



March 17, 2011

The Honorable Ann I. Jones  
Judge, Los Angeles Superior Court  
Central District Stanley Mosk Courthouse, Dept. 86  
111 North Hill Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

**Re: Site Specific Lobby Murals at Golden State Mutual Building,  
1999 W. Adams Boulevard, Los Angeles**

Dear Judge Jones:

The Los Angeles Conservancy formally objects to the sale, removal and loss of the site specific lobby murals at the Golden State Mutual building at 1999 West Adams Boulevard in Los Angeles. We provide the following information regarding the protected status afforded to the lobby murals through the pending local landmark designation of the Golden State Mutual building, which is currently under consideration by the City of Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Commission.

The Los Angeles Conservancy is the largest local historic preservation organization in the United States, with over 6,000 members throughout the Los Angeles area. Established in 1978, the Conservancy works to preserve and revitalize the significant architectural heritage of Los Angeles through advocacy and education. Since 1984, the Conservancy's all-volunteer Modern Committee has worked to raise awareness about Los Angeles' unique collection of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century modernist structures.

**I. Historical Significance**

Completed in 1949, the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company building is a significant example of the work of pioneering African American architect Paul Revere Williams, who has the distinction of being the first black architect admitted to the American Institute of Architects. The building is also significant for its 60-year span as headquarters for the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, one of the first such companies to offer life insurance to African Americans in Los Angeles and the western United States and later becoming the largest company to do so.

**a. Removal of Site Specific Lobby Murals Would Negatively Impact the Golden State Mutual Building**

Significant interior elements of the Golden State Mutual building include two site specific murals painted by acclaimed African American artists Charles Alston and Hale Woodruff. The murals, which are painted on canvas, are part of the building's original design as conceived by architect Paul R. Williams and remain in good condition. Williams sat on a three-person committee that selected the murals' artists and subject matter. The murals, which chronicle the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century

contributions of African Americans in California, are highly significant examples of integrated art in Los Angeles celebrating black history, and are believed to be Alston's and Hales' only public art in Los Angeles.

Because the original design of the exterior architecture and interior public spaces at the Golden State Mutual building remains highly intact, it is able to convey a strong sense of both feeling and association—two important aspects in evaluating the physical integrity of a historic site. The removal of the site specific lobby murals would have a negative impact on the ability of the Golden State Mutual building to convey its historical significance; the building's strongest visual connection to its African American historical context would be lost.

## **II. Golden State Mutual building under consideration for local landmark designation**

The Los Angeles Conservancy and its Modern Committee prepared and submitted a landmark nomination application for the Golden State Mutual building to ensure that this highly significant building and its integrated, site specific lobby murals receive protection through designation as a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument. On February 3, 2011, the Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Commission voted unanimously to take the nominated property under consideration, effectively placing a hold on any alterations to the subject property pending final determination by the City Council. Upon designation as a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument, proposed modifications to the Golden State Mutual building must be reviewed by the Cultural Heritage Commission and the Office of Historic Resources, which have jurisdiction over landmarked properties. The Commission and the Office of Historic Resources have the authority to deny approval for proposed modifications that would impact the Golden State Mutual building's architectural and cultural significance.

## **III. Conclusion**

The site specific lobby murals at the Golden State Mutual building are highly important element of the building's historical significance. Believed to be the only public art in Los Angeles of acclaimed African American artists Charles Alston and Hale Woodruff, these murals were conceived as part of the Golden State Mutual Building's original design. Because they are an integral part of the site's historical significance, the Conservancy formally objects to the sale, removal and loss of the site specific lobby murals at the Golden State Mutual building at 1999 West Adams Boulevard in Los Angeles.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at (213) 430-4203 or [afine@laconservancy.org](mailto:afine@laconservancy.org) should you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Adrian Scott Fine  
Director of Advocacy