



Name of Property: *The Epic of American Civilization* Murals, Baker Library
City, State: Hanover, New Hampshire
Period of Significance: 1932-1934
NHL Criteria: 1
NHL Theme: III. Expressing Cultural Values
 2. Visual and Performing Arts
Previous Recognition: N/A
National Historic Context: American Latino Heritage Initiative
 XXIV. Painting and Sculpture
 H. The 20th Century
 3. Regionalism, 1915-1935

NHL Significance:

- *The Epic of American Civilization* murals are the most important work in the U.S. by muralist José Clemente Orozco, one of the three great Mexican mural artists of the early twentieth century. While the works of Orozco (and fellow artists Diego Rivera and David Siqueiros) were very much products of Mexico and the Mexican Revolution, “supporters of the Federal Arts Project looked to the Mexican mural movement as a model for a new democratic, radical art.” During the late 1920s and 1930s, the “nationalistic imagery (used by these three artists) captured the imagination of the art-viewing American public.”
- Highly controversial in their day, the murals challenged traditional ways of thinking about the development of Aztec and Anglo-American civilizations in North America. The images created by the artist still resonate today as the issues they raise are no less relevant in our own time. That they were commissioned and are maintained by one of the leading colleges in the country is a testament to this nation’s commitment to artistic freedom.

Integrity:

- The murals have not been altered or damaged and retain a high degree of integrity in their original location, the reserve book reading room, that still serves its original purpose in Baker Library.

Owner of Property: Dartmouth College

Acreage of Property: Less than one acre.

Origins of Nomination: The nomination was researched and written by NHL WASO staff.

Cost of Nomination to the Public: None.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

- Designation of these murals will raise awareness of the contribution of a major twentieth-century Mexican artist to the art and culture of America.
- NHL status could assist in the ongoing preservation of the murals.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: None known.

Landmarks Committee Comments: Dr. Stevens asked how the NHL Program deals with frescoes as part of a building. The curator from Dartmouth explained that frescoes are permanent and become part of the wall once the pigmentation dries. Dr. Lord explained that there is a precedent within the program of designating frescoes with the recent designation of the Alsop House, which is owned and managed by Wesleyan University. Dr. Seale noted that he was not comfortable designating the whole building when the significant resource is the mural art.

Landmarks Committee Recommendation: Designation. Professor Hoyos moved, Dr. Murtagh seconded; 2 abstentions; 8 yeas; approval.

Public Comments Favoring Designation (comments received as of 10/31/12):

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen, United States Senator, New Hampshire

Jeffery L. Horrell, Dean of Libraries and Librarian of the College, Dartmouth College Library,
Hanover, New Hampshire (owner)

Michael R. Taylor, Director, Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire

Advisory Board Recommendation: