

**From:** [Melissa Smith](#)  
**To:** [City Council](#)  
**Cc:** [Board and Council Messages](#)  
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To whom it may concern

The festive 245 foot-long circus mural created by local artist Frances Smith may not be everyone's style. But isn't that the very nature of art, different styles? Frances enthusiastically submitted her design to the deciding committee 17 years ago because circus is "her thing".

After attending the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Frances, now in her 80s, moved to Florida in 1958 and to become a student at the Ringling School of Art and Design in Sarasota. Frances went on to become an expert on Ringling style clown make-up and knew many of the clowns in her mural personally. Later she brought this knowledge to Circus World in Central Florida as a demonstrating artist.

During the process of painting the Venice circus mural, Frances, who is a beloved art instructor at the Venice Art Center, involved many students in the painting. To this day children now in their twenties drive-by and can remember the day they helped paint an elephant or a circus wagon. Not so long ago a local Boy Scout troop volunteered to clean the wall as a community project.

Over the years the "city-owned" wall has cracked and crumbled in several places. The background paint shows mildew on wet days and no doubt would benefit from a yearly pressure washing. I myself pressure cleaned it when a local businessman lent me a generator and the airport delivered a large tank of water to the site 7 years ago. So I can attest to the fact that the acrylic paint does not just blow off as I imagine the concern may be. It is a simple process to clean with the proper equipment.

Regarding the comment in the paper recently, "Frances is no longer able to touch it up", WELL nobody ever asked, nor was it part of an established protocol for the artist to "touch it up". Frances would love to touch it up! She drives by every day on her way to a busy teaching schedule at VAC and sees the cracks and fading. She has expressed concern about this for years but can only do so much. Twice she touched up at her own expense, but fixing cracks and pressure cleaning is a different skill set.

The point I would like to make is two part:

First, if the city is willing to budget in after all these years repairs and cleaning to the wall, then why not ask the original artist personally to touch it up and help her with the paint and sealer costs? Learning of this proposal in the local paper was not the most fair course of action, no matter what the outcome, for the original artist Frances.

Second, if the city has decided "out with the old and in with the new," then OK, things change. But for goodness sakes, don't have a new artist paint another circus mural over the old one. There are many walls in town that the new artist VABI has found can paint their proposed mural on. Venice has wonderful murals by many local artists and there is always room for more. I don't think you can have too many murals personally. Look at Punta Gorda.

In conclusion, if there is a revitalized interest in promoting the history of circus in Venice, fantastic! I encourage you to reconsider local creator Bill Dovel's suggestion. Dovel passionately put together a proposal to create a more inviting and imaginative entrance to the blasé train platform leading to Gunther Gebel Williams personal sleeping car. The proposal included historical plaques and signage, circus style seating, colorful painted circus cutouts, an awning and more. As it stands now this historical train depot "attraction" seems unfinished and uninviting when it could be a terrific opportunity to tell an important part of the Venice story.

Thank you, Melissa Smith Hogan