

Elmer, Linda

From: Dennis C <dennismontgomery.carl@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, July 31, 2020 4:59 PM
To: Elmer, Linda; Owczarski, Jim
Subject: Letter of Objection - Railway Exchange Building Mural

Dear Ms Elmer and Mr Owczarski,

I'm writing to you to object to the installation of the mural 'Voting Rights are Human Rights' by Shepard Fairey on the side of the Railway Exchange Building in downtown Milwaukee. My first reaction to this project was: disappointment, frustration. Finally; however, I saw the opportunity for change.

The Shepard Fairey mural is being touted as a win for Milwaukee. A big name artist who will drive tourism. A piece of art that will foster 'community and togetherness' as stated by Sara Meaney, Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Tourism. I do not believe this mural will achieve either of those goals. I wouldn't drive five minutes from my apartment to see this mural. At the announcement on Facebook of the project by Wallpapered City, who submitted the application for the certificate of appropriateness that you are reviewing, there was immediately dissent and outcry in the comments over the choice of artist and subject.

Fairey's mural is placeless, generic and heartless. 'Voting Rights are Human Rights' is based on an image from white photographer Steve Schapiro, who documented the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Fairey does not know the subject of the photo he is reiterating, a black female protestor, nor did he collaborate with anyone directly affected by the 1960s movement. Thus he has no voice to speak on what he paints -- which is readily apparent in his choice of title: 'Voting Rights are Human Rights' -- a phrase as toothless as 'All Lives Matter'. He plasters images of signs, newspapers, and illustrations about protest, violence and gerrymandering in the background of the mural as if implying these issues are a relic of the era he has chosen to represent. As if they are not still issues faced by the community right now, as if civil rights protests are not happening daily, as if voter suppression is not being practiced nationwide. To frame these issues in this way is to erase the work of black activists in this city and the power of this city. Public art is a testament to the moment it was created in and a symbol of the space it occupies. Fairey's mural does not represent Milwaukee, it does not speak from the black community it depicts, and it does not create an accurate image of history.

I believe Milwaukee can do better. I urge the HPC to deny the request for a Certificate of Appropriateness for this project in favor of starting a community dialogue on who and what should be represented in that space. I hope the HPC will see the history happening right now and be a part of it.

Thank you,

Dennis Carl