

# The Long Beach Mosaic

*Created in 1938 to adorn the Municipal Auditorium may now embellish a privately owned condominium*

*By Ana Maria McGuan*

- The grandest of all WPA designs; the single biggest achievement of the Federal Arts Project.
- The largest “texturized” mosaic unbroken by openings in the whole country--some say the world.
- The originator of the “texturized” technique, because of its expanse and the need to find cohesiveness among the many artists’ styles working on it at the same time.
- The cause of a once-in-a-lifetime esprit de corps among so many young artists working and learning from the masters.

(These are a few published statements used to describe this amazing work of mosaic art.)

Back in 1937, for almost a year, some forty young artists used their ingenuity and creativity to put together the mosaic. They worked under the direction of Stanton MacDonald-Wright, better known as the Dean of the California Painters, co-founder of the Synchronism school of art, and Albert Henry King, an accomplished artist and the leading color authority in Los Angeles.

These artists worked during freezing cold and windy weather conditions, sometimes past midnight, when they would curl up in blankets on the beach to sleep and start all over again the next morning. (And some of them may have stayed because of King’s promise to open two cases of thirteen-year-old brandy--but only after the last tile was laid!)

The tiles were cut in a big room on the top floor of a building in Los Angeles, where the mosaic pattern was laid on the floor. They would cut the tesserae with different textures and patterns for each element in the design. Once a section was completed, it was sent to Long Beach where another group of artists had the wall ready and prepared for each section. They would cement it, clean it, and so on, until another piece would arrive.

**“It is the legacy of the thousands of workers who labored at their craft for little money but great pride which inspires us today. Although many of their works of art have been**

**destroyed or stolen, those that remain must be preserved. They stand as a reminder of a time in our country’s history when dreams were not allowed to be destroyed by economic disaster.”** *Nancy Lorange, National “New Deal” Preservation Association.*

Since 1982 this remarkable WPA tesserae mosaic, created to adorn the facade of the old Long Beach Municipal Auditorium, has been hanging on the exterior of the Long Beach Plaza parking structure, waiting for a permanent home befitting its national significance. A new home may have been found--by incorporating it into the lobby of a proposed privately owned condominium project.

Some would ask if this is the best home we can find for this nationally significant mosaic--a mural originally placed at the gateway to historic Route 6 (Long Beach Boulevard) because of its Olympian proportions and design that was meant to be seen from miles away.

***Wouldn't it be better if it could once again adorn a grand public building?***

