

Excerpt from Will Shank's FAIC oral history interview conducted by Kendall George on August 27, 2009 in San Francisco, CA

I worked a lot for Stanford at the Cantor Center where they didn't have a painting conservator of their own. In the meantime, one of my last research projects here was about contemporary murals and how they age, because I'd been called in by a lawyer to help to solve a problem of a mural in the Mission that disappeared, it was painted over at the corner of 17th and Harrison. They wanted my opinion as somebody who deals with contemporary art, and the lawyers came and said 'What usually happens in this case? What do you do when a mural disappears?' What I found out during the course of this particular situation was that there was no usual, that there were no rules, that nobody knew what to do in this case. People were suing each other over disappearing murals. So I was so interested in this question partly because of my left-leaning politics and my roots being out there in the community and caring a whole lot about community art. After a whole career of fixing precious objects for rich people, this was a breath of fresh air for me and I loved that I had a passion about contemporary murals and outdoor art so I was the right guy for this challenge. So gradually, contemporary murals and their care began to take over my life, and by 2003 was organized enough around that with Tim Drescher, who's a Berkeley scholar, we organized together a symposium at the Getty Conservation Institute and the Getty Research Institute called The Mural in the Americas where we brought together art historians and social historians, artists, conservators, paint manufacturers, arts attorneys, community activists and public art managers to all look at the mural—people in the Americas, so it was the U.S., Canada and Mexico—to all look at this question of where did the mural come from, where are they going, how do we save it. By 2005 or 6 this initiative had attracted the attention of the Heritage Preservation in Washington who kindly offered to take it over and manage it and make it part of Heritage Preservation, which it still is, and I'm very proud of that. I'm still the co-director of something called "Rescue Public Murals," which Joyce named, RPM (Rescue Public Murals).