



DATE: March 23, 2023 AGENDA ITEM 6.A

TO: Petaluma Public Art Committee

FROM: David Ward, Public Art Specialist

SUBJECT: Recommendation to the PPAC to Fund Acquisition of Selected Artworks from the Mary Fuller McChesney Estate and Contract for Artwork Installation, Transportation, and Conservation for City Council Approval

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Petaluma Public Art Committee (PPAC) recommend to the City Council that Public Art Funds towards acquiring artworks from the Mary Fuller McChesney estate to add to the City's public art collection. By recommending approval, the Public Art Committee shall direct staff create a scope of professional services to execute a contract for the artwork's installation, transport, and conservation between a qualified contractor and the City.

BACKGROUND

Sculptor, author, and art historian Mary Fuller McChesney, who lived and worked in the Petaluma area for several decades, passed away on May 4, 2022, in Petaluma. McChesney's legacy as a renowned, local, female artist of the mid-century continues in her sculptures included as part of her estate. McChesney's friends, neighbors, and estate managers describe the artist's wishes for her works to be displayed for public enjoyment. The Public Art program has an opportunity to preserve the legacy of this local, influential artist by collecting and displaying McChesney's works for residents of and visitors to Petaluma. McChesney's artwork can educate about a unique and prominent voice in Petaluma's creative community and history, in addition to honoring McChesney's wishes.

Born Mary Fuller in 1922 in Wichita, Kansas, McChesney grew up in Stockton, California on her family's farm and moved to the Bay Area to study philosophy at UC Berkeley. McChesney became a self-taught artist and worked as a welder during World War II at the Richmond Shipyard. In 1949, Mary Fuller married a fellow artist, printmaker, and teacher Robert McChesney. From the radical political pressures of the 1950s anti-communist movement, McChesney and her husband faced increasing pressures from society and work that eventually pushed the artists to move abroad to an artist colony in Ajijic, Mexico, where they lived for the next few years. During her time in Mexico, McChesney discovered Mayan and Aztec mythology that became the theme of her work, which until then was primarily influenced by modern abstract works. McChesney moved back to the Bay Area with her husband in 1952, settling on Sonoma Mountain, where they would live for the next several decades. McChesney developed a unique medium for her sculptures; a mixture of

concrete and vermiculite that would be sculpted before drying, forcing McChesney to work quickly. Many of McChesney's works were not displayed beyond her home on Sonoma Mountain because of their size, scale, and weight.

In August 2022, staff was approached by Joseph Cochrane, former branch manager of the Petaluma Regional Library, about several opportunities to view and potentially collect McChesney's works to support both the City's public art collection and to raise funds for the McChesney estate. At the October 2022 regular PPAC meeting, staff informed the Committee about opportunities to view available artworks in the McChesney estate. The PPAC instructed staff to create a visual catalog of the McChesney works to begin discussion and selection of specific individual artworks that may be better suited and more desirable to collect for the Public Art Program. Between October and December of 2022, staff and an *ad hoc* subcommittee of the PPAC completed site visits to the McChesney residence on Sonoma Mountain, the Astro Motel exhibition, and the Sinella and Calabi residences to view available works in the McChesney estate for potential acquisition.

At the November 29, 2022 PPAC meeting, the Committee directed staff to create an opportunity for feedback and ranking of individual artworks in the compiled catalog. The intended outcome of this ranking selection process was to reduce the number of artworks of interest for acquisition while supporting the creation of desired goals for collecting these artworks. The primary acquisition considerations included but were not limited to the aesthetic improvement of the artworks in the context of their surroundings, public and artwork safety, maintenance, storying telling and grouping these artworks in relation to one another, and the number of artworks to collect, which will inform the targeted project budget. The PPAC discussed the Mary Fuller Estate in the context of these topics to help guide the selection process.

At the January 26, 2023, PPAC meeting, staff presented the results from the Committee's ranking of 92 artworks included in estate exhibitions at the Astro Motel in Santa Rosa, CA, the artist's former residence on Sonoma Mountain, and the Sinella and Calabi residences in Sebastopol, CA. Of the 92 works, 21 works ranked higher based on an aggregate of high-low-medium rankings by the Committee's point values. The Committee discussed these works and instructed staff to identify possible site locations for the public display of acquired works and to be prepared to share these recommendations at the next meeting.

Staff provided a suggested locations list for future public artwork installations and opportunities for the Committee's consideration at the February 23, 2022, PPAC meeting. The locations list was generated for the PPAC to use in consideration of several different active and upcoming projects, including possible sites for the Mary Fuller McChesney acquisition. The Committee discussed several aspects of the acquisition, including timeline, possible sites for installation, ongoing maintenance, artwork curation, interpretation and engagement by the public, and spending expenditures from the Public Art Fund to account for associated costs for the overall acquisition.

The PPAC directed staff to create a preliminary outline of the acquisition process and its primary components to clarify the next steps in the project and its associated costs, tasks, and requirements for executing an artwork collection acquisition as discussed. Though final artwork selections and recommended budgets have not been decided, the Committee has forecasted early budget expense

estimates, in addition to high-level expectations for artwork selections to further along the acquisition project. Staff summarized this feedback in this staff report.

Additionally, the PPAC has invited McChesney estate manager Dennis Calabi to the March 23rd meeting to provide input on the selection for acquisition process to aid in the Committee's discussion and ultimate decision.

DISCUSSION

The 2013 Public Art Master Plan (PAMP) calls for approximately 65 percent of annual Public Art Fund expenses to be allocated toward artwork acquisition and commissions. Any McChesney estate acquisition(s) would fall into this public art fund expense category, as well as fulfill and advance the following PAMP goals:

- **Aiming to foster a sense of beauty at the artwork site.**
- **Represent the diversity of our community.**
- **Activate neighborhoods that may not have existing public art.**
- **Be low maintenance and appropriate for public space.**

From Committee discussion at the January and February 2023 PPAC regular meetings, staff notes that the Committee is interested in collecting approximately 10 to 20 artworks from the estate, contingent on timeline and budget estimates and other logistics from the acquisition process. The Committee anticipated associated expenses for this project, including but not limited to purchase, conservation, transportation, installation, permitting, and labor. The total project cost is estimated to be \$40-60,000 funded through the Public Art Fund.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on these estimated project expenses, staff recommends that the Public Art Committee recommend to the City Council that the City commits \$60,000 from the Public Art Fund towards the project to fund:

1. Acquisition of selected artworks in payment to the McChesney Estate
2. Support contracting with a qualified art handling and installation company to provide services for installation, transportation, and conservation of the acquired works for City Council's approval. These services may need to be executed in separate Professional Services contracts or using subcontractors dependent on the level of services available by qualified contractors.

The following categories shall be used to guide spending of the requested amount:

- **Purchase of Artworks' Title and Limited Copyright (20%)**
- **Conservation of Acquired Artworks (15%)**

- **Transportation and Storage of Acquired Artworks (15%)**
- **Installation of Acquired Artworks (40%)**
 - Includes labor, materials, rentals, City permits, any fabricated pedestals, pads, and/or mounts required for permanent public display of the sculptures. Potential lighting elements and interpretive didactics also included in this category.
- **Contingency (10%)**

These categories should be used as estimations to guide spending in this project. Any unused or remaining committed funds for this project shall be returned to the Public Art Fund.

If PPAC recommends approval to the Council, the City Council would review a request for expenditure of \$60,000 of Public Art Funds to acquire the artworks and to contract with professional services for conservation and installation of the newly acquired artworks. Consistent with other past projects, the PPAC will manage the selection and installation process with staff if the expenditure is approved by Council.