

“Pastoral California” Mural

201 E. Chapman Avenue

1934

Fresco painting

Status: Local Landmark; Listed on the National Register



Dedicated on November 22, 1934, “Pastoral California”, a fresco mural by Charles Kessler II, is located on the west exterior side of the Fullerton Auditorium, which was constructed in 1920. The painting was funded by the Federal Works of Art Project (FWAP). It is one of few remaining fresco murals in the nation, and it is the largest extant FWAP mural created by one person. The mural exemplifies the legacy of New Deal art programs.

The mural was whitewashed with beige paint in 1939, but in 1997, it was restored with the combined efforts of local business and civic leaders, school administrators, teachers, students, alumni, artists, and numerous volunteers. The restoration project symbolized a strong community spirit and the respect for tradition and history that are part of the city of Fullerton.

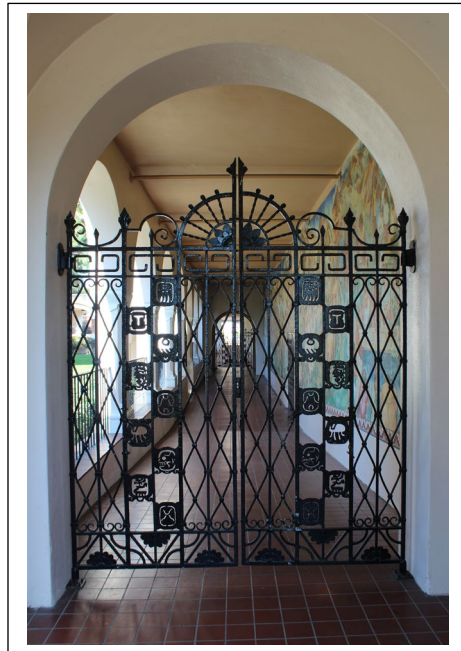
The mural was created using watercolors over plaster, known as the fresco technique. Kessler painted the fresco directly on wet lime plaster, and when the plaster dried, the fresco mural became part of the long wall. Before painting the mural, Kessler drew the work on brown wrapping paper. He then separated the paper into 36-inch squares and transferred them to the wall one square at a time, using them to trace the montages on the wall.

The vibrant fresco depicts California’s mission and rancho periods from 1776 to 1846 in a series of vignettes or montages that feature animals, games, and historical Spanish and Mexican figures from early California and Orange County. The mural is an idealized and romanticized snapshot of life on a rancho in

the early 1800s, before the Gold Rush and California statehood, in what was to become Orange County. Featured are large pictures of horses, cattle, Franciscan padres, vaqueros, fiestas, and women grinding corn and washing clothes. The mural is regionalist but fits within the social realism preferred by New Deal painters, who tended to favor the positive depiction of Americans engaged in everyday situations and activities.

The mural is sheltered by an extensive covered arched walkway that runs the length of the west side of the Fullerton Auditorium. While the covered walkway provides protection from the elements, the mural is somewhat hidden by this projecting arcade. Taking this into account, Kassler planned the colorful fresco so that between each of the square columns of the arcade there was a complete vignette, so that anyone viewing the mural through a single archway would see a full picture panel or scene.

Access to the mural is through three sets of matching and elaborately detailed Mayan Revival wrought iron double gates. Each gate features nine matching square-shaped figures that represent a day on the Mayan calendar. Two of the original gates are positioned on the north and south ends of the covered arcade; a third set of double doors, added during the 1997 restoration, is located on the west side facing the mural. The original contributing gates which highlight and frame the mural at each end, were hand-crafted by Fullerton Union High School students enrolled in a metal shop class in 1934. In 1997, the set of west-facing metal gates were produced to match the original ones and to provide additional protection.



Iron gate at south end of arcade