

COALITION TO SAVE THE VENICE POST OFFICE

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Oct. 19, 2012

Eric D. Radwick, Assistant Special Agent in Charge
Office of Investigations
U.S. General Services Administration

James W. Coyne
USPS Asset Manager
Room 6670, Facilities
475 L'Enfant Plaza, SW
Washington, D.C. 20260-6201

David E. Williams
USPS Vice President, Network Operations
Room 6670, Facilities
475 L'Enfant Plaza, SW
Washington, D.C. 20260-6201

Re: New Deal Mural in Venice, California

Dear Messrs. Radwick, Coyne and Williams:

The United States Postal Service recently sold the historic Venice Post Office. This Post Office included the *Story of Venice* mural, created by renowned artist Edward Biberman. The artist is regarded as an icon of post war California Modernist art. His work appears in the Smithsonian, the National Portrait Gallery, and LACMA, among many other collections. It is our understanding that the sale essentially and wrongfully transfers exclusive access to this publicly owned art work to a private individual. We request that the following steps be taken to review this matter:

- 1) the sale should be investigated to assure that it does not formally or in practice transfer ownership or exclusive access to a private individual;
- 2) that a copy of the loan or sale agreement be sent to our group for community review;
- 3) that the sale of the mural be stopped in favor of continued public ownership and access;
- 4) that any transfer of rights of the art work, at a minimum, include strong stewardship provisions that insure protection of the mural; and
- 5) that any transfer of rights to private hands include strong public access provisions.

It is our understanding that the new owner of the post office claims that the mural needs to be restored and that he is willing to pay for the restoration in exchange for exclusive rights to the mural. The mural was in excellent



Center portion of the "Story of Venice" Mural by Edward Biberman

condition when it was last seen on the walls of the post office. Can a new owner merely make unsubstantiated claims that a publicly owned mural needs to be restored as a reason that it needs to be transferred to private hands? Is there any independent review on what restoration techniques are proposed, on the true costs of any restoration, on where the restoration will take place and the conditions thereof, whether the restorer has the appropriate insurance to cover damage or theft of the mural in their custody; and whether there will be sufficient public access to the work.

This mural tells the story of Venice, not the post office, and because the proposed new owner contemplates demolishing the interior of the post office, there can be no argument that it will rest in its original setting. Our understanding is that the new owner plans to remove the mural from the post office in order to restore it. If it is removed, why does it need to go back into a privately owned business with little public access? Why would it not be placed in the Venice Abbot Kinney Public Library or other local public or nonprofit organization where the Venice community can continue to have daily access to this cherished work of art that is an important part of our heritage? This is a publicly owned priceless work of art that was paid for by the Federal Government and the tax payers of our country. It should not be essentially transferred to private ownership with limited, if any, access to the public.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns. We look forward to hearing from you and please get in touch with me should you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Jim Smith, Chair of the Coalition to Save the Venice Post Office

Cc: Amanda Seward, Esq.

Coalition Members:

- Beyond Baroque
- Free Venice Beachhead
- SPARC
- Venice Arts Council
- Venice Chamber of Commerce
- Venice Neighborhood Council

- Venice Peace and Freedom
- Venice Stakeholders Association
- Venice Town Council
- Edward Biberman Estate
- Councilmember Bill Rosendahl
- Member of Congress Janice Hahn

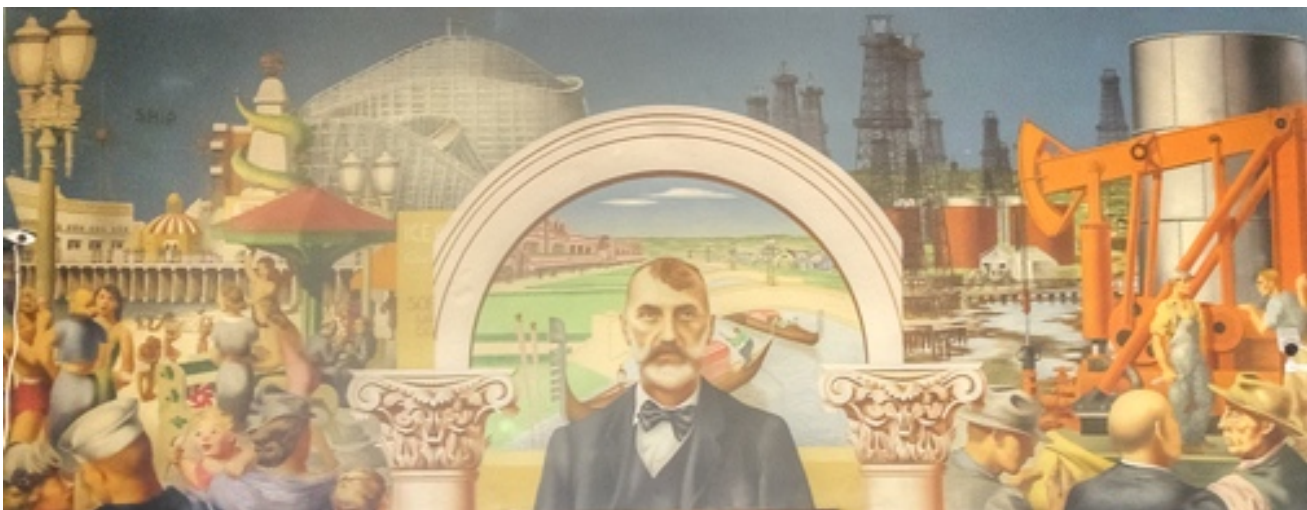


Photo of the Story of Venice mural in the Venice Main Post Office prior to the sale of the building.