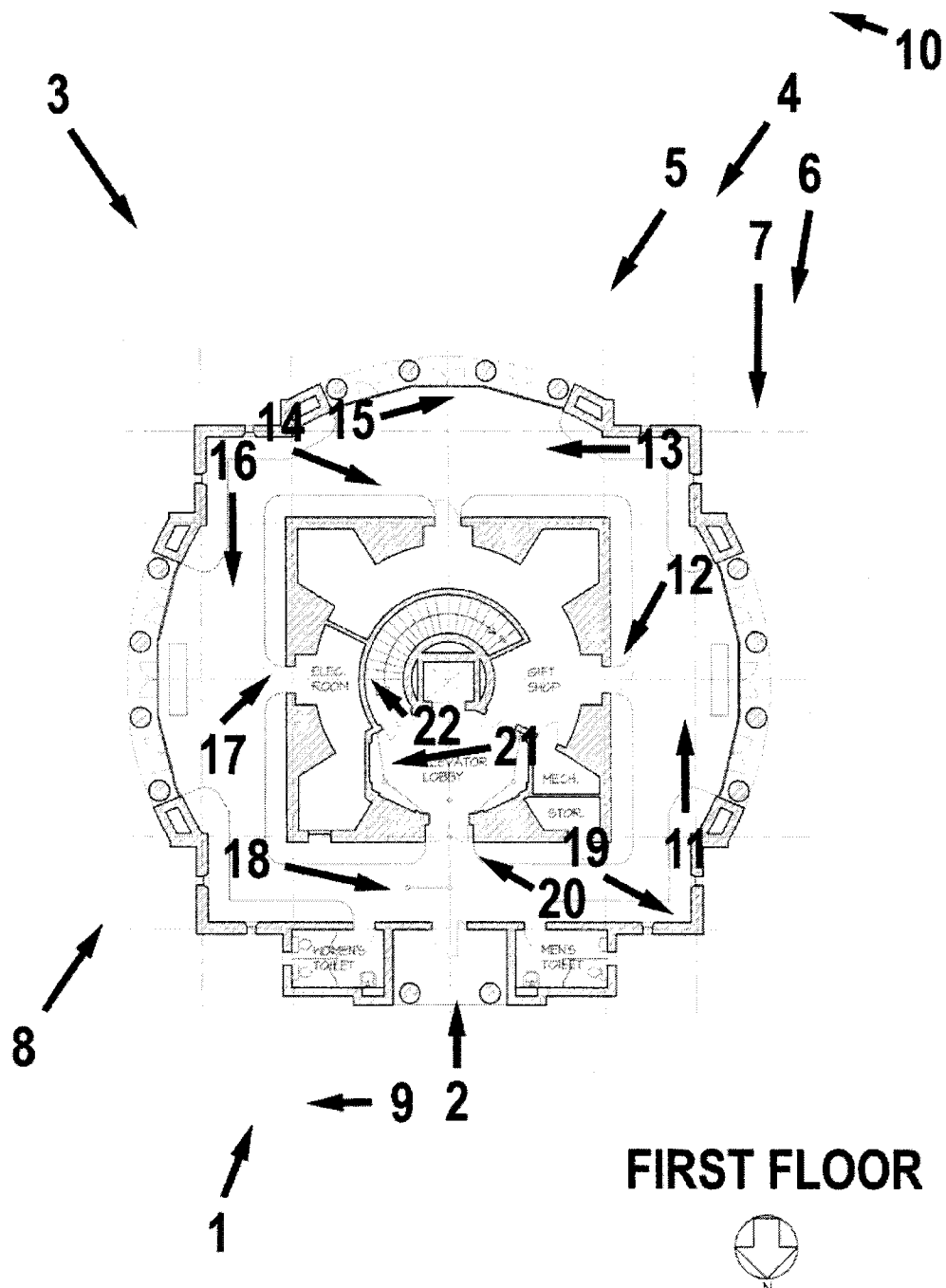
Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)

Name of Property

San Francisco, California

County and State

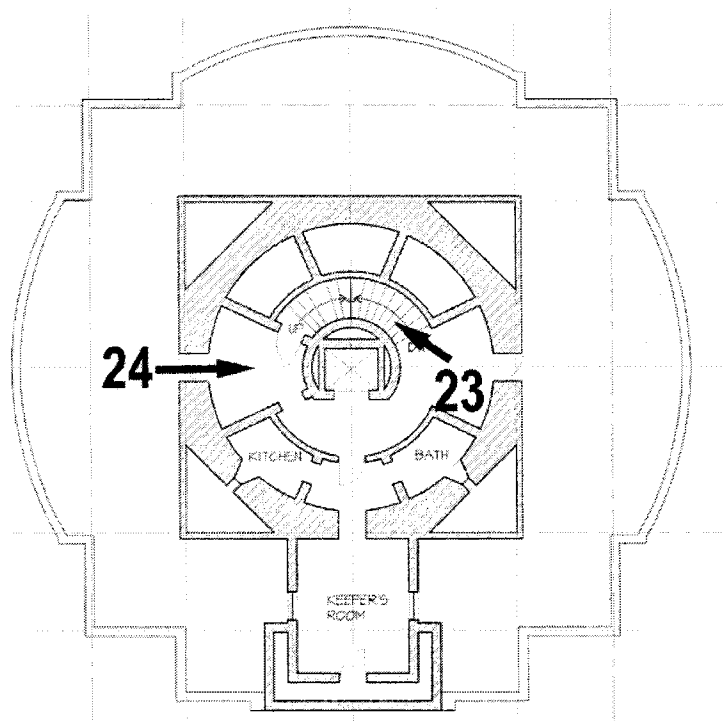
Photo Key: Exterior and First Floor



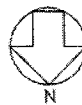
Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Photo Key: Second Floor



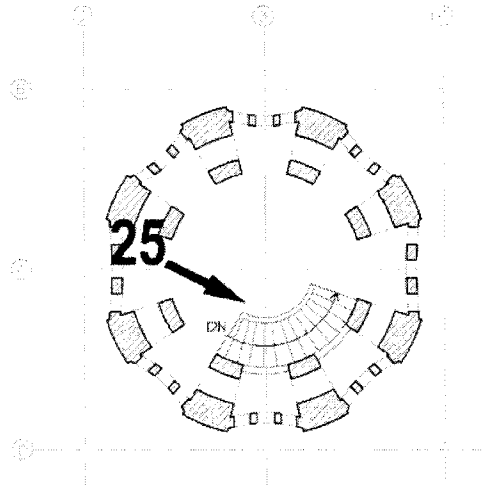
SECOND FLOOR



Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Photo Key: Lantern Level



LANTERN LEVEL



Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)

Name of Property

San Francisco, California

County and State

Figure 1. View of completed Coit Tower looking from Washington Square Park, 1933.

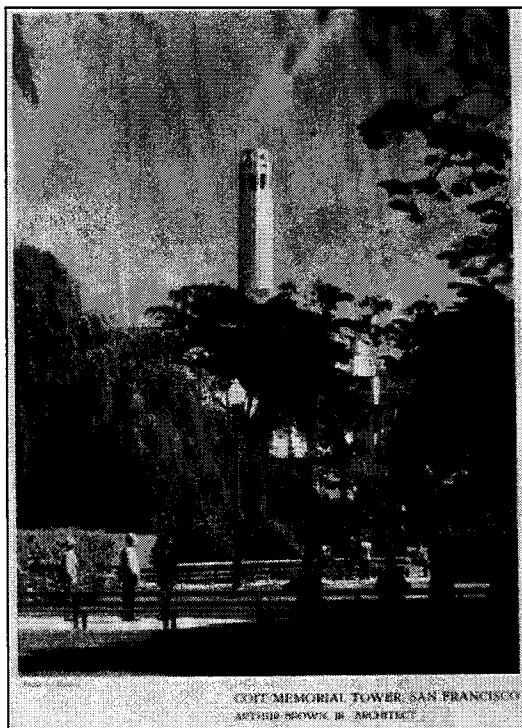
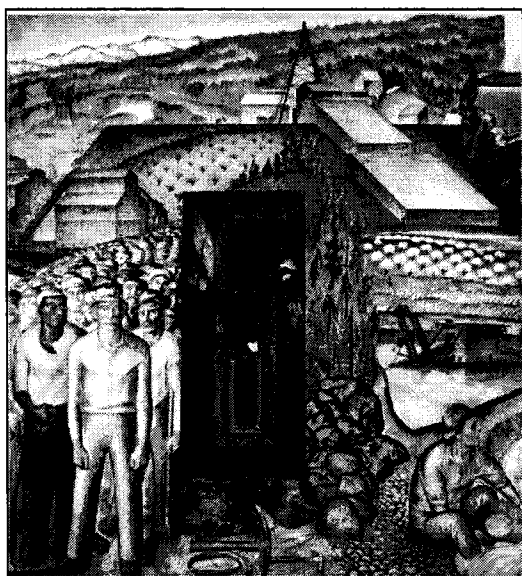


Figure 2. Detail from *California Industrial Scenes* by John Langley Howard; mural located on the first floor, north wall.



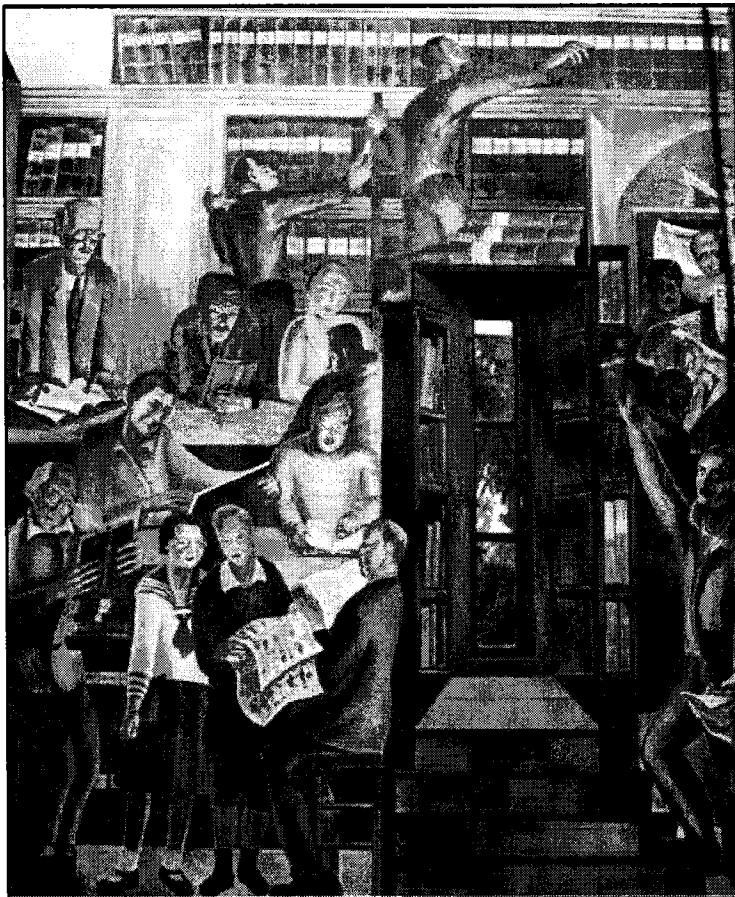
Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Figure 3. Detail from *Industries of California* by Ralph Ward Stackpole; mural located on the first floor, west wall.



Figure 4. Detail from *Library* by Bernard Baruch Zakheim; mural located on the first floor, south wall.



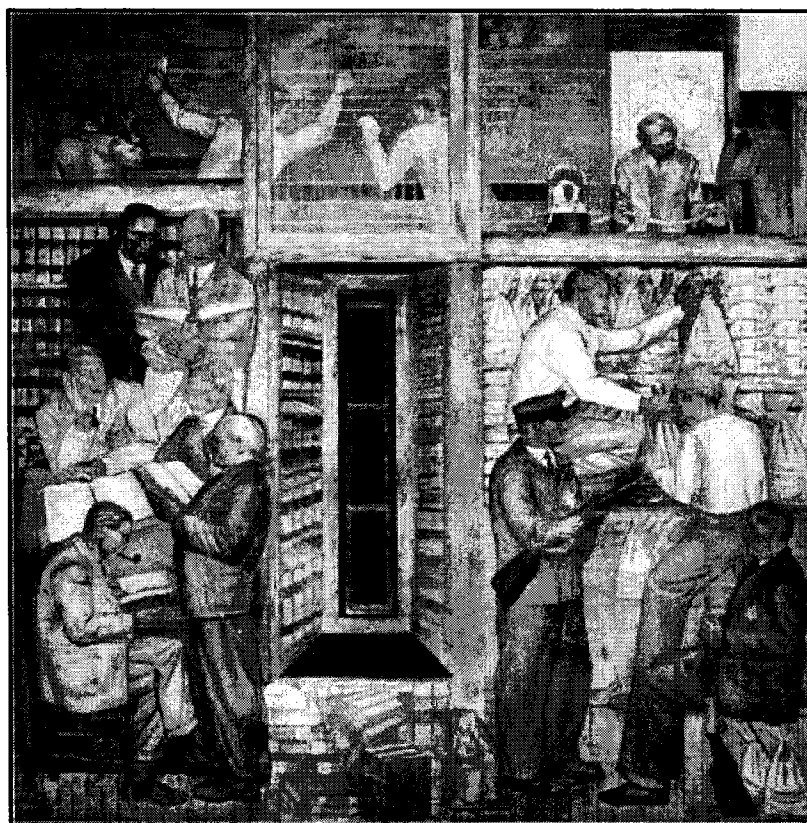
Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Figure 5. Detail from *City Life* by Victor Arnautoff; mural located on the first floor, south wall.



Figure 6. Detail from *Banking and Law* by George Albert Harris; mural located on the first floor, south wall.



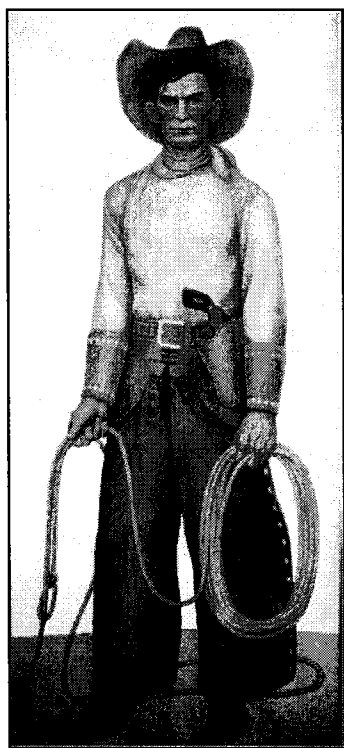
Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Figure 7. Detail from *Department Store* by Frede Jensen Vidar; mural located on the first floor, east wall.



Figure 8. Detail from *Farmer and Cowboy* by Clifford Seymour Wight. The solitary cowboy figure is thought to be a self-portrait of the artist; mural located on the first floor, east wall.



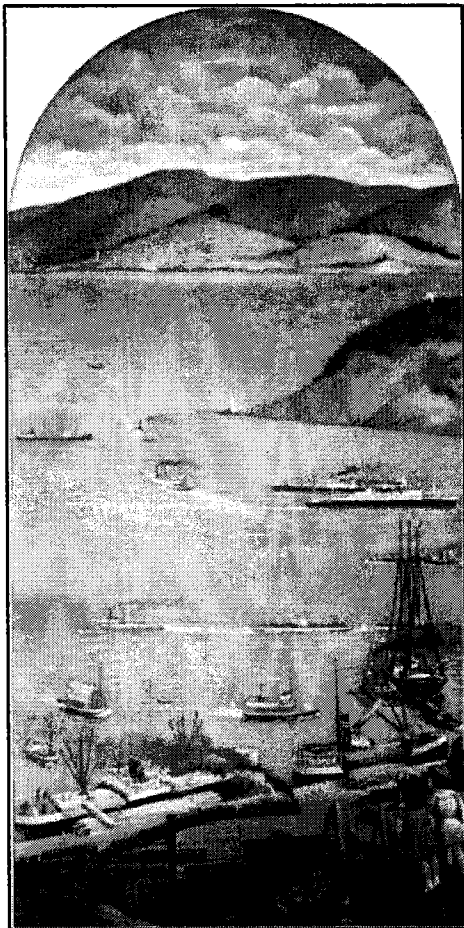
Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Figure 9. Detail from *California Agriculture* by Maxine Albro; mural located on the first floor, east wall.



Figure 10. View of *San Francisco Bay* by Otis Oldfield, oil on canvas; located ground floor, elevator lobby.



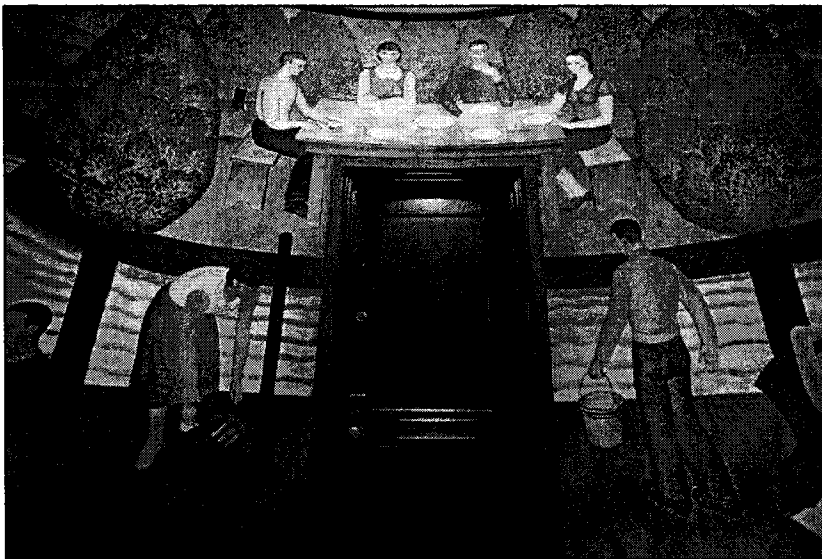
Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment)
Name of Property

San Francisco, California
County and State

Figure 11. Detail from *Powell Street* by Lucien Labaudt, the largest single fresco at Coit Tower; located along both sides of the stairway to the second floor. The mural includes images of Eleanor Roosevelt and Edward Bruce, influential supporters of the PWAP.



Figure 12. Detail from *Outdoor Life* by Benjamin Frazier Cunningham; mural located on the second floor.



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Lillian Coit Memorial Tower

other names/site number Coit Tower

2. Location

street & number 1 Telegraph Hill Boulevard

N/A ☐ not for publication

city or town San Francisco

N/A ☐ vicinity

state California code CA county San Francisco code 075 zip code 94133

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☐ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☐ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

California Office of Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

☐ entered in the National Register

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the
National Register

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register

☐ removed from the National
Register

☐ other (explain): _____

Lillian Coit Memorial Tower
Name of Property

San Francisco, CA
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ private
☒ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture: Monument

Recreation and Culture: Work of Art

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture: Monument

Recreation and Culture: Work of Art

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Modern Movement: Art Deco

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Reinforced concrete

roof

walls Plaster frescos

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Lillian Coit Memorial Tower
Name of Property

San Francisco, CA
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☐ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Art

Period of Significance

1933-1934

Significant Dates

1933

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Howard, Henry

Primary Location of Additional Data

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

Lillian Coit Memorial Tower
Name of Property

San Francisco, CA
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	—	—	—	3	—	—	—
2	—	—	—	4	—	—	—

☐ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Stephen A. Worsley, Coit Depression Preservationists Founder and Spokesman

organization Coit Depression Preservationists date June 18, 2007

street & number 25 Kingston Street telephone (916) 281-8268

city or town San Francisco state CA zip code 94110

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

Name Yomi Agunbiade, City of San Francisco, Recreation and Parks Department

street & number 501 Staynlan Street, John MacLaren Lodge, Golden Gate Park telephone 415-831-2773

city or town San Francisco state CA zip code 94117

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Lillian Coit Memorial Tower
San Francisco County, CA

Summary Paragraph

The Lillian Coit Memorial Tower (Coit Tower) is located atop Telegraph Hill in San Francisco, California. It was constructed between 1932 and 1933 as a memorial to the volunteer firemen who died in the five major fires in San Francisco's history. Designed in the Art Deco style by architect Henry Howard, the tower rises 180 feet from its base with a public observation deck thirty-two feet below the top. It is constructed in three cylinders, one inside the other. The interior is adorned with twenty-five frescoes painted by various artists as part of the Public Works Art Project between 1933 and 1934. Coit Tower retains a high degree of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

Description

Architect Henry Howard designed Coit Tower in the Art Deco style with a budget of \$125,000. The tower was designed to be a "...simple fluted shaft...intended to be dignified but with austerity; monumental without utilitarian function." The tower was not designed to resemble a fire hose. The tower rises 180 feet from its polygonal base and has an observation deck thirty-two feet below its top. It is constructed of three concrete cylinders, one inside the other. The outside wall is decorated with twenty-four vertical flutings in the manner of a classical Greek column; it is approximately eight inches thick in the concave part of the flutes. In order to maintain the illusion of verticality the outer fluting was tapered slightly inward until it was eighteen inches smaller around its top than its base. As Telegraph Hill is asymmetrical, with its long axis running north and south, Howard had to consider the fact that the tower would need to be appealing from all directions. So, in order to maintain Coit Tower's aesthetic qualities, he chose to construct it atop a polygonal base; thus it would present the same profile from every direction. The base provides, on its south, east, and west vistas, a set of floor to ceiling windows that allow views of Pioneer Park, Oakland, most of the South Bay area, San Francisco's North Beach area, and the Golden Gate Bridge. Flanking the exterior entrance is a phoenix bird relief sculpture by Robert B. Howard.

The outermost cylinder is Coit Tower's viewing station. The observation deck consists of a series of arches connected by a ringed sky light. The effect attained by the play of light and shades in these arches combined with the glimpses of the sky through the openings in the top ring was perhaps the tower's most original design element. The second most outward cylinder contains a winding reinforced concrete stairway that once led the public to a second story gallery and the famous viewing platform. The two upstairs Regionalist galleries have sadly been closed since 1960 due to neglect in supervision and graffiti. The innermost cylinder houses a still functional, 1930s manually operated elevator in the Art Deco style. The elevator design and all wall sconces within the rotunda are Art Deco in theme. The polygonal base, serves as the main entrance to the tower from the north. There is a new handicapped ramp opposite the front door on the south lawn window.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

Lillian Coit Memorial Tower
San Francisco County, CA

The first floor, or rotunda, contains eighteen separate wall surfaces, which exist in an equally distributed geometric pattern (see floor plan). The base is a concrete floor rotunda with three large convex window panels, one facing south, one facing west, and one facing east. The northern wall of the rotunda is the only flat wall and contains the vaulted entrance to Coit Tower. The rotunda also has four inset corners with each corner containing two gun slit windows. The center of the rotunda is dominated by four square walls, each containing a single doorway that house the stairwell, elevator shaft, and gift shop, which was a former broom closet. The south and west doors lead directly to the gift shop, the east door contains a small storage closet, and the north door of the inner rotunda leads to the elevator lobby. The elevator lobby is also a small gallery that is enclosed on the interior of the central rotunda. Just inside the rotunda are two public restrooms to the east and west of the front door.

In 1933, upon its completion, Coit Tower's interior consisted of 3,691 square feet of blank concrete wall space. In January 1934, after receiving funds from the Civil Works Administration, the tower's interior was transformed into an art gallery with frescos and murals. Coit Tower became the Public Works Art Project's (PWAP) pilot project. Twenty-six of San Francisco's master artists and their nineteen notable assistants turned the rotunda into three wings thematically divided and depicting California life in all its various aspects. There is a wing depicting industrial production and science, a wing depicting San Franciscan food production, and the city's life resulting from both in the third wing. The sections were divided between artists by surface size and their reputation. The most famous artists worked on 10 foot by 36 foot sections and lesser-known artists received 10 foot by 4 foot sections. The artwork was done in the American Social Realism style. The stairwell was designed by San Francisco artist Lucian Labaudt and depicts busy downtown scenes of Powell Street in 1934 using all familiar faces. His two frescos, the largest painted by a single artist in Coit Tower, extend 6 feet by 32 feet up the stairwell.

The upstairs is exclusively done by the "Ivory Tower Group" of the idealistic Regionalists faction. They all fall within this genre which desired to preserve the sentimental illusion an isolated American purity with an embarrassing nationalistic streak, even as the fabric of the nation was tattered by the protracted Great Depression.

Alphabetical List of Artists and descriptions of the murals they painted at Coit Tower.

Maxine Albero's – *California*

Victor Arnautoff – *City Life*

Jane Berlandina – *Home Life*

Ray Bertrand – *Meat Industry*

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

Lillian Coit Memorial Tower
San Francisco County, CA

Ray Boynton – *Animal Force and Machine Force*

Ralph Chesse – *Children at Play*

Rinaldo Cuneo – *Bay Area Hills*

Ben Cunningham – *Outdoor Life*

Mallette (Harold) Dean – *Stockbroker and Scientist-Inventor*

Parker Hall – *Collegiate Sports*

Edith Hamlin – *Hunting in California*

George Harris – *Banking and Law*

William Hesthal – *Railroad and Shipping*

John Langley Howard – *California Industrial Scenes*

Lucian Labaudt – *Powell Street* mural covers the greatest wall space in Coit Tower and represents a snapshot of life in fashionable and affluent San Francisco. Included in the mural are portraits of Eleanor Roosevelt and Edward Bruce. Their inclusion was Labaudt's way of paying homage to the greatest supports of the PWAP.

Gordon Langdon – *California Agricultural Industry*

Jose Moya Del Pino – *San Francisco Bay, North*

Otis Oldfield – *San Francisco Bay, East, Seabirds, and Bay Area Map*

Fred Olmsted, Jr. – *Power*

Suzanne Scheuer – *Newsgathering*

Ralph Stackpole – *Industries of California*

Edward Terada – *Sports*

Frede Vidar – *Department Store*

Clifford Wight – *Surveyor and Steelworker, Farmer and Cowboy*

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1

Lillian Coit Memorial Tower
San Francisco County, CA

Summary Paragraph

The Lillian Coit Memorial Tower is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion C in the area of art at the local level of significance. Coit Tower is an excellent example of an Art Deco style memorial and an excellent example of PWAP art and the American Scene.

Background

Coit Tower is located on Telegraph Hill which has always been a favorite vantage point for San Franciscans. Positioned above North Beach, the city's oldest neighborhood, Telegraph Hill rises 295 feet above sea level and is 2,415 feet wide at its widest cross section. Early explorers called Telegraph Hill "Loma Alta," which means high hill. Telegraph Hill offers the most optimal 360 degree viewing point to the San Francisco Bay and five surrounding counties. The name Telegraph Hill replaced the name Clark's Point, when, in 1849, George Sweeny and Theodore Baugh built a two-story observation deck from which they would broadcast information about incoming ships to the town below. To communicate their messages they used a unique semaphore system built in 1850 by Lieutenant John K. Deur. Residents always focused on the isolated precipice and its telegraph system for nautical information, which was then the lifeblood of the community. On September 22, 1853, one of the first electric telegraphs was officially opened on top of the hill, and as a matter of history, this opening signaled the end of the popular Deur's semaphore system. The signal station was destroyed in 1870 when a massive storm swept the bay. Wishing to preserve the memory of the telegraph station and keep this hill an open space, twenty-two businessmen, merchants, and public-minded socialites bought the top of the hill in 1876 and renamed the open space Pioneer Park. The park was donated to the posterity as a heritage site to San Francisco's illustrious forefathers. The name commemorated the influential role that Telegraph Hill played as a foundation for the San Francisco Bay Area. The park opened on July 4, 1883. In 1887 the Gray Brothers, Artificial Stone Paving Company quarrymen began blasting ways at the side of the hill. Their blasting virtually removed one third of the entire hill: the east sides of Chestnut and Lombard Streets and the entire south side of Montgomery Street, damaging the solidity of the hill's bedrock. Eventually several concerned civic groups and hill dwellers rioted to halt the blasting of Telegraph Hill.

The 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire were observed by the displaced atop Telegraph Hill. The earthquake disrupted all water lines, except one fire hydrant in bedrock above Dolores Park. The ensuing fire ravaged San Francisco for the next seven days. The firemen had to resort to dynamiting complete blocks to stop the fires. Many firemen were injured or killed while serving San Francisco's citizens. Many of these heroes were volunteer local firemen who were totally overwhelmed by the demands made on them within the chaos of an uncontrollable burn.

In 1923, Superintendent of Parks, John McLaren, approved a complete reforming of Telegraph Hill. Designed by architect G. Albert Lansburgh, Telegraph Hill was given an esplanade; terraces, a road and a concrete balustrade to surround the twenty-six space public parking lot at the hill's summit. All these additions remain in their original condition, adding to the integrity of

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2

Lillian Coit Memorial Tower
San Francisco County, CA

this location. The most significant addition to Telegraph Hill was Coit Tower in 1934. In 1957 a statue of Christopher Columbus was placed inside the parking lot's setting.

Coit Tower's benefactress was Lillie Hitchcock Coit (1843-1929) who moved to San Francisco with her family in 1851. Not long after arriving in San Francisco, Lillie Hitchcock was involved in one of San Francisco's disastrous fires when she and several playmates were in a vacant house that caught fire. Lillie escaped harm, but her playmates were not as fortunate. Lillie Hitchcock's association with San Francisco fireman is said to have begun when as an early teen she came upon the short-staffed Knickerbocker Engine Company No. 5 of the Volunteer Fire Department pulling its engines up Telegraph Hill to reach a fire. Legend said that she "threw down her schoolbooks and rallied some male bystanders to help as she herself began hauling on the tow rope..." After that "Firebelle Lil" became No. 5's mascot. In 1863 Lillie Hitchcock married the wealthy Howard Coit. After her husband's death in 1885, Lillie spent most of her life in France. She returned to San Francisco where she died in 1929. She bequeathed one third of her estate to the City and County of San Francisco "...to be expended in an appropriate manner for the purpose of adding to the beauty of the city which I have always loved."

In 1931 the San Francisco County Board of Supervisors proposed using Lillie Coit's funds to construct a roadway around Lake Merced. The majority of her estate executors objected to using the funds in such a manner. Rather they requested that the Board of Supervisors find "ways and means of expanding this money on a memorial that in itself would be an entity and not a unit of public development." Supervisor Herbert Fleishhacker, also President of the Board of Park Commissioners, was present at this meeting when the Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a Coit Advisory Committee. Fleishhacker suggested that the funds be used for the construction of a memorial for the beautification of Telegraph Hill.¹ The executors agreed. By September 1931 Coit's original \$118,000 was expanded by city funds to reach \$125,000.

During a design competition, Henry Howard was awarded the contract to design an elevated tower. His original design called for a restaurant in the tower. That was later substituted with open space that would be filled with artifacts and displays telling the early history of San Francisco and keeping with the Pioneer Park theme. The tower was completed in 1933 and dedicated to the City of San Francisco on October 8, 1933.

Coit Tower was completed four years after the Great Depression began. Unemployment had grown to an all time high in 1933 and "for the first time in American history, the federal government began to expand its role as caretaker of society as it offered relief and aid to those

¹ Lillie Coit had previously tried to purchase Pioneer Park for the City of San Francisco. She did not know that it was already owned by the city.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 3

Lillian Coit Memorial Tower
San Francisco County, CA

without jobs.”² Like the rest of the country, artists were also suffering the effects of the Depression. In 1933, George Biddle, himself an artist, suggested to his former classmate President Franklin D. Roosevelt, that artists be hired to “...paint murals depicting the social ideals of the new administration and contemporary life on the walls of public buildings.”³ Biddle was inspired by the 1920s public art movement in Mexico when young artists were paid as civil servants to decorate public buildings in Mexico City illustrating the aspects of the Mexican revolution.⁴

As the New Deal was being unveiled Roosevelt had Biddle contact Secretary of the Treasury Lawrence Robert. It was his colleague, Edward Bruce, who became the biggest and most enthusiastic supporter of the idea. He established a “new funding agency, under the auspices of the Treasury Department, to disperse the traditional one percent of building costs allocated for art. With money from the recently created Civil Works Administration, he established the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP)...”⁵ The goal of the PWAP was: “first, to support professional artists and thereby create quality art; second, to educate the public to appreciate the art thus generated; and third, to please the patron without threatening patriotism or violating conventional art traditions.”⁶

The PWAP became a pilot program whereby artists were selected by regional committees. San Francisco became District 15 and was directed by Dr. Walter Heil, director of the de Young Museum in Golden Gate Park. Dr. Heil formed an executive committee consisting of artists, sculptors, museum directors, and prominent San Francisco citizens. At the second meeting of the executive committee the theme, palette of colors and the scale and proportion of the murals was all approved. It was understood by the executive committee that any artwork that did not meet with approval or was causing a problem because of its subject matter would be whitewashed or discarded.

It was Dr. Heil who suggested the artists use the medium of fresco for the murals. The artists went to work in January 1934, using the old, Italian tradition as the Mexican artists interpreted it because several of the artists had worked in Mexico with Diego Rivera and wanted to employ his style and approach. Fine marble dusts were mixed with slaked lime to create the painting surface. Plasters slake the lime by firing it quickly in kilns, then soaking it in water in large vats for about three months. The walls are prepared by a plasterer by building up a bed of cement and rough lime plasterer on which the artists traces an outline of the design. When the artist is

² Charmaine Go, “Unemployment Relief Distribution in the Bay Area During the Depression,” University of California Berkeley, n.d., available online at <http://eh.net/Clío/Publications/unemployment.html>, accessed September 13, 2007.

³ Masha Zakehim Jewett, *Coit Tower San Francisco, Its History and Art*, 50th Anniversary Edition, 1983-84, Volcano Press: San Francisco, 1983, 28.

⁴ Ibid, 28.

⁵ Ibid, 29.

⁶ Ibid, 29.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 4

Lillian Coit Memorial Tower
San Francisco County, CA

ready to paint the plasterer spreads a thick smooth surface coat of fine wet plaster about two feet square, approximately in the shape of the outline. Using a small, wet brush the artist applies the earth colors, either dry or mixed with distilled water, repeatedly building up their intensity as long as the surface remains moist. Although it appears a solid color to the eye, under a microscope the fresco surface shows eight particles of white plaster cupping one color particle. To assure their uniformity, only one artist-assistant at Coit Tower, Farwell Taylor, ground all the color pigments for all the frescoes. As the colors dry on the plaster, the picture becomes part of the wall; any changes must be chipped out.

Dr. Heil hired twenty-six prominent artists and nineteen socialite assistants, a consortium called The Monkey Block, to paint the frescos. He also hired Victor Arnautoff to serve as the group director overseeing the artists, and the subject matter. The frescos in Coit Tower were meant to represent the California life in all its glory and diversity. The second floor murals were to depict California's outdoor and recreational lifestyle. Artist Lucien Labaudt painted both sides of fashionable Powell Street on the walls of the interior staircase. The result was a singularly unified effect of the palette, the media, the scale and the subject matter. These artists turned the inside walls of the Coit Tower into San Francisco's piece de resistance of American Scene art.

The murals created come controversy, particularly Clifford Wight's images above *Surveyor* and *Steelworker* of what was described as communist symbols. These images, coupled with some of the images depicted in other murals, were portrayed negatively by the press. This was compounded by the fact that San Francisco was in the midst of the longshoreman's strike. These symbols were not approved by the executive committee and Heil was directed to have the objectionable features of the mural removed, particularly Wight's work. The San Francisco Art Commission previewed the murals and disapproved with the content. The commission made the decision to close Coit Tower until the objectionable images could be removed. The Artists' and Writers Union put up a picket line to protect the murals from being destroyed. Wight protested that he was being censored after Arnautoff, Howard and Zakheim's frescoes were allowed to remain intact. Wight's symbols were quietly removed as the city was settling the strike and the press were preoccupied with other headlines. Coit Tower was reopened to the public on October 20, 1934.

Significance

Criterion C is satisfied by the artistic significance the Coit Tower murals achieve in execution, expression, and in a Depression-era historical context. The themes of agriculture, education, urban and rural life, social protest, and New Deal idealism established at Coit Tower were to be copied by many other social realist artists working for the government around the country. Like Biddle, several of the Monkey Block artists had studied with Diego Rivera in a socially-conscious mural movement that he started in the 1920s in Mexico. The PWAP funds were such a windfall for North Beach that there existed a covenant of support for the favorite vista point.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 5

Lillian Coit Memorial Tower
San Francisco County, CA

Local reporter John Barry wrote in the *San Francisco News* that the PWAP in Washington had been surprised that enough fresco painters existed to “carry out plans so elaborate as those for Coit Tower, the artists were working away in harmony.” This good will toward the New Deal government reigns nationally throughout the short-lived PWAP. Forbes Watson, PWAP technical director felt that it “quite easily may turn out to be the greatest step toward a finer civilization that the Government of the United States has ever previously taken.” By 1933, the American art scene, a national art movement, had become established as the most popular movement in American art. The political and idealistic schism within the American Scene is perfectly represented in the body of work inside Coit Tower. The work most visible today is that of the Social realists; however, the group who painted upstairs, coined the “Ivory Tower Group” were urban Regionalists. The regionalists scenes depict a movement back to America’s heartland, an outdated idealism of a rural nation. Poverty from crop devastation and the Dust Bowl exodus are simply ignored. The Regionalists were much more hopeful of a recovery and supportive of the American Dream almost in denial of the protracted economic collapse.

The social realists on the ground floor were politically representative of the nation’s cultural melting pot. Large American cities like San Francisco were magnets for the desperate seeking work. Unlike the archery or picnics depicted upstairs, Zakheim’s *Library* in the rotunda depicts local personalities crawling over each other to read international newspapers. A significant example of tempered harsh social statement is in John Langley’s Howard’s fresco, *California Industrial Scenes* (first floor north). The only “hobo” recorded in the gallery searches for work as a poor family camps beneath the curious eye of a rich family and chauffeur. This juxtaposition of strong visual images is similar to the Mexican muralist Siqueiros rather than how Rivera might have portrayed it. Rarely were artists as serious and concerned about their roles as Americans. They did not simply question what to paint, but rather what an artists should paint and what his motivations ought to be. The Monkey Block Group constantly redefined their roles within their profession. The simple enjoyment of making a painting or an exploration of an aesthetic problem seemed almost less important than the need to provide a context for the role of the painter in society.

The Regionalist murals at the top of the tower adore the American strengths in an almost apologetically naïve approach, while the Monkey Block Group’s murals in the rotunda are concerned with socially and politically significant events taking place around the nation at that very moment in their lives. The Realists place a heavier emphasis on art as a vehicle for political and social critique. The self-conscious Monkey Block Group had a distinct effect on this heritage site, time capsule, and the subsequent triumph of free speech which is germane to Criterion C.

The Coit mural rotunda began the *American Scene* in democratic art. By 1934 antagonisms were beginning to grow between Regionalists and the Social Realists downstairs. Many of these artists were Jewish, often immigrants themselves. Since Hitler’s initial restricting, and

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 6

Lillian Coit Memorial Tower
San Francisco County, CA

ultimately lethal, politics towards Jewish artists was carefully reported in the art press, as well as the *Daily Press*, ominous parallels between German nationalism and *American Scene* nationalism could easily be made.

One of the most interesting aspects of Coit Tower is that after seventy-five years visitors today often assume that all of the murals were painted by the same artist. Marsh Zakheim suggests that this priceless collection of frescos represents the "San Francisco School of Painting." With PWAP funds, artists were free from the caprice of patrons: they had no more need for dealers, and they were able to express themselves in their own style. This ground breaking PWAP experiments was their first step toward the thing which Van Gough believed: "An association of artists who guarantee each other's work and living." The Regionalists models were thin from the Depression and the Social Realists were internationally informed, but there was a truce within this school in the shared values of a better future though the New Deal. These artists were all peers and friends who lived on Telegraph Hill. They muted their criticisms for the good of the overall installment. Upon scrutiny, these artists were all suffering and were glad to have a canvas. As Dorthea Lang wrote in 1934, "Make no mistake, if the imagery of the Great Depression is essentially true, it is because there had been nothing in the American Experience to prepare its people for the dimension of what had ripped through the fabric of the nation. There has been nothing since to compare to it. It was the worst of times, a terrible scarring experience that changed this country and people forever." The Coit Tower murals are a definitive representation of the art of the Great Depression.

Coit Tower was designated a local landmark in 1983.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 1

Lillian Coit Memorial Tower
San Francisco County, CA

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 1

Lillian Coit Memorial Tower
San Francisco County, CA

Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description – Property sits on Pioneer Park. Donated to City September 17, 1876. 50 vera lot purchase. Lot No's 1467, 1468, 1474, 1475.

Commencing on the northeast corner of Kearney and Filbert Streets; thence northerly on Kearney Street 275 feet; thence easterly on Greenwich Street 275 feet; thence at right angles 275 feet; thence westerly on Filbert Street back to the place of beginning.

Boundary Justification