Proposal Narrative

Please upload a Word document to the documents section in Fluxx that responds to the questions below. You are welcome to provide separate answers to each individual question or to draft a cohesive narrative that incorporates answers to all questions. The proposal narrative should be no more than 5 pages.1

If helpful, you may repurpose language from other relevant proposals, including documents previously submitted to Mellon. You may include visuals, infographics, tables, and bulleted lists directly within the Word document. Likewise, we hope you will be able to use this proposal narrative for other purposes.

1. INTRODUCTION
2. In one paragraph, tell us briefly about who you are. What is your work and who is it for?
3. GRANT SUMMARY/ABSTRACT
4. In one paragraph, please summarize the proposed work.2
5. REASON FOR THE WORK
6. What need or issue does your proposed work aim to address?
7. How are you positioned to do this work?
8. GOALS
9. What are the goals of the proposed work during the grant period?
10. If you are planning to assess the contribution of your work, how will you do so?
11. ACTIVITIES
12. What activities would Mellon funding support? Please include a timeline.
13. If relevant, identify significant collaborating partners and describe how they would participate in the work.
14. POTENTIAL CHALLENGES
15. What potential challenges could impact the proposed work? How have they informed your planned activities?

**CPAG Mission and History**

The Chicago Public Art Group (CPAG) is grounded in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion through art. Our mission is to unite artists and communities to create public art and expand the tradition of community-based public art making.

When our founders, William Walker and John Weber, formed the Chicago Mural Group\* in 1972, they were motivated by the power of a revolutionary movement that brought art to the streets. Outdoor murals put the stories of cultural heroes and the struggles of ordinary people where they would inspire their communities. Today, CPAG continues to empower citizens to take aesthetic ownership of their public spaces. We mentor, motivate, and support artists to develop installations throughout Chicago and teach creative skills to children and adults. This collaboration provides our constituents with tools to articulate their ideas and the confidence to transform their urban landscapes. CPAG is grounded on the following principles:

Public art—

* Instills community pride and ownership.
* Should be inspired by a community voice.
* Encourages economic investment, provokes thought, and catalyzes change.

\*Later renamed the Chicago Public Art Group

**The Proposal**

The Chicago Public Art Group requests support to preserve an iconic public art installation. The mural Solidarity has important historical, artistic, cultural, and social significance for both Chicago and the nation.

Painted by John Pitman Weber, a CPAG founder, and Jose Guerrero in 1974, the two-story mural was installed in the interior stairwell of the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America (UE) Union Hall at 37 S. Ashland Avenue.

In January 2024, the UE alerted CPAG that the union was selling the building that has been its home since 1947. Neighborhood gentrification, the structure’s deteriorating condition, and UE’s changing needs as a result of virtual work and meetings make the current location a poor fit for the organization’s future operations. The Union’s new location would be 1901 West Carroll Avenue, near the heart of the Chicago Loop. The building is owned by the Chicago Teachers Union Foundation, a 501c3, and houses the CTU offices.

**Locating a New Home**

CPAG and the UE’s leadership and members were devastated by the prospect of this important piece of history being lost to future generations. With the building’s demolition looming, the two groups swung into action and a plan was quickly identified.

The Chicago Teachers Union agreed to give Solidarity a new home at their facility. The building is a three-story renovated warehouse with a dramatic modern interior that will provide an elegant frame for the art. The Chicago Teachers Union Foundation would become the mural’s custodian.

CTU’s engineer visited the UE site and confirmed that there is space in CTU’s lobby for a significant portion of the mural. Sections that could not be located in the lobby would be distributed throughout the facility.

This placement provides a venue that is ideologically appropriate as well as exposure to an impressive new audience. The organization represents 30,000 school-related professionals. Hundreds of people visit the facility each year. CTU and the UE share a tradition of activism and progressive social values. Solidarity depicts that unique history and will enrich CTU’s architectural aesthetic with images that are culturally relevant to the organization.

Smaller sections of the mural will be relocated to the offices of *In These Times*, a progressive magazine that covers labor, located at 2040 N. Milwaukee Avenue in Chicago and at the UE Local 506 Hall in Erie, Pennsylvania.

**The Artists**

John Pitman Weber, along with William Walker, is the co-founder of the Chicago Public Art Group. He is the creator of over 40 public pieces in five countries and is a muralist, sculptor, and printmaker as well as a documentarian and writer on public art.

Weber has participated in major international and national traveling shows, including the Museum of Modern Art’s “Committed to Print,” the Jewish Museum’s “Bridges and Boundaries,” Berlin’s “Kunst und Krieg,” the “Poetic Dialogue Project,” and “Windows and Mirrors,” from the AFSC, that traveled nationally.

Weber is represented in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Spertus Museum, the DePaul University Museum, the Brauer Museum of Valparaiso University, the Loyola University Museum of Art, the Cohen Library of City College, CCNY, the Koehnline Museum of Oakton College, the College of DuPage Collection, Purdue University, Northwestern campuses collection, the Benedictine University collection, and the Elmhurst College collection. One of the first non-Black artists to lead a community-based mural, he has painted murals and facilitated public art workshops in Chicago and internationally.

Jose Guerrero was a self-taught artist, cartoonist, and printmaker. He worked at the Sunbeam appliance factory and for the Chicago Park District, but art was his true vocation. He joined the mural movement in the early 1970s. Guerrero was responsible for many of the murals in Chicago’s Pilson neighborhood. For more than 30 years, he led tours of the area’s public art and offered classes and workshops in printmaking. The tours introduced this work to students from around the Midwest who frequently returned to visit their favorite murals and hear Jose’s commentary, a unique blend of Mexican and Chicago history peppered with accounts of class struggle. Guerrero died in 2015.

**The Mural**

Artists Weber and Guerrero met in 1973. Weber was teaching at Elmhurst College and Guerrero was employed at the Sunbeam factory. Solidarity was a labor of passion and love. Weber and Guerrero were not paid for their work. They undertook the project inspired by their personal beliefs in the dignity of labor and the importance of that struggle. The UE provided a canvas that amplified those ideals. The organization’s mission of militant progressivism aligned perfectly with the artists’ values and their vision for the future. This is how Weber describes their work together.

“The UE was one of the few independent, progressive, and democratic unions, and our murals reflected its worldview. At the top of the stairs, we depicted a group of evildoers: a Ku Klux Klansman holding a noose, a Nazi, and a greedy, buffoonish boss sitting on a pile of workers with a factory in his hand. Jose added a Texas Ranger, a group viewed by many Mexicans in his home state and across the southwest as repressive.”

“We studied and borrowed compositional tricks of the great Mexican masters—Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco—to make interior corners, handrails, stairs, and columns fit naturally into the flow of the mural. Jose had to work around his shift at the plant, and I around the classes I taught at Elmhurst College. The UE could barely keep its lights on, so the union paid only for our materials. But we were both happy to have the rare opportunity to practice mural composition on the aging plaster walls of a late 19th-century building.”

“We used a quote from Frederick Douglass for the mural’s title: ‘Without struggle, there is no progress.’ Douglass’s words fit our intentions—to use art as a tool to shape a better world.”

Those words also apply to the careers of these artists whose passionate commitment to social justice is

evident in the power of their work. To create scenes that would be meaningful to staff and visitors, Weber and Guerrero visited factories and studied the union’s history. Many of the employees who played prominent roles in the union’s activities are depicted.

This is one of the oldest murals in Chicago. It is also the first–and possibly the only one–that portrays

union history. Larry Spivack, President of the Illinois Labor History Society, made this observation. “The

mural is an exciting and beautiful way of telling history. It is a lesson for all of us who are interested in a

better quality of life, a better society, and one that has less wage inequality and less racial division.”

**Removal, Storage, Preservation, and Restoration**

CPAG retained preservation experts, Parma Conservation, to remove, restore, and relocate the mural.

In March 2024, the first phase of preserving the mural was completed. Wall sections were removed, and all salvageable segments of the mural were transported from the UE to Terry Dowd Inc. storage. The mural sections will remain in storage until the details of relocation are settled. Before removal and storage, the mural was documented with high-quality photographs and video. The films allow viewers to continue experiencing Solidarity in its original context. **(Enjoy a video tour of the mural at this link https://vimeo.com/901281326 password UEMural.)**

To date, CPAG has raised about $250,000, which includes grants from the National Design Academy’s Abbey Mural Prize, the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, The Terra Foundation, and the Alphawood Foundation. This funding covers the majority of the cost of Phase 1 or removing the mural.

The effort to preserve Solidarity was truly collaborative:

* Over 2,500 United Electrical Union workers signed a public statement of support.
* Over 200 Union workers donated to an online fundraiser, raising almost $14,000 online.
* Several long-time UE and labor activists made major donations totaling $95,000.
* CPAG also received about $140,000 from the foundations listed above.

A $450,000 grant over two years from the Mellon Foundation would support the final activities needed to complete the preservation process. We are waiting for a precise estimate of those expenses from Parma Conservation. Preservation involves removing the paint from the wall sections, retouching, and reapplying it to canvas. When the mural is mounted on canvas, different scenes will be hung and displayed in the mural’s new locations. Following is the distribution of panels:

In These Times – 2040 N Milwaukee Ave Chicago 60647: UE News, Huelga Banner

UE Erie Office – 3923 Main St., Erie, PA 16511: Founders (biggest piece), Preamble (3 smaller pieces), UE logo Banner

CTU 1901 W. Carroll Ave., Chicago, IL: Oppressors (mounted as a triptych), Florence, Contract Negotiations, Dedication, Forge, Jose Guerrero

We do not anticipate challenges during the final phase of relocating the mural. Chicago-based Parma Conservation is deeply experienced in the techniques involved. The company has restored murals for churches, museums, libraries, post offices, and other civic and social institutions. On the other hand, each work of art involves different materials and conditions, and it is difficult to predict exactly how the restoration will unfold. However, we are confident in Parma’s ability to successfully circumvent or address problems. Thank you for reviewing this material and considering our request.