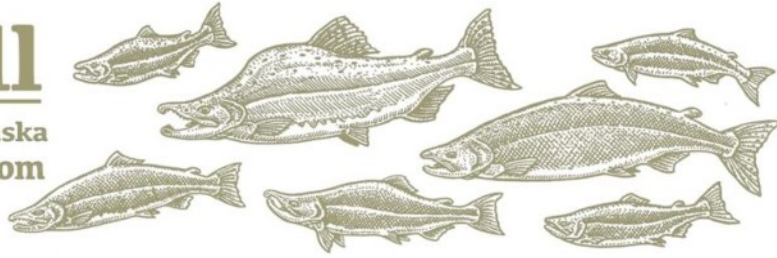


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The History of Ray Troll's *Blue Seas, Green Seas* Mural at NOAA's Southwest Fisheries Science Center in Pacific Grove, California

Written by Ray Troll, September 19, 2022

In 2007 and 2008, I was honored to work on an ambitious project for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) at their Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC) in Pacific Grove, California. I was asked to interpret, via my artwork, the complex and important environmental research that was taking place in this large, nondescript, concrete bunker of a building situated a block from the ocean. The building had been built by the Navy in 1952 as a bunker capable of surviving the impact of a nuclear weapon, so aesthetics was the least of their concerns despite a location in the heart of a quiet, upscale neighborhood. Local residents had long considered this mysterious building an eyesore.

The resulting 32 panel mural was able to transform the building, reflecting the beauty and importance of sea life in the region, and was acknowledged as a community asset. In 2014, six years after the 'Blue Seas, Green Seas' mural was completed, a Congressional budget cut forced NOAA to move its staff out of the building. It has sat essentially vacant since then, and in 2020 the Governmental Services Agency (GSA) sold the building to a private party, with no stipulation for preservation of the mural.

With the sale now finalized, I felt it important to document the history of this major mural project. Here, I have outlined the story of the creation and the currently threatened status of *Blue Seas, Green Seas*. I poured my heart and soul into this project, and years were spent on its creation. It would be an absolute shame to see it destroyed.

The bulk of the Blues Seas/Green Seas mural project was funded by a grant from the [Preserve America](#) program, so it seems doubly ironic and wasteful that the government disposed of this building in such a cold-hearted manner.

I still harbor hope that it can be saved by community efforts. Should there be a way to save this massive work of art for all to enjoy, I will happily participate in its preservation and conservation.

The project and process

My job was multifaceted and challenging. My tasks were to:

- Interpret the research taking place in the building, letting the public know what was happening on the site,
- Beautify an ugly building,
- Integrate the building into the surrounding landscape and neighborhood,
- Reflect historic aspects of local fisheries,
- Reflect the work of NOAA's research vessels,
- Not draw too much attention to the building so that it detracted from the beauty of its surroundings,
- Represent the local sea life in an accurate way,
- Assemble a responsible and talented crew to paint the large-scale panels based on my detailed drawings and to adhere them to the building.

I met with scientists at the building on a number of occasions to better understand their work. I learned a great deal about the [Pacific Decadal Oscillation](#) (the PDO) and NOAA's investigation on its cyclic regimes so important to all sea life in the region. I eventually formulated the concept of warmer 'blues seas' changing to the colder 'green seas' to reflect the shifting ocean conditions of the California coast. Two sides of the building would have blue backgrounds, two would have green. They'd be staggered as you walked around the building. The cooler green panels would have creatures that live in an anchovy-based food chain; the blue panels would reflect a warmer, sardine-based regime.

The building had been constructed using poured concrete panels arranged in rows, so it seemed natural to have individual scenes in each rectangle. The trick was to have visual continuity, to make the separate pieces flow together, and move the viewer seamlessly around the building from one panel to the next.

The SWFSC scientists supplied me with an extensive 'menu' of creatures that thrived in the two climate regimes, and those that flourished in both. It was quite a list, but I was free to draw from it as I saw fit and to depict creatures I was particularly inspired by or that had a certain visual appeal for me. I spent most of 2007 working on the colored pencil drawings. I would submit them and get feedback and guidance along the way. I had to alter a number of them after the review process. Still others were scrapped entirely and had to be redone. I was committed to scientific accuracy as well as visual impact, and each panel, and the mural as a whole, reflects that balance.

I made a special effort to develop a color palette directly from the landscape and seascape near the building. My intention was to make the building literally blend into its surroundings.



Two California-based mural artists, Roberto Salas and Memo Juaregui, projected and painted my compositions onto sections of non-woven material known as [Polytab](#) or [Parachute Cloth](#). The painting took place at the NOAA SWFSC in La Jolla. The finished panels were then adhered to the building using clear acrylic gel. The work was completed by the fall of 2008.

A total of 32 panels are adhered to the building. The mural stretches 250 feet, wrapping the entire upper section of the edifice. The completed project was officially unveiled at a well-attended community event on November 12, 2008.

After NOAA

In 2014, six years after the *Blue Seas, Green Seas* mural was completed, NOAA moved their staff out of the building. It has been essentially abandoned since then. In 2020 the Governmental Services Agency (GSA) made plans to auction the building off to the highest bidder. The auction has been set to start on January 31, 2022.

In late 2020, the GSA contacted me about their plans to "dispose" of the building and what the implications would be for the mural. It is not possible to remove the panels as the process would require scraping them off the building. Another option would be to paint over them entirely, but this too destroys the artwork. GSA wanted to dispose of the property with no constraints regarding the mural. This meant that I was approached to sign a document permitting the sale to proceed with the option (and likelihood) that the mural would be destroyed.

The possible destruction of the complete *Blue Seas, Green Seas* mural sequence seems like a terrible waste, and a loss to the community. As the artist I retained the copyright to my original art but did not have the capacity to forestall or cancel the sale. I felt pressured to give permission to the federal government so that they could sell the property.

In early 2020 a group of local citizens coalesced around the idea of turning the building into a Center for Ocean Art, Science and Technology, to be known as COAST. What a wonderful use of this building and the murals this would be. It dovetails perfectly with the original intent of the project, and what my work is all about: blending the twin disciplines of art and science.

It's doubly important to convey the perils our oceans are facing now with climate change, ocean acidification and plastic pollution threatening the entire life support system of the planet. What COAST is proposing is a step in the right direction, and it's an opportunity that should not be lost. *Blue Seas, Green Seas* can play a part in this and hopefully there is community capacity to make that happen.

Sincerely,

Ray Troll

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