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## A Mural on the Move

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In 1949 the cornerstone of UNH's Kingsbury Hall was laid into the ground and one year later the facility opened its doors to engineering students. But before this occurred, the late professor of arts John Hatch painted a mural on the back wall of the Kingsbury Hall Library--a mural that spoke of the newly discovered atomic energy as either a key to the future, or the downfall of humanity. His warning is far from outdated, and as the university continues onward in the 21st century with an up-to-date Kingsbury Hall for engineering and science students to study, learn, and invent in, the "Atomic Age" mural will be coming too, in a new location, and with a few touch-ups.



The Hatch mural was moved over spring break from an area in the old Kingsbury building, which was demolished, to the wall outside the first floor lecture hall in the new south wing. In its new home hundreds of students will see the mural every day. During the summer of 1950 Hatch painted the mural, and was paid \$700 by the university, plus \$50 for supplies, says his widow, Maryanna Hatch. "It was a pretty last minute thing," she adds, but since money was scarce Hatch quickly accepted the offer. "The space given to him was not one that he would have chosen. It was on a solid cinderblock wall and had to be resurfaced."

The mural was painted in casein, a water-soluble medium derived from milk that is ideal for mural paintings because it dries to an even consistency. Though the mural is more than 55 years old, Hatch's message is still clear today. In the center of the mural he painted a double-edged sword of reason erupting downward from an eye of conscience, splitting both the painting and the atom in half. On the right side of the mural, under a hand spread out in friendship and giving, is the positive future, a future supported by using the atom; one of community values, education, and fertile lands. On the left, under a closed fist, is its destructive counterpart. Here, the mural predicts the new technology will breed war, resulting in a collapse of communication, infrastructure, and humankind. The scene is strongly reminiscent of a post-Apocalypse earth. "[The mural] has an important message and asks questions we're still struggling with," says Vicki Wright, director of the UNH Art Gallery. "It's

not just something that was created 56 years ago—it's something that still rings true today."

Wright compares the fresco with those done by early 20th-century Mexican muralists. "He was an artist who explored many different styles and mediums throughout his career," says Wright, who spent time visiting local art shows with the retired professor. Many of Hatch's paintings show influences from Asian, Mexican and Cubist painters, as well as other styles, she adds.

Hatch, who died from cancer in 1998, retired from teaching at the university in 1985. Living on Mill Road near downtown Durham, he was a former faculty member that kept close contact with what was going on in the UNH art department. Wright, who began working at the university in 1986, recalls Hatch stopping by for art supplies. Or calling her up to say he was headed to a local art exhibit and that he'd meet her outside the Paul Creative Arts Center in a couple of minutes--not asking whether Wright was busy or not. He always did things on the spur of the moment, she says. "He had a fabulous sense of humor," says Wright, remembering a sparkle in Hatch's eye whenever he would say anything. "And he always struck me as a little mischievous."



Finding a job in UNH's art department straight out of graduate school, Hatch attended Yale University where he earned his BFA in 1948 and MFA in 1949. He was also a veteran and before enrolling in Yale had enlisted in the Aerial Phototopography Unit of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, taking photos in the Philippines for military mapping during World War II. Hatch's paintings

are as diverse as the different styles he uses in each one. Many of them are spread throughout campus: the State War Memorial Window on the third floor of the MUB, a portrait of UNH English professor Gwynne H. Daggett in a reading area of Dimond Library, a watercolor of Adam's Point in the Dimond Library's Administration Office.

"He was a sailor who spent a lot of time on the ocean," says Wright, and many of his paintings reflect that, like his acrylic of South Point Star, one of the Isles of Shoals, and his watercolor Sea Patterns. Hatch experimented with different mediums too, using sand, fabric, and other materials to construct several of his paintings.

But it was for Hatch's mural in Kingsbury, one that he once called "a cross section of our contemporary state of technology," that UNH officials set aside money as part of the building fund to relocate and preserve it. Dean of the College of Engineering and Physical Science (CEPS) Joe Klewicki says there are a number of reasons why the preservation of the Hatch mural was important, but one reason was that it spoke to the heritage of the school. "The mural, for a number of years, has been a central icon of [Kingsbury]," says Klewicki. "So having it in the new building provides continuity with the history of the college."

To protect the future of the Hatch mural, SKANSKA USA Building Inc., the contractor company renovating Kingsbury, hired nationally renowned painting conservators George Adams and his wife Christiana Cunningham-Adams of Cunningham-Adams Fine Arts Conservation to move and then restore the mural. Adams and Cunningham-Adams have

restored murals all over the country, including at the United States Capital Building and the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. They have also restored murals in Italy. Working together, Adams, a conservation engineer, and his wife, a fine arts painting conservator, move murals from existing locations to new areas and repair the damage that stress, weather, vandalism and other factors can do to them.

Adams, whose interests are primarily in the structural integrity of the murals' walls and the effects climate has on them, says that their goal is not to restore murals to near new condition, but to repair the paintings so that the artist's message is still visible and the murals still look as old as they actually are.

Adams and his wife believe the Hatch mural, which was faded and had paint loss spots in several areas near the top, was affected by the air in its old location. "It unquestionably was climatic issues that localized on some weaknesses in the painting," says Adams. The last and only other time the mural was restored was in 1991 by Hatch. Even with the best planning and leadership, no plan is fool-proof. UNH Photographic Services took detailed digital pictures of the mural before it was moved. That way, if something did happen, it could be recreated by using the digital images. The Hatch mural, which was moved over a period of two days with the help of 10 workers, had to be prepared and placed into a metal frame before it could be physically moved. Workers, who spent almost two weeks preparing to move the mural before actually moving it, added a plaster background to the four-inch thick concrete wall the mural was painted on to increase the strength of it. Two layers of compounds and rice paper were also added to the mural face by Cunningham-Adams to protect its surface during transport.

Chris Kelley, SKANSKA senior superintendent, and Brenda Whitmore, UNH Facilities Construction Project Manager, were both at the moving of the painting to assist in the process. "The first step was to stabilize the mural," says Kelley.

To do this, workers had to support the mural wall with wooden braces to prevent it from toppling over, and then remove the adjacent walls bordering the 38-foot long, 8-foot tall mural. Then they cut a groove below the bottom of the painting, which stood about 34 inches above the ground, and inserted a steel L-angle. An I-beam was then set onto the top of the mural wall and metal tresses were positioned diagonally on the mural's front and back, and clamped to the I-beam on the top and the L-angle on the bottom, then tightened enough to hold them in place.

The delicate process of moving the mural, overseen by Adams, then began. "Because this thing is 40 feet long and very awkward to move...we decided the safest thing was to cut it in half without disturbing the integrity of the painting," he says.

The mural was cut in half vertically, each half weighing about 6,000 pounds. Then one half was lifted, using a block-and-tackle-like device called a chainfall, and the wall below the mural was knocked out. After this the mural was attached to a set of trolleys suspended from a track of I-beams on the ceiling. The mural wall, originally on the second level, was then trolleyed 140 feet to an opening in the floor and lowered to the ground level using the chainfall, where it was positioned onto two T-shaped metal ends with wheels. Then it was wheeled through the old Kingsbury to the new south wing, where it was suspended from a second I-beam and slid into place.

"There were a lot of people just standing there and holding their breath," says Whitmore about the tense atmosphere. "Every step was critical."

The entire process was then repeated for the second half of the mural and the two pieces were slid into place side-by-side. "A portion of the mural will stick out beyond the curve of the wall," says Kelley about the left side of the painting, caused by over-cutting both ends of the mural wall. "This is consistent with the intention of a curator to visually represent the fact that the mural came from another place. The fact that the mural sticks out tells the viewer that the mural wasn't originally put there."

The final step is the restoration of the mural. Cunningham-Adams will remove the protective layers and repair any damage done to the mural in transport. She will also fill in and paint over the cut-line that splits the mural wall in half, and brighten any colors on the painting that have faded due to time or climate damage. Cunningham-Adams and her husband, who began the restoration process last week, will be returning soon to finish repairing and touching-up the mural. For restoring the mural, everything that Cunningham-Adams and Adams add to its surface is reversible and a modern medium. The hope though is that the restoration will last a while. "It's better if this painting won't have to be touched for another 100 years," says Cunningham-Adams.

Mrs. Hatch is happy with the mural's new home, which is a much more visual location. "People will [constantly] be walking by it and they can see it from a lot of viewpoints," she says. "I'm looking forward to it being restored and I think it will be a great tribute to John."

Who knows? In a hundred or a thousand years later students may still be admiring and learning from John Hatch's mural--and the message he has for all.



