

# THE MURALS OF MAXO VANKA

## **Interpretive Planning -- Request for Proposals**

### **Project Introduction**

The Society to Preserve the Millvale Murals of Maxo Vanka (Vanka Murals) seeks proposals from consultants interested in leading our organization through a comprehensive interpretive planning process. Drawing on a recent assessment of the Vanka Murals' docent-led tour program, in sync with a historic structure report funded by a Keystone Planning Grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and the Heinz Endowments, archival materials and scholarship, and input from diverse stakeholders and constituents, the consultant will generate an interpretive plan and a series of recommendations for organizational structure, programming, and communications.

### **About Maxo Vanka and the Vanka Murals**

#### **Who is Maxo Vanka?**

Born in Zagreb in 1889, after eight years among the Croatian peasantry, Maximilian (Maxo) Vanka began his studies at the School of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb. He graduated from the Royal Academy of Beaux Arts in Brussels, Belgium in 1914 and won the gold medal of King Albert for his self-portrait. Vanka returns to Zagreb as a Professor of Painting and eventually married an American, Margaret Stetten, in 1931, and migrated to the U.S. in 1934 and lived in New York City.

In 1937, Father Albert Zagar, priest of St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic church in Millvale, contacted Vanka. Zagar invited the artist to come and paint murals on the interior of the small Romanesque church designed by architect Frederic Sauer in 1900. The church was rebuilt following a fire in 1921 under Sauer's direction, and Vanka's "canvas" was created. The artist accepted Father Zagar's invitation and began a collaboration with the priest to create one of the most spectacular collections of murals in the world. The artist painted a portion of the murals in 1937, and in 1941 came back to the church, as war ravaged his homeland of Croatia, to complete the second commission in St. Nicholas. His final work in the church was in 1951. Vanka's philosophy of painting revealed his deep spirituality. Of his philosophy of painting, he declared: "I painted so that Divinity in becoming human, would make humanity divine." Vanka founded the art department at Delaware Valley College of Science and Agriculture in New Britain, PA. He died in 1963.

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### The Society to Preserve the Millvale Murals of Maxo Vanka (Vanka Murals)

#### *Mission*

To conserve and protect for permanent public exhibition the nationally recognized Vanka Murals within St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church in Millvale, Pennsylvania enabling the immigrant artist's "gift to America" to serve as an enduring catalyst for community engagement and education, inspire social and cultural dialogue, celebrate diversity, and forge connections through reflections on the extraordinary American and immigrant experiences.

#### *Vision*

To establish a lasting national monument to America's storied immigrant experience, utilizing the ongoing conservation of the historic Vanka Murals to create a nexus for community engagement, education, and socially and culturally oriented programming that evokes reverence for the past and inspiration for the future.

#### *History*

The Society to Preserve the Millvale Murals of Maxo Vanka was incorporated in 1991 as an independent 501(c)(3) organization with a mission to raise awareness and educate the public about the murals and their significance to Pittsburgh's history, and their depiction of America's immigrant experience.

Because of the Society's efforts, the murals have received historical designations by the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation and the National Register of Historic Places. Vanka Murals also manages the volunteer docent program that offers regular Saturday tours and responds to special requests for tours from individuals, organizations, schools and other private groups. The organization is also responsible for the fundraising effort to facilitate immediate conservation and lighting of the murals. Vanka Murals also prioritizes the ongoing development of a diverse audience — local, national and international — with the intention of sustaining the murals for the enjoyment and education of generations to come.

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Since 2009, Vanka Murals has raised more than \$1.25M from generous individuals and institutions making it possible to conserve and light 12 of Maxo Vanka's 25 stunning Murals covering the walls of St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church in Millvale. Vanka Murals works in partnership with the congregation of St. Nicholas which maintains the building, and the church was recently designated as one of the "Shrines of Pittsburgh." This special grouping within the Diocese of Pittsburgh was created to coordinate relationships between parishes that possess unique religious, cultural or artistic significance.

Vanka Murals welcomes an increasing audience each year with more than 4,000 visitors annually through its docent tour program and mission-related events and activities. Public interest, awareness, and access to the Murals are on the rise through Vanka Murals' efforts thanks to the support of the local, national, and international Save Maxo Vanka community.

### **Scope of Services**

Create an interpretive plan that demonstrates the significance and potential of the Murals and includes a vision for visitor experience and programming, suggested outcomes/impact, and implementation recommendations. This document includes but is not limited to:

- General Thematic Framework Exploration of themes and subthemes to support programs and outreach.
- Target Audiences Recommendation and profiles of key audiences/constituencies for programming and messaging.
- Media and Methods Describe preferences and design directions for interpretive media and methods.
- Programs and Partnerships Develop recommendations for local and national programming and strategic partnerships that will advance mission and increase sustainability with consideration for the special relationship between the St. Nicholas congregation and Vanka Murals.
- Operational Implications Generate recommendations regarding organizational infrastructure (both paid and volunteer) as well as guidance on capacity-building/professional development.
- Implementation Priorities and Timeline Describe specific priorities for interpretive implementation, including recommendations for content experts to support the development of new programs. Provide a general phasing plan covering all actions recommended in the Interpretive Plan.

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### PROPOSAL

#### In your proposal, please include the following:

- **Project Team:** If applicable, anyone assigned to work on the project should be identified, including titles, education, and work. Identify all subconsultants and profile their qualifications for this project.
- **Clients:** A minimum of 2 references for whom the consultant and/or key personnel have performed similar work within the last five years, and two examples of work produced under similar contracts.
- **Timeline:** The consultant's proposal must include a proposed schedule for the project, beginning in January 2020 and concluding within 12 months.
- **Costs:** Provide a breakdown of costs with a suggested payment schedule.

### Budget

The budgeted amount for these services is not to exceed \$25,000, all inclusive.

### Proposal Submission and Review Process

- Consultant shall provide all deliverables in electronic format by October 31, 2019 to:  
Anna Doering, Managing Director [adoering@vankamurals.org](mailto:adoering@vankamurals.org)
- Proposal review begins immediately.
- Consultant must be able to participate in a video conference or in-person interview no later than November 15, 2019.
- Final round of interviews will take place onsite in Pittsburgh the week of December 2nd.
- Consultant will be notified of selection by December 9, 2019.