BEYOND THE WALL: REDEFINING CITY WALLS’ “GATEWAY TO SOHO”

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At the intersection of Houston Street and Broadway in Lower Manhattan stands a pair of multi-story painted walls (Figure 1). Framing Broadway on the intersection’s southeastern and southwestern corners, both are advertisements: one, for a product; the other, for a place. Covering the southeastern corner’s building’s vertical and horizontal façade is the russet and gold brand logo for the American clothing retailer Hollister. A visually sparse image set against a neutral gray background, this chromatically reserved wall is in sharp contrast to its companion across the street at 599 Broadway: Forrest Myers’ *Untitled (The Wall)* (1973).

Myers’ *Untitled* is a hybrid work of public art. The work consists of a 90-square-foot field of blue enamel paint from which perpendicularly project 42 four-foot-long steel channel irons. They are regularly spaced across the wall surface, arranged as a series of seven horizontal rows or, alternatively, a series of six vertical columns. Their positions are not arbitrary, but instead determined by extant channel irons used in the 1917 construction of a shared party wall between buildings, exposed by the mid-twentieth-century demolition of a formerly adjacent building. Myers’ artwork was praised by the building’s 1970s landlord as successfully converting “this liability into an asset…”1 Enhancing construction remainders left materially and optically exposed with a Minimalist work responsive to the edifice upon which it was installed, Myers’ *Untitled* offered an aesthetically and psychologically assuaging site intervention.

Directly beneath Myers’ work is an identifying plaque sponsored by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission that provides a third title for Myers’ officially untitled and only parenthetically titled public project. Designating the work “The Gateway to SoHo” and attributing it to “sculptor Forrest Myers,” the plaque occludes much of the original context for the work’s creation. The attribution of Myers’ work as simultaneously standing at and serving as “The Gateway to SoHo” is fraught. The earliest references to the work-as-gateway emerged during the project’s creation, used to bolster municipal support by capitalizing on a projective value ascribed to both the artwork and the neighborhood before which it stood. This designation has continued to be

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invoked in subsequent decades, especially each time the mural’s preservation has been threatened.\textsuperscript{2} Labeling the artist as a sculptor, while not incorrect given Myers’ greater body of work and own reference to the piece as a sculpture, masks the original sponsorship of the work, which was guided by an agency more often associated with painted walls. Myers’ \textit{Untitled} was part of a greater program undertaken by the not-for-profit artist collective City Walls, Inc. (henceforth City Walls), responsible for creating murals throughout New York City and elsewhere over the course of its decade-long history of operations.\textsuperscript{3} This article considers the series of City Walls murals created along Houston Street in order to more appropriately contextualize Myers’ work and the proper location of a “Gateway to SoHo.”

Myers’ sculpture-mural hybrid was the third City Walls mural to be painted along the southern side of Houston Street. Often forgotten are two other projects by City Walls: Jason Crum’s \textit{Peace} (1969) (Figure 2) at Houston Street and West Broadway and Mel Pekarsky’s \textit{Untitled} (1972) (Figure 3) at Houston Street and Crosby Streets.\textsuperscript{4} Although over-painting and new construction destroyed these murals,\textsuperscript{5} the historical recuperation and contextualization of these projects reveal additional supporting gateposts. Considered together and in their original locations, these three works allow for a rethinking of the place and accurate structure of a possible visual gateway in relation to SoHo in the late 1960s and early 1970s.\textsuperscript{6}

A version of the history of SoHo has been well rehearsed in the literature of urban development: the evolution of a culture of “loft living” and the merging of art-world and real-estate economies to create a fashionable neighborhood for
Figure 2. Jason Crum. Peace. 1969. Photograph courtesy of Mel Pekarsky.

Figure 3. Mel Pekarsky. Untitled. 1972. Photograph courtesy of Mel Pekarsky.
urban middle-class cultural investors, effectively driving out the very artists responsible for the initial “settlement” of a neighborhood formerly zoned for light industrial practices. Although recent studies have sought to readdress the place of artists as restructuring SoHo and rescuing it from either post-war urban decline or total Robert Moses-era reconstitution — examining what urban historian Aaron Peter Shkuda has referred to as a new artistic mode of urban development — the place of works by these artists both in the neighborhood and in the narrative of the neighborhood continues to be unsatisfactorily considered. Expanding upon the set of addresses of commercial galleries and alternative art workshops that frequently receive critical attention as central hubs of creative cultural fulmination in the region, this article examines artistic practice at the literal margins of SoHo.

By looking at the places they occupied at the cartographic limits of a neighborhood, these boundary-defining murals are revealed to have existed alongside other efforts to provide definition to a post-industrial SoHo. Seeking a “Gateway to SoHo” demands there first exist a SoHo in front of which a gateway can be found. With a timeline starting with the mid-century redevelopment of Houston Street and extending through the passage of rezoning and redistricting approvals in the early years of the 1970s, the creation of “SoHo” as a distinct and recognizable place was a process of interventions in and clarifications of a city in both two and three dimensions. To understand how the triad of City Walls’ murals along the southern edge of Houston Street mediated between these levels of urban visualization entails understanding City Walls’ mural projects as part of a locally responsive public practice. This article resituates these painted walls as art historically significant place-defining media in the literal and psychological remapping of Lower Manhattan.

**DEFINING AN ORGANIZATION**

Self-defined as a “flagship public service organization” dedicated to “raising the profile of public art in urban America,” City Walls’ origins track to New York City in June of 1967. Allan D’Arcangelo’s *Untitled* (1967) at 340 East 9th Street, between First and Second Avenues, in Manhattan served as the progenitor work for the still-unnamed and only loosely defined art sponsorship organization. David Bromberg, a young urban engineer — or “urban dreamer,” as art critic Grace Glueck later referred to him — approached D’Arcangelo with the idea to transform the debris-strewn lot by adding a mural to an adjacent wall. Amid rising interest in small-scale transformations in New York City’s physical structure (including publicly and privately funded vest pocket parks and community playgrounds), Bromberg sought alternative strategies to enliven the contemporary urban environment. Bromberg secured permission from the building’s landlord...
directly for the mural, setting a procedural precedent for future commissions. In form, content, and location, this four-story mural served as a prototype for similar projects to follow.

With its combination of references to highway signage, blades of grass bursting forth from the ground, and cloudlike forms hovering in a blue field of sky, D’Arcangelo’s landscape — or “roadscape,” as Peter Blake described the work in a 1968 New York article surveying the then-recent proliferation of mural art in the city — suggested the commensurate existence of vibrant organic matter alongside man-made infrastructural support. More than this, Untitled provided a visual shock: a temporary burst of color in an otherwise neutral (if not darkened) site that also transformed this otherwise nondescript location into a minor local landmark. As a new site of distinction, the mural quickly generated interest, due to its location and its affective potential. Commissions for additional works on the block soon followed, with building owners serving as instigators for subsequent projects overseen by Bromberg: Robert Wiegand’s Juliette (1967) at 317 East 9th Street and Jason Crum’s Angus Special (1967) at 324 East 9th Street. By the end of the year, an initial cohort of artists brought together under the banner name “City Walls” was established, as were rudimentary procedures regarding project funding and artist’s fees.

From the group’s first organizational year, it became clear that the projects completed under the sponsorship of City Walls would depart from those more typically associated with its contemporaries in this period of the community mural movement. Rather than narrative retellings of community historical events, realist indictments of contemporary social ills, or laudatory portrait memorials of notable local figures, the murals City Walls artists created during the first half decade of the group’s existence prioritized formal and environmental issues (broadly defined). Completed murals were initially predominately works of abstract geometric patterning (e.g. Robert Wiegand’s mural, …at the Astor Bar (1968) at the intersection of Astor Place and Lafayette Street, Nassos Daphnis’ Untitled (1969) overlooking Madison Avenue Park at 26th Street, and Jason Crum’s two-wall, perpendicularly arranged, playground-defining Haven (1969) at 29th Street and Second Avenue), while tonally vibrant figural landscapes and rigorous pursuits of minimalist arrangements would soon follow. Yet these projects were not conceived separately from the locations on which they were painted. As Doris Freedman, the third president of City Walls and future founder of the Public Art Fund (into which City Walls was absorbed in 1977) later explained, such painted interventions served a vital function, providing “visual relief” and acting “as a temporary environmental improvement.” This echoes art historian Dore Ashton’s period analysis of the group’s work as being a “rectification of initial planning blunders” in which unexpected burst of color enlivened “dead tenement walls.” Swaths of blue paint acted as surrogates for a sky blocked by towering
structures, while dynamic repetitive patterns in vibrant primary and secondary colors provided moments of both visual interest and visual rupture when placed amidst the drab facades of aging early and mid-century buildings.

Intentionally selecting the “unlikely surfaces of non-descript industrial buildings, exposed end walls of tenement rows, party walls stripped naked by the demolition of a neighboring building, idle backdrops to pocket parks, and vacant lots serving as a temporary car parks . . .”20 cropping up with greater frequency in neighborhoods grappling with a city-wide transition from shipping and light industry to other forms of capital production, City Walls’ artists and their supporters adopted the position that their murals enacted a form of “instantaneous urban renewal” by endeavoring to “focus and neutralize” such declining neighborhoods.21 This interest in a contextually responsive local practice is evidenced by a December 13, 1970 tour itinerary set forth by the group. Most of the completed murals formed an almost perfect axis cutting diagonally across the southern pole of Manhattan (Figure 4). With the exception of two midtown Manhattan murals and one Brooklyn mural, 11 of the 14 toured works were in

Lower Manhattan neighborhoods, seeing the earliest suggestions of not only urban redevelopment but also urban re-territorializing. This area stretched from Crum’s *Haven* (1968) at 29th Street and Second Avenue to the north to Crum’s *Revoluted Pushcart* (1967) at Warren Street and Church Street to the south.\(^22\) Trendy designators would soon follow for these neighborhoods, the products of nascent municipally sanctioned real estate branding programs. However, such locations were also often the same neighborhoods in which many of the participating artists lived, worked, or exhibited. These were familiar everyday locations to artists like Crum, Myers, and Wiegand, who lived in converted loft buildings at 414–416 West Broadway, 458 Broome Street, and 16 Greene Street, respectively.\(^23\)

The places of City Walls’ murals have been overlooked in evaluations of the group’s practices, including period discussions favoring formal readings and seeking goals of population redemption in the group’s works. In his September 7, 1972 review in *The New York Times*, John Canaday pejoratively referred to City Walls as a “do-gooder organization,” advocated that “City Walls should change its name to City Eyesores,” and charged the group with “blatantly obstreperous violations of the elementary principles of mural design, scaled and patterned to overpower or obliterate their surroundings rather than to pull them into some kind of harmony.”\(^24\) Canady’s position echoed that of *Newsday* art reporter Emily Genauer. She called for a moratorium on future works by Jason Crum and Robert Wiegand, charging the group with a misguided mission by declaring, “Any more diagonal bars in red, blue, yellow, green and white running high as a building’s roof, and the old dingy slums will begin to seem an eye-resting relief.”\(^25\) Skeptical about any positive real-world changes resulting from such projects, Genauer previously wrote of City Walls’ works:

> Question: Will alienated ghetto kids now identify with their communities because they can play basketball in a vest-pocket park against a background of chevron stripes by a young hard-edge painter? Will young mothers airing their babies find peace and fulfillment contemplating a huge, brightly colored mural decoration looking rather like a billboard or a blown up traffic signal? Will Johnny find a job and future because a painter (whose own future may be far from clear) let him climb a rigging platform and help cover 85 feet of wall with red-and-green diagonal checkerboard?”\(^26\)

Freedman addressed such broader criticisms when responding in a published editorial, “Obviously, paint is not a panacea for urban ills.” Without engaging with the issue of individual stylistic preference, Freedman explained that the murals were meant to be “an interim measure, which deals with symptoms rather than causes…” and not as correctives to entrenched sociological issues playing out.
around the sites of the murals’ installations. Rather than intervening in the more deeply seated deleterious conditions plaguing the sick city organism, City Walls’ works responded to surface afflictions by making and marking places of meaning on and above street level.

Although not identical to the motivations of municipal agencies and private investors who sought to craft such instant neighborhoods, the importance of constructing distinct urban places was an argument advanced by the members of City Walls. The key difference between these two camps was that, rather than fostering economic investments designed to promote boutique commercial interests, City Walls’ members sought to transform ill-defined remainder spaces into places of momentary aesthetic and psychological uplift. The organization’s objectives extended beyond exploring the “decorative” and “cosmetic function” of urban wall painting, characterizations attributed to the group by mural historians Eva Cockcroft, John Weber, and James Cockcroft in their 1977 study of recent mural practice. As Joan K. Davidson, the first president of City Walls, explained, “The power of the walls is that their strong color and design, sheer size, and strategic location, can, indeed, define city spaces, even as architecture does. The paintings enclose space to make it welcoming and peaceful; they announce throughways and terminations…” For Davidson and City Walls’ original stable of artists, these “monumental painted walls of New York are banners in the battle to make the city habitable for people…to know where they are, to recognize familiar landmarks, to feel that they are in a place.”

This issue of place — entailing both the work’s placement at a particular site and place-making as a process engaging regional identity — was key to the artists’ selection of locations. As detailed in a narrative written by Doris Freedman and Kyle Morris to accompany a slide lecture of the group’s works, artists selected walls that they considered to be: first, “visually strategic — that is, a wall where a painting could be easily, effectively or even dramatically viewed; and second, a wall where a painting would most effectively influence and enliven the total surrounding environment.” The physical constraints of a site as frustrating access informed decisions of site selection or rejection. Considerations of shadows cast at different times of day and the presence and scale of already extant objects (e.g. other buildings, municipal and service utilities, etc.) guided choices in location. Once a suitable location was selected, an artist could create a design capable of staging an interruption in an otherwise monotonous or oppressive urban context.

To these two related context-driven concerns — the potential to be seen and the potential to enliven a local environment — a third concern was added: the potential for the already present material and chemical properties at a location to accommodate a new mural work. This meant evaluating the age and composition of walls. New brick facades were often avoided, for the acid in the brickwork could
rapidly degrade the wall surface over time. Cement-covered walls posed the threat of the surface layer separating or water seeping between the surface layer and its backing. Shoddily grouted surfaces required additional preparatory caulking and sealing to prevent against future degradation and, again, water seepage. Therefore, the most frequently chosen surfaces were those of older buildings with walls that could be newly treated and sealed without too great an extra cost. Taken together, these three considerations — the object-filled urban context, the mural’s design, and the surface’s material composition — were integral to the processes of site selection and project creation. In looking to City Walls’ projects along Houston Street, the visibility, design, and wall surface composition of the murals were directly responsive to the effects of a then-recently completed infrastructural transformation within the region.

DEFINING A ROADWAY

In January of 1951, the city began purchasing building lots along Houston Street, preparing for the second proposed widening of the east–west roadway in just over two decades. Land parcels were acquired through linked municipal assertions of eminent domain and ascriptions of regional blight. Six years later, in February 1957, the city’s Board of Estimate formally approved a multi-phase expansion project, coinciding with the more broadly conceived Robert Moses-led Lower Manhattan development program. This far-reaching infrastructural expansion included plans for a proposed — yet ultimately unrealized — Lower Manhattan Crosstown Expressway and the reconstruction of the Manhattan Plaza of the Brooklyn Bridge. Within this program, Houston Street emerged as a principal transportation artery extending laterally across Manhattan from east to west. To realize this goal, buildings were demolished on either side of Houston Street, with Lafayette Street serving as a transverse midpoint. Demolition occurred along the south side of Houston Street between Lafayette Street and Sixth Avenue to the west and along the north side of Houston Street between Lafayette Street and just beyond Avenue D to the east.

The first phase of the Houston Street project, completed by the end of the 1957, widened Houston Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue, including the eastern section of Houston Street between Columbia Street and Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive. Four additional proposed phases were undertaken in a piecemeal manner, with diagrammed projections for the project published in the local press to lend a sense of order to a regionally disruptive undertaking (Figure 5). When completed in 1963, the final project fell just short of its intended scope: rather than a consistently widened Houston Street between Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive to the east and Varick Street and Seventh Avenue to the west,
the widened Houston Street started at Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive to the east and terminated at Sixth Avenue to the west. Within these boundaries, the roadway was expanded to a width of 125 feet across, consisting of: two sets of 45-foot-wide multi-lane traffic roadways (four lanes dedicated to eastbound traffic; another four lanes to westbound traffic), a nine-foot-wide traffic median with bench seating and plantings between the directional traffic lanes, and 13-foot-wide sidewalks running along either side of Houston Street.

Among the effects of this project was to formalize a clear northern boundary along the blocks of waning industrial production just south of the roadway, physically reinforcing a boundary that had previously existed in name only. The newly widened Houston Street also allowed for increased visibility along the street, both from the east to the west along Houston Street but also from the north to the south across Houston Street. Standing on the road’s northern sidewalk looking southward, one has a mostly uninterrupted view of the north-facing facades of the street’s southern buildings, and vice versa. Offered is a rare, long-distance view of the city while standing within the city itself.

This is not to suggest that these facades were much to look at initially, leading to another consequence of the Houston Street expansion. Due to the construction — or specifically the demolition — along Houston Street, unsightly remainder spaces were created. These spaces were the fractional land parcels on the road’s southern edge: sections of lots on which multi-story buildings previously stood. In many cases, these lots were quickly replaced with either provisional parking...
lots or fenced-in outdoor storage. The remaining buildings just south of these lots, formerly partially abutting or even sharing structural party walls with now demolished buildings, found their unfinished and often perfunctorily built masonry walls and formerly interior courtyard windows newly exposed to the streetscape.

Within this context, Crum’s *Peace* (1969) served as a bold statement with its symmetrical arrangement of curvilinear cascading bands of primary colors. Painted upon the north-facing façade of the building on the southeastern corner of Houston Street and West Broadway, Crum’s mural started just above the first story of the building and extended across the full building surface, save for a central pushed-back column of windows. The elevation of the mural above the lowest level of the building served to ensure the mural’s visibility and preservation: preventing Crum’s work from being blocked or damaged by vehicles parked in an adjacent shallow lot. Stepped back from the recently expanded sidewalk, this minor parking lot allowed enough space for a single row of parked cars against the building’s exterior.

Despite retaining the building’s unpainted set back column of windows bisecting this mural, Crum would cover entire façades in other design proposals, suggesting the artist’s limited concern for observing some sort of spatial hierarchy of surfaces. The most relevant demonstration of Crum’s use of the entire building as a ground for an aesthetic intervention can be found in his *Project for a Painted Wall, New York City, New York* (1969) (Figure 6). This over-painted photograph was created just prior to *Peace* and in time for its inclusion in “Painting for City Walls,” an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art from April 17 to June 16, 1969. The modified photograph served as a proposal for two murals interrupted by a street: one a continuous checkerboard pattern crossing over recessed light- and air-wells, and the other an Op Art–inspired illusionistic pulsing of color abruptly cut off at the building’s corner. This painted proposal points towards two ideas. The first addresses a formal issue. Despite divided by the road running into the photograph, the upper and lower margins of the murals are consistent: the upper margin determined by the buildings’ rooflines and the lower margin by the preservation of street level surfaces for commercial practices (both parking lots and commercial billboards are visible along the first story level). The result is an almost continuous horizontal band of color across the image and thus across the roadway: the murals connected as a single, unified expanse of color on an otherwise black-and-white city image. The second point raised by Crum’s proposal relates to the specific area of the city displayed. This is not just New York City, but Manhattan; not just Manhattan, but Houston Street; and not just Houston Street, but the intersection of Houston Street and
Broadway, which in a few years’ time would be comparably framed by actual murals by City Walls.

Although not part of the original summer of 1967 group of artists, Pekarsky was a quick addition to City Walls’ roster. More obviously figural in its style than the earliest City Walls projects, Pekarsky’s mural *Untitled* (1972) at 136 Crosby Street (a building lot shared with the address 600 Broadway) was the third mural he completed for the group. A series of stacked registers containing irregular landscapes set against rainbow-colored bands of sky, Pekarsky’s mural introduced to the block an alternative — and perhaps literal — vision for an urban landscape. The mural brought forth luminous white space otherwise absent from the darkened building facades. Despite its use of recognizable imagery, the mural’s design avoided *trompe-l’oeil* illusionism, and thus served as a balance to Crum’s more abstract but no less chromatically vibrant wall painting five blocks to the west.

According to recent recollections by Pekarsky, neither was his mural designed nor was its location selected with any awareness of Crum’s modified photograph proposal. However, Pekarsky’s mural nonetheless contributed to a partial fulfillment of this earlier plan. By the middle of the 1970s, a variation of Crum’s proposal was finally realized through an informal and unintentional collaboration between City Walls artists and contemporary urban commerce along this stretch of
Houston Street. As recorded in a 1974 photograph taken as part of the Environmental Protection Agency’s Documerica Project, a federally funded photojournalism series documenting the impact of environmental concerns in everyday American life,39 Pekarsky’s Untitled and Myers’ Untitled were visually joined by a rotating crop of large-scale painted and mounted advertisements (Figure 7). A semi-contiguous, brightly colored, horizontal surface emerged along the southern side of Houston Street. These cognitively linked painted façades along the newly modified roadway can be understood as not simply limited to the block between Crosby Street and Broadway, but inclusive of the intervening blocks between Pekarsky’s mural at Crosby Street and Crum’s mural at West Broadway as well. The corridor was marked as a place of art.

While signaling a place of art, Houston Street also defined the boundary of an emergent place for art. Without suggesting a singular causal relationship between the creation of the murals and the changing perception of the blocks just south of Houston Street as a site for contemporary art practices, it is nonetheless telling that a shift occurred in the public perception of the neighborhood in the years buttressed by the completion of the first and third of City Walls’ Houston Street murals: 1969 to 1973. As will be discussed in the next section, the intersections at which the murals were painted emerged as sites of increased significance within this same period. Therefore, the murals should be understood as more than an isolated optical intervention or urban novelty. Instead, City Walls’ Houston Street

Figure 7. Danny Lyon for the Environmental Protection Agency. Wall Painting on a Building on Houston Street in New York City’s Manhattan (photo number 412-DA-12458), from the DOCUMERICA series. Jun. 1974. Courtesy of the National Archives.
murals should be couched as participating in SoHo’s introduction into the public’s consciousness as a place with not only a distinct local cultural identity but also clearly mapped boundaries.

**DEFINING A NEIGHBORHOOD**

A 1970 article appearing in *The Art Gallery* described City Walls’ commissions as “confined for the most part to undistinguished buildings and neighborhoods that hardly could be called well-known to the average New Yorker, let alone visiting out-of-towners.” Reinforcing this characterization was the inclusion of SoHo among a list of “off-beat” sightseeing locations authored by New York City’s Convention and Visitors Bureau in the fall of that same year. The label of “Hell’s Hundred Acres,” adopted at the beginning of the 1960s as a referent for the expanse south of Houston Street, continued to appear in published newspaper accounts of the neighborhood with almost as much frequency as the later adopted “SoHo” abbreviation. When “SoHo” was used, a narrative or graphic charting of the region almost always accompanied this new designator, as well as the occasional pronunciation guide. However, as maps reproduced in *The New York Times* in 1970 demonstrate, disagreement existed about where the boundaries of SoHo were set even among those informally tasked with providing clarification for these boundaries (Figures 8 and 9).

By the middle of the 1970s, SoHo shifted from an off-the-radar neighborhood to a “must-see” location for both residents and visitors. The historical conditions for the creation and promotion of SoHo as a distinct place entailed not only the influx of new financial and cultural capital, but also the changing the official map of Manhattan itself. Tracking the multiple contemporaneous designations establishing and refining regional boundaries reveals the social and cartographic conditions within which this neighborhood appeared.

The branding of SoHo as a discrete neighborhood in the late 1960s is often tied to the changing geography of the New York art world. Two early commercial pioneers to the region were the 1968 arrival of the Paula Cooper Gallery to a 5000-square-foot loft-turned exhibition space at 96–100 Prince Street and O.K. Harris Gallery’s soon-thereafter occupation of a former artist cooperative on the ground floor of 465 West Broadway. The 1970 opening of a multi-gallery complex by Leo Castelli, Andre Emmerich, and Ileana Sonnabend at 420 West Broadway was declared in the press as formalizing an “invasion of SoHo” by an uptown Madison Avenue art trade. Just over a year later, when an additional approximately 20 galleries opened within blocks of one another, the art critic Peter Schjeldahl observed the neighborhood as gripped by linked economic and social transitions. Evidence of “soaring rents, bars, boutiques and busloads from Scarsdale” was
detectable in 1972.\textsuperscript{46} By the middle of the decade, SoHo offered a “circus or Disneyland situation . . . of total bombardment of the senses, an activity that purely sensational — but in the commercial sense, not the gutsy one,” as described by one gallery owner.\textsuperscript{47}

A burgeoning cultural tourism cottage industry cropped up around networks of galleries and artist’s studios, often catering to a non-resident population (those living either outside of the region or outside of the city). Navigating the neighborhood meant traversing promoted routes with clearly delineated landmarks and set parameters. However, the imagined structure of SoHo set forth in narrative guides and printed maps could vary, reflective as such projections were of the motivations of the individual or agency adopting the mantel of local cartographer. For example, printed gallery guides from the early 1970s highlight clear regional axes, with West Broadway offering the greatest concentration of galleries on a single roadway.\textsuperscript{48} In contrast, tour routes drawn up by the then recently formed SoHo Artists Association more evenly distributed locatable galleries and studio spaces across West Broadway, Wooster, Greene Street, Mercer Street, and Broadway.\textsuperscript{49} This latter approach — presenting artistic

diversity and abundance across a wider area rather than clustering sites within a more narrow and thus more easily traversable area — was tied to the SoHo Artists Association’s desire to implement modifications to both the map and public policy of the city. Rather than the downtown invasion of uptown galleries, it is this other history of SoHo that more directly informs the historical context of City Walls’ Houston Street murals: a definition of SoHo owing to a collaboration between residents and government leaders to establish the neighborhood not as a vague geography of art locations but as a place within a clearly delimited territory.

The map of SoHo was standardized with the passing of related city and state legislation in 1971, including: the approval by the City Planning Board and the New York Board of Estimate to amend to New York City Zoning Resolution to allow for residential use of lofts previously zoned only for light manufacturing; the passage of Senate Bill 6689 and Assembly Bill 7630 to apply lenience to the enforcement of fire and sanitation codes to allow artists time to convert loft buildings into living/working quarters; and Governor Nelson Rockefeller’s signing of a legislative amendment to Article 7-B of the Multiple Dwelling Law. Spurred on by coordinated pressure applied by the SoHo Artists Association (of which Wiegand was an active member), the NoHo Artists Association, the Artist Tenants Association, and the Citizens for Artists Housing (of which Freedman was Chairman), this new legislation was farther reaching — in both geography and


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quality of life assurances — in its accommodation of artists’ housing in New York City than the earlier 1961 Artist-in-Residence protections.\textsuperscript{50} To start, the commercial zoning of Artist-In-Residence allowances did not apply to the blocks south of Houston Street.

Prior to 1971, SoHo fell within the M1-5 zoning district. As set forth in New York City’s 1961 rezoning plan, M1-5 encompassed an irregularly shaped yet continuous area more readily identified today as inclusive of NoHo, SoHo, and TriBeCa. This region was zoned to support light industrial manufacturing only.\textsuperscript{51} The zoning resolutions approved in 1971 created two new districts within the center of M1-5: M1-5A and M1-5B. M1-5A was a rectangular area, inclusive of the buildings along the western side of West Broadway to the west, the northern side of Broome Street to the south, the eastern side of Mercer Street to the west, and the southern side of Houston Street to the north. M1-5B was more unevenly shaped, spanning the remaining central M1-5 area between Houston Street and Canal Street. The M1-5A and M1-5B rezoning expanded acceptable building uses, including legalizing joint living/working quarters for artists.\textsuperscript{52} The new zones were defined with the resident artist culture, rather than a newly arrived commercial art culture, in mind.\textsuperscript{53} Following the rezoning, some 800 artists already living in M1-5A and M1-5B had their residences legalized.\textsuperscript{54}

The borders of this redrawn place were refined with the passage of new neighborhood protections two years later. On August 14, 1973, the city’s Landmarks Preservation Commission granted historic designation to 26 of the approximately 40 blocks within the combined M1-5A and M1-5B zones — fully encompassing the former, and encroaching into some of the northernmost sections of the latter (Figure 10). The rectangular area of the “SoHo Cast Iron Historic District” was contained within Houston Street, Broadway, Howard Street, Crosby Street, Canal Street and West Broadway.\textsuperscript{55} The drafting of the historic district so soon after the rezoning of the same region was not a coincidence; rather, it was similarly indebted to the community of local artists seeking to secure its stake in the region through the municipal legitimization of its neighborhood.

The original proposals for historical districting were sought by the SoHo Artists Association as a tactic to put an end to proposed high-rise real estate construction. The Landmarks Preservation Commission undertook preliminary historical research of the region in 1966, and the first public hearing before the Commission was held on July 21, 1970. In the intervening years, a series of further revisions to district boundaries were set forth. Initial protections were inclusive only of a few blocks along Greene Street. However, the Commission expanded the district to a broader area in light of accusations of deference towards “landlord orientation.”\textsuperscript{56} With the approval of the 1973 designation report (delayed by a three-year, city-wide moratorium on historical districting passed in 1970), existing industrial buildings would be able to be demolished in cases where no use for them
could be identified. With the amendments to the zoning laws, as well as a rising faddism among non-artists for loft living, this provision was viewed as an increasingly difficult standard to meet.

Beyond responding to housing needs, the establishment of the new historic district alongside M1-5A and M1-5B formally demarcated SoHo as a distinct place within the city, adding a layer of definition to the neighborhood in municipal records. While debates continued into the 1970s over whether sections of Canal Street should be included within the protected zone of M1-5B, Houston Street
served as an unquestionable boundary within each new designation. Although zoning districts and historic districts are often difficult to discern when viewed not in planning documents but instead from street level, the expansive width of Houston Street provided a detectible break in the urban environment, giving visible form and visual justification to a “south of Houston” neighborhood. However, the lateral boundaries — the eastern and western limits — of this newly formalized SoHo were less readily identified outside of designation reports. The translation from a two-dimensional paper SoHo to a three-dimensional substantive neighborhood was aided by the set of two-dimensional graphics painted along Houston Street.

City Walls administrators and artists had not set out to intentionally create a visual portal announcing a district south of Houston Street. Nonetheless, by the time Myers completed his mural in 1973, such an entryway had been formed. Through a piecemeal appropriation of otherwise barren pre-war building facades, the triad of murals visually echoed the limits of this new “SoHo” neighborhood being publically advertised to a downtown-migrating uptown audience. A western and eastern frame corresponding to the recent districting was clearly marked along Houston Street by Crum’s and Pekarsky’s paintings at West Broadway and Crosby Street, respectively.

Although subway routes could deposit visitors in the middle of SoHo (thus bypassing Houston Street altogether),60 those traveling south toward SoHo at street level were offered clear announcements of their immanent crossing of territorial boundaries: the northern perimeter by a widened Houston Street, and the eastern and western limits by the set of dramatically colored murals. Therefore, rather than assigning the moniker of “The Gateway to SoHo” to Myers’ mural alone, or even to the proximally close Myers and Pekarsky murals, it is appropriate to consider a more fully painted expanse of Houston Street as comprising a multi-posted and multi-entranced gateway to SoHo in the mid-1970s. A quasi-collective billboard, the mural-lined expanse served as a visual declaration of a place. This triad of murals further demarcated a newly mapped — and thus newly defined — neighborhood, while also announcing the creative quality of this neighborhood located just beyond the painted walls.

NOTES

1 Letter from Charles J. Tannenbaum to Frank Gilbert, 27 Aug. 1973; Public Art Fund Archive; MSS 270; 3; 15; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

2 In an August 27, 1973 letter sent by Charles J. Tannenbaum, the building’s owner, to Frank Gilbert, then-director of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, Tannenbaum wrote, “The creation of a visually appealing treatment of our northern wall standing at the very gateway to the District symbolizes its present modern-day artistic vitality.” Several months earlier, Tannenbaum used a slight but crucial variation on this same phrase in a letter to Donald M. Oenslager, then-president of the New York City Arts Commission. In this letter from January 19, 1973, Tannenbaum
described his building as standing “at the Broadway gateway to SoHo.” This phrase appears to have been readily used by Tannenbaum. Almost one year prior, in a March 27, 1972 letter from Doris Freedman to Tannenbaum, Freedman praised Tannenbaum’s self-designation of his family’s building: “As you so aptly put it, your building is at the gateway of SoHo...” These letters can be found in the Public Art Fund Archive; MSS 270; 3; 15; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries. In 1997, the building’s then-owners announced plans to remove the entire mural. Citing water damage to the wall as a result of corrosive connections in the channel irons, the owners took the initiative to start the de-installation process by removing a section of irons on the eastern edge of the work and erecting scaffolding in front of the rest of Myers’ work. Myers charged the owners with intentionally allowing the work to fall into disrepair, enacting “demolition by neglect.” During the Landmarks Preservation Commission hearings and legal trial that followed, those supporting Myers’ work (including Lisa Phillips, Executive Director of the New Museum, and Mark A. Silberman, legal counsel for the Landmarks Preservation Commission) cited the work’s role as a “gateway” to assert its historical and continued cultural value. It was in light of this most recent debate over the protected status of Myers’ work that the plaque described above was installed. The plaque dates the work to 1973. However, for several years, Myers’ work was captioned in situ with the artist’s initials and “72.” Adding further confusion to the dating of the mural, the project report of the work in the Public Art Fund Archives’ project files lists the date of installation as January 1974. See Jesse McKinley, “F.Y.I.,” The New York Times, 7 Jan. 1996: CY2; Daniel Grant, “Saving Public Sculpture,” American Artist 64,697 (Aug. 2000): 18–22; Danny Lee, “Landmarking of a Wall Sculpture Hits Bricks-and-Mortar Opposition,” The New York Times, 21 May 2006: CY6; “Wall’ Dispute in SoHo Lands in Court,” The New York Times, 15 Mar. 2001: B4; and Daisy Hernandez, “Pause in Landmark Fight So Mural’s Real Wall Can Be Fixed,” The New York Times, 3 Oct. 2002: B1.

3 By the end of the 1970s, members of City Walls, representing themselves as such, had been invited to serve as consultants for projects in Atlanta, Boston, Denver, Jersey City, Kansas City, Oakland, St. Louis, and Syracuse.

4 In total, City Walls was responsible for sponsoring five murals along Houston Street. The fourth was another Mel Pekarsky mural at the intersection of Houston Street and Mulberry Street. Visible along the northern side of Houston Street, this large floral mural was painted in 1971 on the southern façade of Saint Barnabas Mission, overlooking a fenced in playground and an adjacent parking lot. Dorothy Gillespie painted the fifth mural in 1975, just south of the intersection of Houston Street and Mercer Street on the northern-fronting wall of 169 Mercer. Despite its visibility along the southern side of Houston Street, Gillespie’s mural falls beyond the chronological scope of this study.

5 Crum’s mural was visible until the early 1980s, when it was partially obscured by a new two-story building. Later, in 1998, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission provided approval to the owner of the building on which traces of Crum’s mural remained to install commercial advertisements. Pekarsky’s mural was similarly replaced by advertisements, although the date when this happened is less clear. Reports filed with the Landmarks Preservation Commission in the early 1990s seeking approval for these new advertisements do not make mention of the mural. These recent histories are briefly discussed in the court opinion of the “Board of Managers of Soho International Arts Condominium v. City of New York, New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, and Forrest Myers,” 8 Sep. 2004, accessible at http://ny.findacase.com/research/wfrmDocViewer.aspx/qx/fac.20040908_0001681.SNY.htm/qx.

6 The rare exception to treating Myers’ Untitled alone as serving as the “gateway to SoHo” is found in a November 21, 1980 letter requesting the refurbishing of Myers’ work. Written by Jenny Dixon, then-director of the Public Art Fund, in response to an earlier announcement of the building’s owner’s intention to repaint the entire façade gray, the letter described how several City Walls’ works directly contributed to constructing a new public face for the downtown neighborhood. Dixon described how “these wall paintings definitively [sic] brought attention to Soho. You may be familiar with the paintings on each side of West Broadway and Houston Street. They are commonly referred to as the ‘Gates of Soho.’” Dixon’s brief suggestion of there being multiple murals and potentially
multiple “gates” informs much of my current research on this topic. Letter from Jenny Dixon to Stanley M. Riker (Riker’s Management Corporation), 21 Nov. 1980, Public Art Fund Archive; MSS 270; 4; 1; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.


10 In April 1967, the artist Tania was contracted to complete a mural for 10 Evergreen Avenue in Brooklyn as part of a program overseen by landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg to convert 10 vacant lots into pocket parks. Considered the period’s first non-commercial outdoor wall painting in New York City, the impetus for urban regeneration spurring the creation of Tania’s Untitled certainly informed D’Arcangelo’s painting several months later. Although Tania’s Brooklyn mural would be listed within rosters of City Walls’ murals, its existence nonetheless belongs to a different system of sponsorship.


12 City Walls artists approached landlords directly or through City Walls representatives acting as proxies. In some cases, building owners independently contacted the group and requested that several mural proposals be submitted for a potential commission. In almost every case, it was the owner of the building on which the mural was to be a painted who could unilaterally grant permission for a project. The exception was Myers’ mural, which presented unanticipated logistical challenges. Even after Charles J. Tannenbaum assented to City Walls’ use of the Houston Street–facing façade of his building, the project required approval by a number of municipal agencies. The New York City Arts Commission needed to determine the artistic merit of the project, the Building and Highways Department needed to sign off on the structural drawings of the perpendicular sculptural projections, and a franchise permit was required by the city for art agency’s use of the “taxable airspace” above Houston Street. City Walls needed Landmark Preservation Commission approval as well. As a result of the delays encountered with granting these previous approvals, the date set for the painting and installation process fell after the designation of lot as a part of a historic landmark district in 1973.

13 Peter Blake, “Graffiti Are Growing Up,” New York 1.4 (29 Apr. 1968): 32. Blake surveyed several recent Bromberg projects, alternating between praising the results (e.g. D’Arcangelo’s mural on 9th Street was “Bold… and smashing” and Crum’s mural at 140 Church Street was “the best,” as “it glitters like Lucy in the Sky, with Diamonds”) and offering more terse evaluations (e.g. Wiegand’s mural at 317 East 9th Street was “done in red, blue and venetian blinds” and Crum’s mural at 324 East 9th Street “fits in nicely with the fire escapes”).

14 D’Arcangelo’s first mural was financed through contributions by friends and relatives of Bromberg. However, over the next several years, grants were sought from corporations, private individuals, and local and national public arts programs. Soon after the group’s founding in 1967, it received financial support from the J. M. Kaplan Foundation and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. This was later supplemented by private donations by David Rockefeller and William Bernhard and additional institutional support by the Merrill, Noble, and Buttenweiser Foundations,
as well as National Endowment for the Arts and New York State Council for the Arts grants in 1971.

The Kaplan Foundation’s early partial funding can be attributed to Joan K. Davidson’s dual roles as vice president of the foundation and an early president of City Walls.

15 The title of this mural is sometimes recorded as …in the Astor Bar. This mural holds the distinction of being the first mural to be completed under the auspices of the then-recently formed Department of Cultural Affairs. Doris Freedman was appointed the first director of this new municipal department upon its establishment in 1967. In advance of the unveiling and dedication of Wiegand’s mural on August 18, 1968, August Heckscher, the city’s Administrator of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs, heralded the work as starting a new city-wide initiative to “unite artist and community in the creation of neighborhood landmarks and community beautification” through mural painting. See Department of Parks, City of New York, “First Outdoor Mural by Contemporary New York Artist to be Presented,” Press Release, 13 Aug. 1968.

16 See note 29.

17 Plans for dissolving the group had been discussed in City Walls board meetings as early as 1974. See Board of Directors’ minutes, 23 Oct. 1974; Public Art Fund Archive; MSS 270; 1; 9; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

18 Freedman quoted in Joseph Gale, “Transforming Sooty Brick and Cracked Concrete into ‘City Walls,’” Newsday 18 Nov. 1974: 12A.


20 Doris Freedman, “City Walls, New York: A New Kind of Public Art,” 1975; Public Art Fund Archive; MSS 270; 2; 20; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

21 Ibid.

22 “City Walls Tour, NYC, Dec. 13, 1970”; Public Art Fund Archive; MSS 270; 1; 4; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

23 Slightly further north than these three addresses, yet still within the range of murals defined by the 1970 tour route diagram, Pekarsky lived in a loft building at 48 West 22nd Street.

24 John Canaday, “Dutch Genre Drawings’ at the Morgan,” The New York Times, 16 Sep. 1972: 25. This was Canaday’s second published attack on City Walls. The first came almost a year earlier, with Canaday’s extensive, multi-column coverage of a recently completed City Walls-sponsored mural by Knox Martin at West 19th Street and the West Side Highway. Although conceding that Martin’s mural “is easily the best of all the City Walls projects that I have seen,” this was faint praise. Canaday continued describing Martin’s mural as “the only one exhibiting a degree of professionalism much beyond what could be expected of a well-supervised school child equipped with a rule, a compass, and a paint box.” Comparing City Walls’ previous projects to the “audible goo” of music pervading elevators and managed lobbies, Canaday argued that City Walls’ artists did not improve the environment as much as “annihilate it” with brashly colored, out of scale, and irresponsibly placed works. His rhetoric becomes quite strident at times, accusing the muralists of committing “environmental rape” and encouraging the entire City Walls organization to “go soak its head.” It was this earlier article of Canaday’s that prompted Freedman and others to submit letters to the editor of the paper countering Canaday’s published critique. For Freedman’s letter, see note 27. John Canaday, “A Mighty Big Hair of the Dog,” The New York Times, 12 Sep. 1971: D33.


29 Davidson resigned her position in 1970, citing her belief that artists should exert more control over the governance of the group. Jason Crum then served as an interim administrator for the organization. However, he would soon claim that the administrative responsibilities entailed in managing the group were “overly burdensome for a practicing artist,” echoing the public reason given for David Bromberg’s early retreat from the group soon after its incorporation. In 1971, Doris
Freedman was asked to become the president and administrator of City Walls. Doris C. Freedman, “City Walls”; Public Art Fund Archive; MSS 270; 2; 20; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

Joan K. Davidson, untitled catalogue essay, Using Walls (Outdoors), n.p. Italics reflect the formatting of the original catalogue essay.

Doris Freedman and Kyle Morris, untitled slide lecture narrative; Public Art Fund Archive; MSS 270; 1; 1; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries, 18.

Ibid., 19.

The first proposal was in 1929. To accommodate a subway system expansion along Houston Street, extending from Sixth Avenue to Essex Street, plans were set in motion for the city to acquire property on either side of Houston Street to increase the width of above ground roadway from 50 to a minimum of 75 feet (ultimately resulting in an average width of 80 feet across Houston Street). In addition to allowing for better circulation of both vehicle and pedestrian traffic, the widening was undertaken to accommodate both above- and below-ground facilities for the expanding subway system. These included allowances for retaining walls of the subway tunnels and new construction for entrance and exit terminals and related transportation kiosks.

As another parallel to the 1929 Houston Street widening, the earlier project was part of a greater Manhattan (and specifically Lower Manhattan-focused) development. The 1929 project was carried out alongside the city’s condemning and razing of approximately 200 buildings along Chrystie Street and Forsyth Street between Canal Street and Houston Street and approximately 100 buildings along Allen Street and Pike Street. This was part of a combined tenement housing rehabilitation and vehicle expressway construction program within the Lower East Side.

To mark the project’s conclusion, an official ribbon cutting was held on June 14, 1963 at the intersection of Lafayette Street and Houston Street, reinforcing Lafayette Street’s position as a geographic midpoint in the mid-century widening plan.

For example, Crum’s Surge (1970) on Hart Island was painted with radiating arcs crossing over window frames.

The exhibition presented a series of two- by three-foot illuminated color transparencies of nine completed works and painted black-and-white photographs as studies for future projects by Crum, D’Arcangelo, Wiegand, and Tania. Arthur Drexler, then-director of the Museum of Modern Art’s Department of Architecture and Design, curated this exhibition of projects that seem to have been considered urban design projects rather than “fine art” works proper. The wall text accompanying the exhibition described the works on view as “simple in concept, loud in color, and geometrically patterned” with no connection made to contemporaneous art world styles, movements, or motivations. The works were offered as strategies of “refurbishment” and “community improvement”; a “restful” visual form “powerful enough to drown out all distractions” caused by the urban environment. The exhibition also served as a promotional venture for the group. The final sentence of the wall text stated, “It costs about $4000 to paint one wall; interested citizens alert to a new opportunity in public patronage of the arts should contact Mr. [David] Bromberg: 90 Bedford Street, New York City.” See Museum of Modern Art Press Release No. 52, Apr. 1969, http://www.moma.org/docs/press_archives/4244/releases/MOMA_1969_Jan-June_0077_52.pdf?2010 (accessed 20 Apr. 2013); and PAINTING FOR CITY WALLS, Apr. 17 – Jun. 16, 1969, Wall Label, http://www.moma.org/docs/press_archives/4245/releases/MOMA_1969_Jan-June_0078.pdf?2010 (accessed 20 Apr. 2013).

These three murals were within two blocks of one another, offering a case for being treated as their own multi-posted gateway to SoHo. Before Untitled (September 1972) and Untitled (July 1971) at the intersection of Houston Street and Mulberry Street (see note 4), Pekarsky painted Untitled (May 1970). With an image of an oversized floral element, this first mural was placed on the northern façade of the Bleeker Street building that occupying the triangle between Lafayette Street and Mulberry Street.

The Environmental Protection Agency was founded in December 1970 to monitor several kinds of pollution (e.g. chemical, air, water, and even visual) across the United States. On at least one
occasion, Doris Freedman couched City Walls’ murals with resolving urban environmental ills in line with those of interest to the Environmental Protection Agency. In an August 23, 1971 press release announcing the selection of Knox Martin to paint a City Walls mural overlooking the West Side Highway, Freedman explained how such large-scale works by reputable contemporary artists can offer “a solution to ever growing visual pollution” overtaking the embattled city. City Walls, Inc. press release, 23 Aug. 1971; Public Art Fund Archive; MSS 270; 3; 5; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

40 “Building Up City Walls,” The Art Gallery 14.1 (1970): 25. Soon after the article’s publication, there was a notable exception to this otherwise accurate geographic analysis: the successful commission of a City Walls mural for the Lever House, Robert Wiegand’s Leverage (1970). Sponsored by the Lever Brothers Company, negotiated with assistance from the Museum of Modern Art, and executed by Environmental Design Associates, Inc., Wiegand’s mural was placed on the eastern façade of the Park Avenue International Style building, directly above its U-shaped elevated terrace.


42 A 1970 article in the Boston Globe instructed the reader that the newly established New York City artist neighborhood of SoHo is “pronounced Sow-How (for south of Houston Street).” “New York City: Off-Beat Touring Includes a Visit to Soho,” A34.


44 Grace Glueck, “4 Uptown Art Dealers Set Up in SoHo,” The New York Times, 27 Sep. 1971: 40. These commercial galleries took over a newly refurbished cast-iron loft building that formerly housed the A. G. Nelson Paper Company warehouse. The art transportation company Hague Art Deliveries, which jointly financed the renovation of the building along with Castelli and Emmerich, occupied the ground floor of the building.


47 For example, see “SoHo Gallery Map,” Art Now Gallery Guide (Sep. 1971): n.p.; and “Map of SoHo Art Galleries,” Winter–Spring 1971; SoHo Artists Association Records, 1968–78, 1, 18, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. In a 1975 article in a tourism publication, a distinction is drawn between Prince Street and West Broadway. While the former is considered “SoHo’s Main Street” for local residents with bars, informal restaurants and grocery stores catering to a mostly artist population, the latter is characterized as appealing to “the sightseers and gallery patrons who swarm to the community on weekends” with its concentration of not only galleries but also boutiques and new restaurants. Susan Edmiston, “SoHo’s Lofty Life-Styles,” Passages 6.4 (Apr. 1975): 13–17.
For example, see “Location of Artists’ Lofts for Cornell Tour” and “Soho Tour,” 1971; SoHo Artists Association Records, 1968–78, 1, 10, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. See also the “SoHo Artists Festival” map, 1970; SoHo Artists Association Records, 1968–78, 1, 18, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This map was jointly promoted by the SoHo Artists Association and the New York City Parks Department.

This earlier program granted permission for artists to reside on the top two floors of buildings in commercially zoned areas, pending appropriate egress allowances, sanitation, and notification to public safety providers.

City Planning Commission, Department of City Planning, Zoning Maps and Resolution (New York: City of New York, 1961). For the M1-5 area, see Zoning Maps 12a, 12b, 12c in the “Zoning Maps” section of the resolution.

The full boundaries wrapped around Houston Street, Mulberry Street, Prince Street, Lafayette Street, Center Street, Broome Street, Baxter Street, Sixth Avenue, Spring Street, Sullivan Street, again across Broome Street, and West Broadway. For period maps, see SoHo Artists Association Records, 1968–78, 1, 5, 8 and 13, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Buildings in M1-5A with lots no larger than 3600 square feet, containing loft spaces larger than 1200 square feet and smaller than 3600 feet, and with at least one artist (previously illegally) residing in those lofts prior to September 15, 1970 were granted “as of right” legalization for joint artist living/working quarters. Buildings in M1-5B had similar lot and loft requirements, but lacked the restriction of needing to have previously served as an artist’s residence.

The legalization of individual lofts required an additional approval process. The resident was required to be certified as a practicing artist by an Artist Certification Committee review board overseen by the New York City Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs. SOHO REFERENDUM draft, undated; SoHo Artists Association Records, 1968–78, 1, 5, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; and CERTIFICIATION OF ARTISTS APPLYING FOR OCCUPANCY IN THE M1-5 ZONED SOHO, undated; SoHo Artists Association Records, 1968–78, 1, 18, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Although both the eastern and western sides of Crosby Street fell within the newly designated zone, only the eastern side of West Broadway was included as part of the new historic district. The name of the district consciously acknowledged both an older and more recent history: “Cast Iron” referencing the visual style, material form, and structural innovation offered by the concentration of nineteenth-century commercial cast-iron architecture within the area; and “SoHo” acknowledging the designer’s adoption and promotion since the 1960s. Cited in the designation report were not only the district’s economic, architectural, and entertainment legacies, but also the district’s important role in the residential development of the city in both the mid-nineteenth century and contemporary periods. City of New York Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs Administration and Landmarks Preservation Commission, SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Designation Report (New York: The City of New York, 1973).


This decision by the Landmarks Preservation Commission was part of a cluster of designations made in the summer of 1973. Along with the SoHo Cast Iron district, contemporary designations were made within Carnegie Hill, West 76th Street, and West 105th Street in Manhattan, as well as Park Slope, Carroll Gardens, and Boerum Hill in Brooklyn. Hearings for each of these districts had initially taken place in 1970. However, the commission passed a moratorium on further designation decisions in December of 1970, citing inadequate staff and budget as reasons for suspending hearings at the time. See Roberta B. Gratz, “Commission Ready to OK 7 Landmark Areas,” New York Post, 24 Mar. 1973: 4; Roberta B. Gratz, “SoHo Wins Historic Designation,” New York Post, 16 Aug. 1973: 4; and Gerhard Liebmann, “SOHO,” undated; SoHo Artists Association Records, 1968–78, 1, 1, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 17.

During the rezoning negotiations between the city and the SoHo Artists Alliance, the city proposed to map the southern boundary of the new M1-5B to exclude two Canal Street blocks and a set of frontages along the northern side of Canal Street and thus keep them open to future real estate development. The blocks in question were instead taken up as part of a separate rezoning and redevelopment plan before the City Planning Commission. See “SURVEY OF ARTISTS AND NON-ARTISTS LIVING IN THE AFFECTED BLOCKS (2 blocks and 2 frontages) ON CANAL ST,” undated; SoHo Artists Association Records, 1968–78, 1, 4, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. See also the letter from Ingrid Wiegand to Donald H. Elliot, 14 Nov. 1970, SoHo Artists Association Records, 1968–78, 1, 2, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Subway access to SoHo was provided by local service to stations at Spring Street and Sixth Avenue, Prince Street and Broadway, and Spring Street and Lafayette Street.

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**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

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