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Proposed Mural Artwork, St. Martin's Theatre

Design and Access Statement

April 2022



Notice

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Document History

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Listed Building Consent is required for any demolition, alterations or extensions to a listed building that would affect its character as a building of special architectural or historical interest. In accordance with the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, works for the alteration of a listed building are authorised if written consent has been granted by the local planning authority, in this case the London Borough of Camden.

This Design and Access Statement (DAS) is written in support of Conservation Area and Advertising planning applications to install a painted, public artwork on the northern elevation of the St Martins Theatre, facing Tower Street in London. The statement is prepared on behalf of Adam Spiegel Productions who are the operators of the theatre and Wood Street Walls, the Community Interest Company (CIC) commissioned to install the artwork. This statement should also be read in conjunction with the accompanying Heritage Statement and plans.

1.2 Background to Project

Since 2019 Wood Street Walls have been working with Adam Speigel Productions (ASP) - the owners of the Mousetrap show and custodians of St Martin's Theatre - on proposals for a mural on the flank wall of the theatre facing Tower Street in Seven Dials. St. Martin's is home to the theatrical production of Agatha Christie's 'The Mousetrap' which opened in London's West End in 1952 and ran continuously until 16 March 2020 (the longest running production ever recorded), when the stage performances had to be suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The proposals have been developed with the support of the Agatha Christie Trust - who own the rights to the majority of the images and works of Agatha Christie; ASP - who own the rights to The Mousetrap; and the freeholders of the Theatre.

At a pre-application stage, the Seven Dials Trust were also consulted on the emerging proposals and have given their in-principle support. LB Camden planning officers were also consulted on the proposals and confirmed that listed building consent would be required to undertake works. They also advised that due to the nature of the artwork, and its relationship to the theatre, advertising consent would be required.

1.3 Design Team

The theatre producer, Adam Spiegel Productions, approached Wood Street Walls, a Community Interest Company specialised in public murals, to find an artist suited to the brief and prepare a design concept. They had seen a number of their other projects in and around London, including in sensitive locations such as next to the Grade II* Listed William Morris Museum in Walthamstow.

Together, and after careful consideration of a number of potential artists, the clients chose an artwork provided by Wood Street Walls' Creative Director, Matt Dufour - who works as an artist under the name ATMA - to develop the design for the Theatre. More information about the artist can be found in the appendix of this document.

Once an initial concept for the artwork had been developed, the planning and design consultancy Tapestry were appointed to submit the planning applications, and to prepare the required accompanying documents and drawings.



William Morris Mural, Walthamstow

2.0 --- The Proposal

2.1 Overview

2.2 Site Context

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2.0 The Proposal

2.1 Overview

The proposal is for a bespoke mural to be painted on the rear elevation of the theatre, fronting onto Tower Street. In 2019-20 minor repairs and redecoration of the façades of the theatre were undertaken by the owners.

The proposed artwork would cover the majority of Tower Street elevation and would wrap around the chamfered elevation on the corner with Tower Court, covering a total surface area of 288.7 sqm. No changes are proposed to the Tower Court or West Street elevations.

The artwork would be painted directly onto the wall, and would range in colour from brown, sepia tones, to purple and magenta, and would feature two archival portraits of Agatha Christie, reproduced with kind permission of the Agatha Christie Trust.

No changes are proposed to the use of the building, its access, hours of operation, scale or form, and all the proposed works are reversible.



Site on Tower Street

2.2 Site Context

The site forms part of the rear and side wall of the St Martin's Theatre on the corner of Tower Street and Tower Court, London. The property is registered by Historic England (1379186) as being of Grade II significance for its heritage value:

‘Designed in 1916 by WGR Sprague as a companion to the Ambassadors Theatre (1913), West Street (qv), but for different owners. Built by Lenn Thornton and Company, the building has an Ashlar facade with banded rustication to ground floor’.

The exterior of the building extends to 4 storeys, arranged in 5 bays with 10-window left return. As per the listing, ‘At the ground floor there are round arch openings and a wide central entrance surmounted by a plain 20th Century canopy. Giant engaged Ionic columns in antis

with rusticated end pilasters rise through the 1st, 2nd and 3rd floors, supporting an entablature, with triglyphs in the frieze, and parapet. First floor windows have Tuscan pilasters supporting pediments, above shouldered architraves and keyblocks’.

The interior of the building comprises a: ‘2-tier auditorium, in Classical style, of polished hardwood. Turned balusters to balcony fronts. Side walls of auditorium have large Doric engaged columns and pilasters on pedestals supporting bold entablature which continues over the rectangular proscenium arch. Glazed domed ceiling. Stage machinery: nearly complete example of Edwardian (1916) wooden stage, marred only by alterations made to accommodate dimmer room in the sub-stage space. Represents one of the final stages in the development of timber stage machinery in England and an exceptional survival’.

The primary entrance & frontage to the theatre is located on West Street, opposite the junction with Litchfield Street, where The Ivy restaurant is located. Tower Court runs along the north western side of the theatre, and Tower Street, where the artwork will primarily be situated, forms the north eastern (rear) boundary. To the south and south east are buildings occupied in part by the Tymbeyard coffee shop and offices for the entertainment trade union, Equity.

The surrounding area is dense, with low to medium scale buildings arranged between the historic radial street pattern of Seven Dials. Buildings are predominantly used for cultural or office purposes, with the site being located at the heart of London's famous West End theatre district.

The theatre is also located in the Seven Dials (Covent Garden) Conservation Area, and this is covered in greater detail in the accompanying Heritage Statement.



2.3 Design Process

The St Martins Theatre has a cultural as well as historic value, being home to Agatha Christie's play, *The Mousetrap*, since 1974 - making it the longest continual run of any show in the world. 2020 (the year in which the artwork was initially proposed), also marked 100 years since Agatha Christie published her first novel - *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. In celebration, the Producer of *The Mousetrap* wishes to celebrate her achievements by painting a mural on the theatre wall.

Dame Agatha Christie (Lady Mallowan, DBE) is the best selling fiction writer of all time. Christie wrote her first short story aged 18, whilst recovering from an illness. Specialising in detective works of fiction, she was dubbed "the queen of crime", creating characters such as Hercules Poirot and Miss Marple. In the 1950s the theatre was said to have engaged Christie's attention, leading to a theatrical adaptation of her radio play, *The Mousetrap*, premiering in London's West End in 1952, and being performed at St. Martin's Theatre without interruption, from 1974 to 2020.



Dame Agatha Christie in 1946

2.4 Proposed Artwork

Location

Having chosen the subject matter and artist, the next step in the design process was to decide where on the building, an artwork could be placed. The historic building registration focuses on the front façade of the building to West Street; its relationship with the neighbouring Ambassadors Theatre; and the interior of the St. Martin's Theatre (which Architectural Review 'noted a change in style of decoration from the lavish showy palace to a traditional English domestic interior implying a more select audience').

The fenestration of the theatre frontage leaves little room for decorative painting and such works could risk detracting from the attractive historic façade details such as the ionic columns and first floor level, the Tuscan pilasters supporting pediments. The side and rear façades are plainer, with fewer architectural details - as with the Ambassadors Theatre, the rear elevation to Tower Street looks and functions as a somewhat blank, back of house. It is here that an artwork has the potential to contribute to the streetscape – providing visual engagement and vibrancy to a quieter back street.



Chamfered building corner at Tower Court / Tower Street

Scale

The scale of the proposed artwork is commensurate with its setting – spanning the entirety of the rear elevation, then tapering off around the corner of the building. Wrapping elements of artwork around the corner of the façade helps to avoid a hard edge and creates glimpsed views for pedestrians walking from the northern end of Tower Street and crossing over from the northern end of Tower Court. Oblique views of the primary artwork will also be possible when walking south along Monmouth Street. Even when the theatre is closed, the artwork will contribute to the streetscape by creating a bright and interesting gem to be discovered by people visiting or working in the area.

" *The secret of getting ahead is getting started.*"

Agatha Christie (1870 - 1976)

Appearance

The mural will use sepia tones to depict Agatha Christie as a young girl, behind her, the established & older writer will be depicted in dark purples and different shades of pink. The portraits will be set against a backdrop of flowers and leaves in a complimentary palette of layered creams, browns, pinks and purples. In white or cream lettering the words ‘the secret of getting ahead is getting started Agatha Christie 1870 – 1976. The mural will be painted over the existing cream coloured masonry above the line of the brown brickwork. The proposed colour scheme picks up on the reddish-brown bricks on the rear of the adjacent Ambassadors Theatre. Magenta pink colours also feature in the neon light above the front entrance to the St Martins Theatre.

2.5 Lighting

It is proposed to illuminate the mural by washing it with light from above using LED strips in a warm white – this reduces the light spillage to the sky and sides that could otherwise be associated with lighting it from below. The LED strips would be inside an aluminium sleeve on arms. There will be no spillage as the light would cut off along the bottom of the mural and light levels will be soft as there are already streetlights nearby. The hours of operations could be adjusted using either a dawn to dusk sensor or time clock to suit local needs, and would be managed in line with the other theatre lighting.

The artwork depicts portraits of both Agatha as a young girl and elder literary icon, with flourishes of the flora found in her birthplace of Torquay, Devon.



TOWER STREET ELEVATION

TOWER
COURT

3.0 --- Appendices

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- 3.1 About the Artist
 - 3.2 Management & Maintenance
 - 3.3 Technical Specifications

3.1 About The Artist

Notes

Artwork by ATMA, from left to right: 'I Clap For' - WSW for a NHS Surgery; commission for the Postal Museum (background depicts Falkland Rd, Camden); and William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow.



ATMA is a London based artist and designer, who has collaborated with a range of institutions including the Victoria and Albert Museum and Punch Drunk Theatre, worked on projects in association with Lufthansa and Dulux, as well as Google, who commissioned him to paint part of their Paris Arts & Culture Hub.

He is a highly skilled and creative visual artist, experienced in painting large scale portraits like the one proposed for St. Martin's Theatre, and one of his key installations is the large mural of the famous Arts & Crafts Designer William Morris, which is located on a wall adjacent to the William Morris Gallery - a Grade II* Listed Georgian Mansion - which was the former home of Morris.

A video showing the process for developing the William Morris artwork can be found online here: <http://www.atma-art.com/project/william-morris-gallery/>

Examples of ATMA's portraits are included here, with a wider portfolio of works able to be viewed online at <http://www.atma-art.com/portfolio/>.





