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\$80,000 National Bowling Stadium mural approved

By: **Kelsey Penrose** February 9, 2023



Artist rendering of the bowling stadium mural.

The Reno City Council on Wednesday approved an \$80,000 commission to artist Rafael Blanco to create a mural on the exterior of the National Bowling Stadium in downtown Reno. Blanco was selected out of 41 submitting artists.

He attended the University of Nevada, Reno for his Master of Fine Arts program but lives in the Chicago area. Blanco also [painted two murals](#) at the University of Nevada, Reno in 2020.

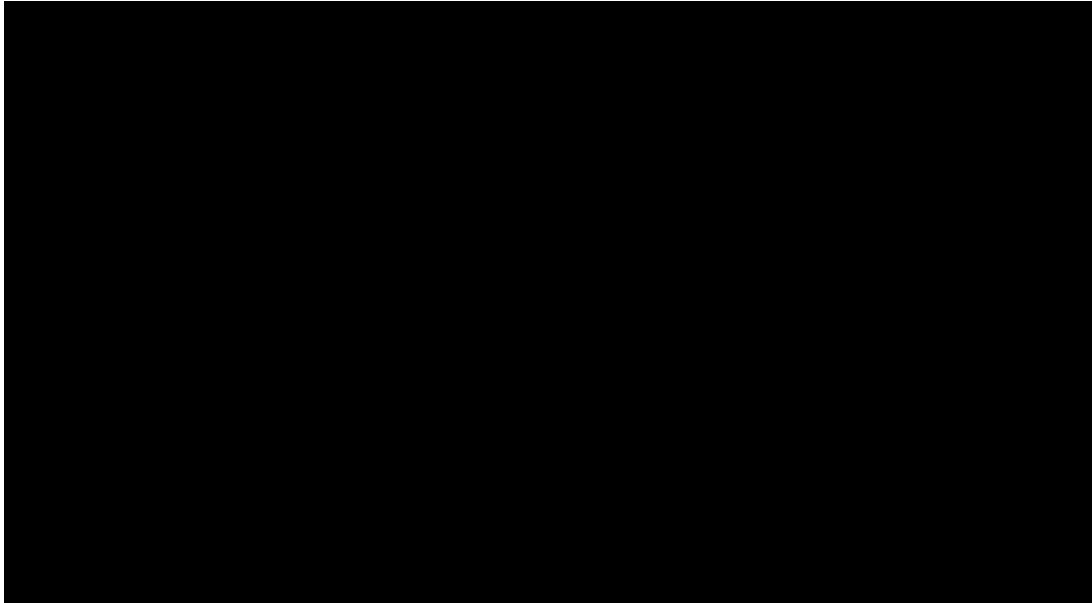




Artist Rafael Blanco in 2020 when he was part way through painting the mural on Sierra Hall. Image: Isaac Hoops

Though approved, the project drew criticism from several council members due to the process of the art selection.

Council member Jenny Brekhus took issue with the concept of the mural, and questioned why the building was receiving a mural rather than a “paint job.” She said she did not want to be a part of choosing art.



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"I don't want to be a part of 'this art I like, this art I don't,' but I think the decisions [...] should have come to the council to decide if we wanted to move forward with a mural or not," Brekhus said.

She added that it wasn't that she had a problem with the art itself, because "she hadn't really looked at it," but rather she was "sad" the council hadn't made the decision about whether or not a mural was the correct choice.

While Mayor Hillary Schieve said she thought the artist was "incredibly talented," she wished the council could have been more in the process because the selected mural is bowling-themed, and she envisions the stadium to be more multipurpose in the future.



Schieve also said she wanted to know more about the process in general, including why non-local artists are being chosen often for local art projects.

“We’ve got amazing talent right here at home,” Schieve said. “So when we don’t pick a local artist, I want to know why. I think it’s really important to keep artists working in our own community.”

Schieve asked the city manager’s office to look into changing the process for mural approval.

Council member Naomi Duerr suggested there be a threshold of \$50,000 created at which point arts and culture projects must come to council for approval.

Council member Devon Reese, as the former member for the Capital Projects Surcharge Advisory Committee, which is in charge of the mural project, said that there was a “moment” that the committee had to make decisions about the timing of renovations, and that any delaying of the mural decisions could create a problem.

“I am worried about the timing issue in terms of delaying it because we’ve got like paint, weather, issues about weather that prevent us from painting earlier, the bowlers are coming, it’s in an area where we don’t want to have painting going on while bowlers are trying to enter and exit,” he said.

After a lengthy discussion about adding Wolf Pack colors, a more diversified sports theme, and other changes, Duerr asked for the final rendition to be presented at the next meeting. Reese countered that the council should not be in the business of deciding whether art was good or bad.



Duerr argued that since the city is paying the artist, the city is the client, and they should work together with the artist to achieve the vision.

“I’m not talking about the colors, but what’s important is the vision. We’re setting the vision about what the piece is about and I think that’s a very appropriate role for the council,” Duerr said.

Brekhus voted against the mural, and the council approved to move forward on the project.

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