



North Carolina Art History Project

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A set of 14 murals was commissioned in 1954 for the Institute of Government's new building. The murals interpret North Carolina's history, or at least a perspective on that history, from colonial beginnings through early space exploration. For many years the murals were exhibited as a set in our auditorium (which was converted to the east wing of offices during our building renovation). We rarely used the auditorium for our classes, and for many years the largest audience for the murals was recent law graduates who spent hot summer nights in the auditorium listening to tedious lectures (my perspective as one of those graduates) in a bar exam review course. Mrs. Coates nearly to the end of her life gave guided tours of the murals to interested civic and university groups. We still display eight of the restored murals in the lobby and the atrium—the others have found homes in other public buildings across the state and one is in storage.

Everyone has their own opinion about the murals. John Sanders is supposed to have said that they are neither good history nor good art. I have come to like them as interesting conversation pieces, but at best they offer a limited and incomplete historical perspective. The murals do not recognize the perspectives and achievements of African-Americans or Native Americans throughout North Carolina's history. This is a major shortcoming and we have been working for several years to commission new art that will focus on African American leaders, creators, educators, and other contributors to the rich history and cultural fabric of the state. Ann Simpson has done a wonderful job of leading the effort. She worked with a history committee to determine the missing histories and objectives for the new paintings, and she also worked with a selection committee composed of outside art experts and colleagues within the School to choose from among the artists who submitted statements of interest. We also intend to commission art in the future that honors the historical contributions of Native Americans in North Carolina.

Earlier this year we selected two artists to create new works honoring African American history in North Carolina, and each one has developed an exciting concept. The current economic crisis made it impossible to justify spending money, even money from our Foundation, to go forward with either work of art. We had asked the Local Government Federal Credit Union if they would make a pledge so that one of the artists could begin work while we sought additional contributors. The LGFCU board instead "chose to fund the entire cost for the commission, thus making a statement about the merits of this project." In the letter accompanying their \$45,000 donation, the LGFCU executive vice president said "[w]e are convinced the mural will not only serve to recognize those who contributed to the Civil Rights Movement, but also as an encouragement to future



generations.”

The artist is [Colin Quashie](#) from Charleston, South Carolina, and he will create a 6? by 45? painting that uses the 1960 sit-in at the Woolworth lunch counter in Greensboro as “the inspirational framework” that recognizes a select and representative group of African-Americans who figured prominently in North Carolina’s history. According to the artist, “[t]he connective tissue throughout this mural is the concept of ‘service.’ All of the nominees for inclusion have spent the formidable years of their lives serving the community and enlightening humanity in a variety of ways.” The mural will be located on the wall facing our dining room on the lower level, which the artist selected “for its contextual connection with the thematic heart of the work.”

I encourage you to look at [his final proposal](#) to learn more about the painting (here are [more images](#) from the proposal), as well as Colin’s [resume and cover letter](#) that were submitted in response to our request for proposals. The list of the people and events to be portrayed are being finalized now, so not everyone on the “menu” sample will be depicted with the exception of the Greensboro Four. No living people will be included. We expect the delivery date to be later in the spring of 2010, which still will allow us to connect it meaningfully with the 50th anniversary of the Greensboro sit-in (February 2010). I am thrilled that we are in a position to begin honoring the wonderful contributions of African Americans throughout North Carolina’s history. Take a look and let me know what you think.





Colin Quashie's Illustrative Presentation for the Mural Titled "Service"