

SEE HEAR: STEVE PAUL ON RAMBLING AROUND THE ARTS (Continued)

It worked. The Mellon Foundation funds — an undisclosed fraction of the overall grant of \$4 million — made it possible for Gárate and del Ordi to spend a month over the summer in Haag Hall.

The frescoes were in quite good condition, Gárate said, showing little in the way of structural decay or damage. The murals had actually been conserved in the 1990s, though accepted processes have changed since then and prompted the team to tweak and remove some of the earlier over-painting. And they also had to treat some gaps they found above and below some places in the plaster foundation.

Gárate and del Ordi began by cleaning all the surfaces, using distilled water and thin Japanese paper to remove accumulated grime and making the colorful works appear fresh and ready

to pop off the wall. More days of touching up scrapes with fine-pointed brushes and fresh watercolor pigments followed.

Over time, Grieco has helped guide students to corral the history of the murals, even identifying and tracking down Kansas Citians who served as Quintanilla's models and were still alive to share their stories. A website devoted to the project was in the process of being updated, Grieco told me, and the university reintroduced its polished treasures with a public program on Oct. 13.

Small steps, but a mighty fine art story in our midst. □

For more, see our previous column about the murals, kcstudio.org/eight-decades-later-the-haag-hall-frescoes-have-many-stories-to-tell/.

TWO THINGS

The Belgian art and engineering team proposing a large-scale installation around the rebuilt **Barney Allis Plaza** came up with a brilliant plan. Of seven appealing finalists for the \$2.18 million public art project, the firm of **Gijs Van Vaerenbergh** was the only one to incorporate a sense of Kansas City history, a key factor that led to its selection and summertime approval by the Municipal Art Commission.

Pieterjan Gijs and Arnout Van Vaerenbergh, who presented their concept, process and renderings to the commission in an online meeting, said the team was impressed by the site's connection to an important historical moment. This is where the city's original major Convention Hall was built in 1899, burned in 1900, and was rebuilt in 90 days, in time for the Democratic National Convention, giving birth to the idea of the "Kansas City spirit."

The firm's design echoes the original two-story building's arched façade in a series of skeletal fragments along the perimeter of the block-long, four-acre site. The arches provide welcoming entry points, which put me in mind of the dramatic classical arch that fronts the central entry of Washington Square Park in New York City. The planned arrays of tubular steel, like three-dimensional sketches in the air, are intended to offer ever-changing visual views of the surrounding cityscape and to blend with the landscaping and activated spaces designed for the park by a team including HOK Architecture and McCownGordon Construction. Nighttime lighting will increase the dramatic effect.

Optional elements, such as a climbing vine envisioned for one corner section of the fragments and a second-story viewing platform on another, will depend on budget questions and potential fundraising beyond the proposed bottom line.



Allis Plaza project rendering by Gijs Van Vaerenbergh

The park, art project, and the reconstructed parking garage below ground are expected to be completed toward the end of 2026. (For more background on the One Percent for Art project, visit kcstudio.org/public-art-project-has-a-chance-of-giving-real-life-to-a-prime-downtown-site/.)

"Soundings: Making Culture at Sea" at the University of Kansas Spencer Museum of Art is a small but thoughtful exhibit that carries an intriguing premise — to explore how various artists and global cultures have found creative invention under the influence of the ocean deep. Objects and artworks range from a ship's mermaid ornament to an Inuit painting of seaweed to photographer Terry Evans' powerfully stunning images of Greenland glaciers. I'd been collecting some proverbial pebbles in encounters with sea-inspired literature and art, so the chance to dwell on the Spencer's two paintings by Winslow Homer (one from the Caribbean, the other from his perch at Prouts Neck, in Scarborough, Maine) was of particular interest. But beyond that, the exhibit presents often surprising material that speaks across cultures, genres and academic themes. The exhibit closes Dec. 14. — **Steve Paul**