

2021 GOVERNOR'S HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARDS

Paramount Theatre of the Arts Façade Restoration



Designed by legendary Bay Area architect Timothy L. Pflueger in 1930, the Paramount Theatre of the Arts, Oakland, California, is one of the few remaining large Art Deco movie halls in the United States, and the only one west of the Mississippi River. The City of Oakland has owned the Paramount Theatre since the 1970s and is represented by the Paramount Board of Directors. The Theatre was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1977, is listed on the California Register of Historical Resources, and is a City of Oakland Landmark.

The east (Broadway Street) elevation of the reinforced concrete structure features a monumental terra cotta tile mosaic, which extends over 100 feet above the street level. The mosaics, which depict brightly colored male and female figures overseeing scenes of the performing arts, were specifically designed for the Paramount by Gladding, McBean, & Company. The scenes are framed by maroon

and gold tiles on all sides. The mosaics are divided by a streamlined vertical blade sign bearing the name "PARAMOUNT." The façade retains high integrity, as alterations to the mosaics have been limited to minor repairs.

A façade survey in Spring 2018 determined that while much of the mosaic was in excellent condition, ultraviolet degradation of previous repairs, as well as spalling of the chevron-shaped tiles flanking the mosaics, had negatively impacted the appearance of the façade. In Winter 2019, work began to repair and stabilize the terra cotta façade and restore the blade sign between the mosaics. Work complied with the Rehabilitation Treatment of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.

Ultraviolet (UV) exposure had caused years of coatings to fade and peel. Removal of the coating revealed deep spalling. Replacement of the terra cotta, with a wider joint between the tiles, prevented friction spalling while maintaining the façade's appearance and the original design intent. The original maroon glaze formula was used by Gladding, McBean, so the original and replacement terra cotta segments matched perfectly. Multi-colored mosaic scenes on the principal façade were in nearly perfect condition, so repairs consisted merely of joint re-pointing and limited spall repair. The small copper roofs at the top of the mosaics had become loose over time and were not protecting the mosaic. To prevent future damage, the copper roofs were removed, and refurbished, and waterproofing membrane installed prior to reinstalling the copper. Work on the iconic blade sign included patching corroded sections, and re-coating of the sign prior to reinstallation of the stored neon lights, most of which were original to the 1930 construction.

The partnership between the City and the Project Team was representative of the esteem held for the Paramount Theatre. The theatre was part of the City's gilded past and continues to hold a central role in the life of Oakland, hosting citizenship ceremonies, high school graduations and other community events. The restoration of the distinctive mosaics to their previous glory helps to ensure this historic landmark will be a part of Oakland's future as well.