

The original documents are located in Box 50, folder “President - Personal Portrait - Paul Collins Mural” of the Philip Buchen Files at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

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Hogan
Duck
President's
Portrait

October 9, 1974

Dear Jack:

Many thanks for your letter and warm congratulations. Yes, I have seen and was most pleased with Duncan's sermon on the garden.

The matter of a portrait of the President by Paul Collins, I believe I had best leave to others from here to work on.

Warmest regards.

Sincerely,

Philip W. Buchen
Counsel to the President

Mr. Jack Hogan
News Director
WZZM-TV
West Michigan Telecasters, Inc.
Box 2
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49501



TV-RADIO

WEST MICHIGAN TELECASTERS, INC.
BOX Z GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN 49501 (616) 364-9551

October 2, 1974

Mr. Philip Buchen
Legan Counsel
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D. C.

Dear Phil:

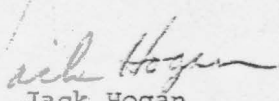
I am a little late in saying congratulations, but as you well know we are all very proud to have you serve in the Ford administration. I am sure that you have had a chance by now to read a copy of Duncan's sermon on the pardon. If for some strange reason you did not get a copy, please let me know.

I mentioned the possibility of having a local black artist, Paul Collins, do a portrait of the President. As I understand it there is a move underway in Grand Rapids to have this done with local people picking up the fee.

Apparently someone has been in touch with Bill Seidman about this, but I am still trying to get some prints of Paul's work so that you will know why we have recommended this man.

Dave Mehney, who has Kawasaki in Grand Rapids, is apparently in touch with Mr. Seidman so that all of the Grand Rapids people will know about this project.

Cordially,


Jack Hogan
News Director
WZZM-TV

JH/tt



President's
Portrait EXECUTIVE

①

(see TR3/ST22
earlier GI2
material)

April 18, 1975

Dear Paul:

I want to tell you that we now think we have just the right place for the unique painting you presented when I visited Grand Rapids last fall. As you may know, Betty has been helping me decorate, and we decided that this example of your talent would be perfect for my private working office. It is a poignant blending of the past with the present and will serve as a constant reminder of your friendship. Many, many thanks!

With warmest personal regards.

Sincerely,

NEW YORK
JERRY FORD

Mr. Paul Collins
709 Logan Street, SE.
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

Cuff Links sent under separate cover

(Loddy - James)

GRF/mfw/mh/mw

GIFT



30 painting

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

4/18/75

Dear Mrs. Ford,

I appreciated your guidance on this one. Just to be sure I have it right, would you please look it over before I send to the President's office for signature. . .

Many thanks!

Marge
Marge Wicklein

*Thank you
signed*



December 20, 1974

PERSONAL

Dear Mr. Collins:

Thank you for the framed painting of the President's boyhood home and the White House received during his recent visit to Grand Rapids. He indeed appreciates the effort reflected in this example of your work, and is most grateful for the goodwill that prompted your thoughtful gift. President Ford is always pleased to be remembered by residents of Michigan, and this note comes to you with his best wishes.

Sincerely yours,

(Miss) Mildred Leonard
Personal Assistant

Mr. Paul Collins
709 Logan Street, SE.
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

ML/mfw/cf/cf

gift



BIOGRAPHY OF PAUL COLLINS

Paul Collins, born in Muskegon, Michigan, moved to Grand Rapids at an early age. He is a graduate of Ottawa Hills High School and author of a large mural in South Middle School depicting the Black Struggle.

He spent two years in Africa completing a collection, "Black Journey from Africa".

BIOGRAPHY OF PAUL COLLINS - Card 2

Portraits by Paul Collins include that of Roger Miller, Steve McQueen and Martin Luther King.

Spending time in Wounded Knee during the uprising, he has just completed a collection of 30 paintings on the American Indian.

###



Gift For: PRESIDENT FORD

RECEIVED By: PRESIDENT

DATE: 29 Oct 74

DONOR: MR PAUL COLLINS, Artist

ADDRESS: GRAND RAPIDS, Mich.

Gift: FRAMED PAINTING

Disposition: RECEIVED AT CALVIN COLLEGE FIELD HOUSE, GRAND RAPIDS, Mich.
AND RETURNED TO MAIL ROOM, WASH., D.C.



Herbert G. Oldenburg
HERBERT G. OLDENBURG

Presidents
~~Boyhood~~
home
Portrait

May 9, 1975

To: Mr. Buchen
From: Eva

I have checked with Jay,
Anne Kamstra and
Central Files and we
can find nothing on this
"portfolio."

I have called Mr. Hogan
(see attached note) -- so
shall we "give up on this
one"?

Yes
P



Thursday 5/1/75

President
Boggs
Chase

3:55 I called Jack Hogan about the "portfolio by Paul Collins". He described it as a big envelope -- probably 22 x 16. Apparently Collins was with Jack Hogan and said maybe you could do something about the material -- so they dropped it into an envelope addressed to Mr. Buchen -- and it was sent separately from the letter of 10/2 -- it was a bunch of pictures, photo clippings and materials dealing with black art -- there was no letter with it.

I told him to all indications it would appear that we never received. If we had, we would have mentioned it in our reply.



*President
Boyd
Howe*

BOX Z GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN 49501 (616) 364-9551

April 10, 1975

Mr. Phil Buchen
Legal Council to the President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Phil:

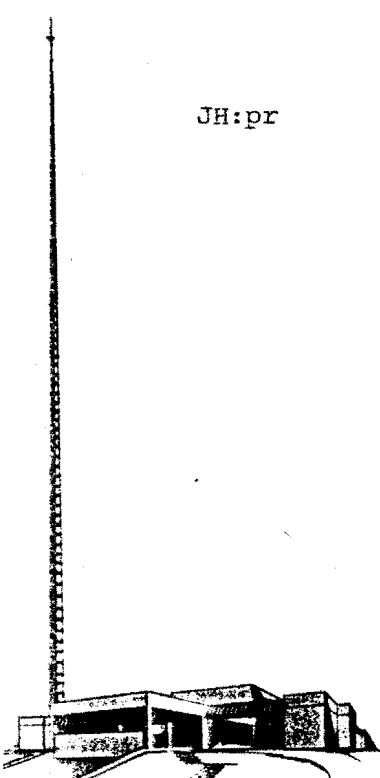
We sent you a portfolio by Paul Collins, and you sent it on to someone else. It appears now that Mr. Ford's portrait will not be done by our local black artist.

Will you please retrace where Paul's material might be and have it returned to me. We have many projects in mind for him, and I would like this sample material back.

Cordially,

Jack Hogan
Jack Hogan
News Director

JH:pr



President's
Portrait

May 9, 1975

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From: Eva

I have checked with Jay,
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*President
Portrait*

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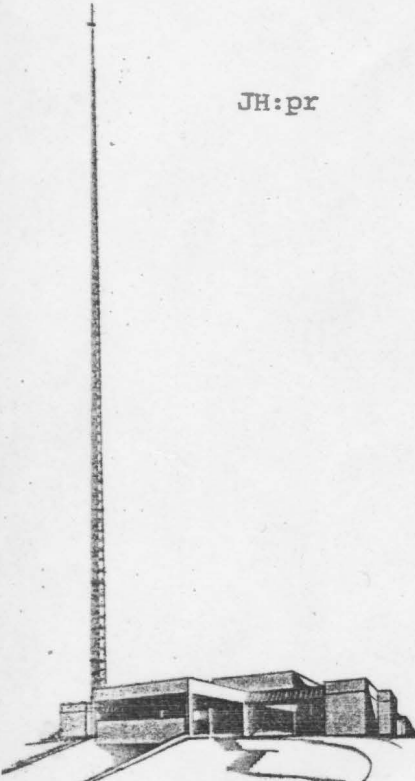
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Will you please retrace where Paul's material might be and have it returned to me. We have many projects in mind for him, and I would like this sample material back.

Cordially,

Jack Hogan
Jack Hogan
News Director

JH:pr



*President
Portrait*

Friday 5/23/75

4:00 Mr. Buchen advises that the Paul Collins package of materials was returned to Jack Hogan.

Mr. Buchen didn't know how they arrived or from whom -- but they got back.



THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

May 27, 1975

FOR: PHIL BUCHEN

FROM: BILL ROBERTS *JWR*

SUBJECT: Mural proposed for Kent Co. Airport

Over the weekend, I talked with Cong. Guy Vander Jagt, and discovered that he was the source of the promise to the group raising funds for the mural that the President would appear at the unveiling. In fact, Vander Jagt sent a telegram to the Grand Rapids Press to clarify the situation, after the Press reported the White House statement that it had no knowledge of the project.

Attached is a copy of the telegram Vander Jagt sent to the Press. Vander Jagt is enthused about the project--thinks it will be good for all concerned, and apparently Vander Jagt intends to work with the fund raisers on the project.



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MR. DAVID OSBORNE, MANAGING EDITOR
 GRAND RAPIDS PRESS
 GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

MAY 23 1975

OVER A YEAR AGO PAUL COLLINS, WHO IS A CLOSE PERSONAL FRIEND AND WHOM I HAVE BEEN PRIVILEGED TO HELP IN SMALL WAYS IN SEVERAL OF HIS ARTISTIC ENDEAVORS, AND I DISCUSSED PAUL'S PROJECT OF PAINTING A MURAL AT KENT COUNTY AIRPORT DEPICTING THE PRESIDENT'S LIFE. I TOLD PAUL I THOUGHT IT WAS A TREMENDOUS IDEA AND I PLEDGED MY ENTHUSIASTIC COOPERATION TO THE PROJECT INDICATING THAT I WOULD BE GLAD TO BE HELPFUL IN OBTAINING MATERIALS FROM THE PRESIDENT AND HIS FAMILY TO ENABLE PAUL TO DO THE MURAL. ONE OF THE REASONS FOR MY ENTHUSIASM WAS MY PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE PRESIDENT'S ALMOST WEEKLY TRIPS THROUGH THE AIRPORT WHILE HE AND I WERE CONGRESSIONAL COLLEAGUES TOGETHER. THE FACT THAT I KNOW THAT THE PRESIDENT KNEW AND THOUGHT HIGHLY OF PAUL WAS ANOTHER REASON FOR MY ENTHUSIASM. I WAS ALSO ENTICED BY PAUL'S SUGGESTION THAT THE COMMITTEE BE ESSENTIALLY BLACK BECAUSE THAT COULD BE INDICATIVE OF THE SPECIAL RAPPORT THE PRESIDENT STROVE FOR AND ACHIEVED WITH THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN HIS CONSTITUENCY. I TOLD PAUL THAT I WAS CONFIDENT THE PRESIDENT WOULD PARTICIPATE IN SOME SORT OF UNVEILING OR RECOGNITION CEREMONY AS HE CAME THROUGH THE AIR TO SOME FUNCTION TO WHICH HIS PRESIDENTIAL DUTIES WERE TAKING HIM. PAUL SAID HE WOULD GET BACK TO ME FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COOPERATION I HAD PLEDGED AFTER THE COMMITTEE WAS OFF THE GROUND. I FORESEE ABSOLUTELY NO PROBLEM WHATEVER IN OBTAINING THE COOPERATION I HAD PLEDGED TO PAUL.



GUY VANDER JAGT
 MEMBER OF CONGRESS

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

May 23, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: BILL ROBERTS

FROM: PHILIP BUCHEN *P.W.B.*

SUBJECT: Proposed Mural at Kent
County Airport

After receiving your memo of May 20, I talked to Jack Hogan at Grand Rapids. He advises that the group, hoping to raise funds for commissioning Paul Collins to paint a mural at the Kent County airport which would depict the life of the President, has not even attempted to clear this with anyone at the White House or to assure themselves that the President would appear for the unveiling.

I see no reason for trying to discourage efforts by this group but if asked we should say that the project arises from spontaneous local interest, and is not a matter on which the White House or the President is taking any position.

It may be, of course, that the interest will vanish before any progress can be made in financing such a project.

Handwritten initials: P.W.B.

Stamp: R. F. ...

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

May 20, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: PHIL BUCHEN

FROM:

BILL ROBERTS *JRB*

Maury deJong says that a letter is being circulated in Grand Rapids, soliciting \$35,000 in funds for a mural at Kent County Airport depicting the life of Gerald R. Ford from boyhood to the Presidency. The letter says that Artist Paul Collins has been commissioned to do the work, and that he has been assured the President will be there for the unveiling of the mural. deJong says he's talked with Collins, and Collins claims he was told by someone in the White House that the President would "try" to be there.

The letter is signed by Mrs. Bobbie Butler, Patron. deJong says her address is 2309 Jefferson St., SE in Grand Rapids. Others listed on the letterhead include Burke Porter, Hazel Grant, and Milo DeVries. Maury wasn't sure who was organizing the effort and pushing it.

If you'd like further details I'll be glad to pursue it.

President

Friday 5/14/76

Portrait

3:50 Called Dorothy Downton and told her that
Mr. Buchen talked with David Mehney
concerning the Paul Collins Mural -- and he's
sure he's all set.





1200 SIXTEENTH STREET, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20036 DISTRICT 7-4704

May 11, 1976

Dear David:

In order to assist in the campaign by the Gerald R. Ford Mural Committee to raise funds for a Paul Collins mural, I am enclosing my check payable to the County of Kent.

Although I have not had the opportunity to see Paul Collins' project as it is nearing completion, Guy VanderJagt tells me that he is preparing a superb work of art which will do credit not only to the artist but to the community. As a citizen of Grand Rapids, I urge wide participation in the fund drive still to be completed which will enable Kent County to install this tribute to our President in the Kent County Airport.

I thank you and your colleagues for the work you are doing to make this development possible, and I wish you much success.

Sincerely,

Philip W. Buchen
Counsel to the President

Mr. David Mehney
5080 36th Street, S. E.
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49508

Enclosure

bcc: Wm Saemen

PHILIP W. BUCHEN
703 CAMBRIDGE BOULEVARD, S.E.
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN 49506

220

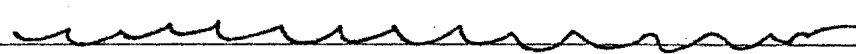
May 11 1976

74-5
724

PAY TO THE
ORDER OF

County of Kent

\$ 200.00

Two hundred and 

⁰⁰
100 DOLLAR

OLD KENT
BANK AND TRUST COMPANY
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

Philip W. Buchen

⑆ 0724 0005 ⑆ 2001 838 8 ⑆

*Check is to go
with my letter to Mehney*

Friday 5/7/76

*Mehney's address:
5080 V36 St. S.E.
M.R. 19305*

3:50 Dorothy Downton said she's sure you are aware of the Paul Collins Mural. (616) 949-6500

David Mehney is on the Committee of people who are working on it and he indicated there are a lot of black people who are interested in it.

He said he thinks it would help a great deal if the people in the area know that the President likes the idea of the mural. He thinks it would help getting the vote in the primary. Mr. Meany felt he nor anyone on the Committee had had any encouragement for them.

He said he would have resigned but Cong. VanderJagt talked him out of it.

Dorothy said she spoke to the President and asked what she should do about it.

The President asked her to ask you to call Mr. Mehney and talk to him about this specific Paul Collins mural. Tell him the President is in favor of it. He thinks it's great. He's honored they want to do this.

He wants you to talk with Mr. Mehny.



Monday 6/7/76

2:10 Margaret Trainor called from Cong. Vander Jagt's office and asked if they might have a copy of the letter you sent to David Mehney in connection with your contribution toward paying for the Paul Collins' mural. (copy attached)

225-3511

She said Mr. Mehney mentioned to the Congressman what a great letter it was. Cong. Vander Jagt is going to try to help raise funds to pay for it.

They are in Room 2334 Rayburn



*Paul Collins
Mural*

June 7, 1976

To: Margaret Trainor

From: Eva Daughtrey

As requested, I am attaching a copy
of Mr. Buchen's letter to
David Mehney sending his contribution
for the Paul Collins mural.





1200 SIXTEENTH STREET, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20036 DISTRICT 7-4704

May 11, 1976

Dear David:

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I thank you and your colleagues for the work you are doing to make this development possible, and I wish you much success.

Sincerely,

Philip J. Buchen
Counsel to the President

Mr. David Mehney
5030 36th Street, S. E.
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49508

Enclosure

cc: Wm. L. Leman

Tom Lee
2472 Abbington Drive SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49506
(616) 241-1726

September 1, 1976

The Honorable Philip Buchen
Counsel to the President
THE WHITE HOUSE
Washington, DC

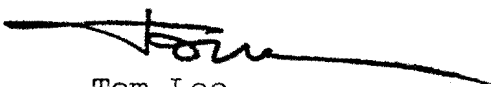
Dear Mr. Buchen:

Several weeks ago I spoke with you regarding the propriety and legality of reproducing the Presidential Seal on Press Materials related to the Gerald R. Ford Mural. You referred me to Mr. H P Goldfield of your office. Mr. Goldfield has been extremely cordial and cooperative in handling my inquiry.

Enclosed herewith is an advance copy of the press briefing booklet on the mural, which I completed this date. I do not plan to disseminate this material to the press until just prior to the unveiling of the mural, but I thought that you might like to have an advance copy, for your records. As you can see, the Presidential Seal reproduced very well and, I think, quite tastefully.

Thank you for your fine cooperation in this matter.

Sincerely,



Tom Lee
Enclosure

The Gerald R. Ford Mural

Created by Paul Collins

PRESS INFORMATION



Paul Collins: "I've captured significant moments in a man's life, the life of a President, moments in time that are timeless."



Grand Rapids artist Paul Collins puts finishing touches on his mural commemorating the life of the 38th President of the United States prior to unveiling the work at Grand Rapids' Kent County Airport. The Ford Mural, which measures 18' by 8', has taken Collins more than a year to complete.

The Gerald R. Ford Mural

NEWS RELEASE

For further information
contact Tom Lee at (616)
241-1726 or Dave Mehney
at (616) 949-6500.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ADVANCE REACTIONS TO THE GERALD R. FORD MURAL

GRAND RAPIDS, MI-- Advance reactions to the Gerald R. Ford Mural by artist Paul Collins have been completely enthusiastic according to David Mehney, Gerald R. Ford Mural Committee finance chairman. "In the course of fund-raising for the mural a number of people have had the opportunity to view the work, and everyone has been positive," Mehney noted.

Some view Collins's work as a historical commemoration of Gerald Ford's life and career. Others see it from a primarily artistic perspective, citing it as a magnificent example of the life-like realism for which the portrait artist is internationally known.

On permanent display at the Kent County Airport near Grand Rapids, the Gerald R. Ford Mural portrays images from Ford's life, from his boyhood to the Presidency. It is a montage of imagery

(more)

that includes the Ford Children, the President's mother, scenes from his youth, and also Betty Ford. Central to the mural's theme is a large portrait of Gerald Ford, with his boyhood home, the Presidential Seal, and the Declaration of Independence ranging in the background. Painted on gessoed masonite panels, the 18' by 8' mural blends two differing mediums, graphite pencil and dry-oil, in an effective, visual portrayal of the scope and dimension of Gerald Ford's life.

"The harmony between the black and white and the colored areas indicates that Collins works primarily in terms of value rather than hue, an honorable tradition -- in fact the only tradition -- in mural painting from the classical world through the Renaissance, and on up to the Mexican and WPA muralists of the 20th century," commented Fred Myers, Grand Rapids Art Museum Director.

Peter Secchia, close friend of President and Mrs. Ford, was amazed at how accurately Collins depicted the four Ford children. "They're excellent likenesses," said Secchia.

Perhaps no one is as close to the President as Mildred Leonard, for many years Congressman Ford's personal assistant, and now personal assistant to Ford in the White House, who said "the magnificent Paul Collins Mural, depicting as it does all the fine attributes of President Gerald R. Ford, is a beautiful tribute to our first Chief Executive from Michigan." Ms. Leonard felt that Collins had clearly defined in the mural Ford's

(more)

"gentleness, strength, courage, and steadfastness of purpose" and that in so honoring President Ford "the artist also honors himself and our country."

Senator Robert Griffin (R-Michigan) called Collins's work an "extraordinary and beautiful mural." Griffin added that the mural portraying the life of our 38th President "is a tribute as well to those in the community who have sought to record for posterity the life and accomplishments of one of their own."

Frederik G. H. Meijer, Chairman of Meijer, Inc., and a close friend of Collins, expressed the feeling that the mural reflects tremendous insight into Ford's character on Collins's part. "President Ford is a warm human being," Meijer said, "with the ability to make both the most humble and the most famous comfortable in his presence. I believe Paul Collins has well represented this quality."

One of the most perceptive and telling observations on the Gerald R. Ford Mural was made by Richard M. DeVos, President of Amway Corporation and a close acquaintance of both the artist and the President. DeVos sponsored two of Collins's most prolific endeavors: the Black Portrait Collection, a series of 30 paintings portraying life in West Africa, and Other Voices, a series of paintings created by the artist near Wounded Knee, South Dakota, which penetrate to the heart of native American life, culture and traditions. "Collins's mural on the life of Gerald Ford is in essence the story of a man who has utilized his talents in the

(more)

political sphere to help mold a better world," said DeVos. "It was created by another man with a mission, Paul Collins, whose tremendous talents have been used to tell the story of man's continuing struggles for freedom and dignity throughout the world."

The Gerald R. Ford Mural

NEWS RELEASE

For further information
contact Tom Lee at (616)
241-1726 or Dave Mehney
at (616) 949-6500.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BACKGROUND OF THE GERALD R. FORD MURAL

GRAND RAPIDS, MI-- When Gerald Rudolph Ford ascended to the Presidency on August 9, 1974, bringing peace and stability to a nation long troubled, citizen groups and even entire communities throughout the United States sought ways to honor the new Chief Executive. Trees were planted in his name. Parks were dedicated, schools and libraries renamed.

In Ford's hometown of Grand Rapids, Michigan, such feelings and sentiments ran higher than perhaps anywhere else in the country. There is now a Gerald R. Ford Freeway running through the heart of the city. Also in the downtown area is a soon to be completed Gerald R. Ford Physical Education Building. And there is talk of a Presidential Library to house books, papers, and other memorabilia from Ford's long and distinguished political career.

But one man, internationally known artist, Paul Collins,

(more)

felt that a more personal tribute to Ford would also be appropriate, a tribute to a man as well as to a President, to complement the many tributes of brick and steel and stone. In 1975, with the help of enthusiastic community leaders, a member of Congress, and even President Ford himself, Collins set to work on a large-scale mural depicting the life of Gerald Ford from his boyhood in Grand Rapids to the Presidency of the United States.

The monumental Gerald R. Ford Mural, which Collins recently completed after more than a year of continuous work, is now on permanent display at the Kent County Airport. Measuring 18' by 8', the mural presents a composite of 32 separate images, including the Declaration of Independence, the Presidential Seal, the President's boyhood home, and various scenes from his youth. Collins also included portraits of the Ford children, and two superb representations of Betty Ford: one as the young and hopeful bride of a freshman Congressman, the other as the vivacious and self-confident wife of a President. Collins skillfully recreated several scenes from Ford's early years in the form of old and yellowed photographs. All of the images surround a large and remarkably life-like portrait of the President in a moment of quiet reflection, pipe in mouth.

Collins credits Michigan Congressman Guy Vander Jagt (R-Luther) with planting the idea of a Presidential Mural in his mind. "I met Guy for lunch in Washington shortly after Ford became President," says Collins, "and he expressed a sincere desire to have me create an artistic tribute to the President, something that would reflect

(more)

the man in a warm, human light, and not as just a political figure." Collins considered Vander Jagt's comments, but did nothing for several months. But Vander Jagt continued to bring the matter up whenever he and Collins met. "Guy Vander Jagt is persistent" says Collins. "Everytime we got together he would ask if I had come up with any ideas. Finally, I told Guy that the only thing I could think of that would do justice to the President's life was a large mural. Guy immediately responded to the concept, and he has supported the project all the way since then."

Vander Jagt, a close personal friend of both the artist and the President, feels that Collins's mural has unquestionably achieved its mark.

"I know Paul's capacity as an artist, and I expected him to create something of excellence," comments Vander Jagt. "But the mural is so much more than a portrayal of Gerald Ford, it is an inspired and insightful perception of a man's life and character. It would be incredibly difficult for anyone to try and sift through the events and experiences of a lifetime and select a few random moments that magically portray all that a man is. Yet, that is precisely what Paul Collins has done."

When the artist had definitely decided to tackle the mural project, a group of concerned individuals from the Grand Rapids area organized the Gerald R. Ford Mural Committee to commission the artist and to raise funds for the project. The Committee is chaired by Mrs. Bobbie Butler.

(more)

Collins originally considered selling the mural to a museum in Washington, D.C. However, Burke Porter, a Grand Rapids industrialist and one of the first to recognize the young painter's talent, suggested that the mural remain in President Ford's hometown for artistic and historical reasons.

"Burke also suggested that the Kent County Airport would be an ideal location for the mural," says Collins, "because thousands of people passing through the facility will be able to view it." Porter and other members of the group assisted Collins in securing clearance to place the mural at the airport, which required approval of the Kent County Board of Commissioners and the Kent County Aeronautics Board. Both bodies responded positively to the proposal.

"Paul has created a work of refreshing realism that warmly envelops the viewer into the fullness of Gerald Ford's life," says Aeronautics Director Bob Ross. "We are extremely pleased that the mural is to be permanently displayed in the Kent County Airport where our citizens and many visitors can view this fitting tribute to our most distinguished citizen."

To create the mural Collins worked from hundreds of old photographs loaned to him by President and Mrs. Ford and other Ford family members. The artist also interviewed close friends and associates of the President -- many from his boyhood days -- to gain additional impressions of his subject. On August 21, 1975, Collins visited with President Ford at Vail, Colorado,

(more)

for a personal interview and sketching session.

"It was the most difficult task I've ever faced" says Collins of the project. "Of course, I've painted other murals, but it is an exceptionally awesome responsibility to try to artistically portray the President of the United States on this scale."

Grand Rapids Art Museum Director Fred Myers feels that Collins responded ably to the demands of the mural. "Collins worked out a brilliantly direct way of making a pictorial composition," Myers comments. "Easy to overlook is another Collins's forte that is equally important: his empathy with his subjects. You get the feeling that Collins empathizes with the people he paints, from his black people in Africa, to his native Americans at Wounded Knee, to the President from Grand Rapids. He empathizes and is able to depict the essential humanity of each subject."

Cost of the mural was \$35,000, according to David Mehney, Gerald R. Ford Mural Committee finance chairman. "Funds were derived from donations from the community at large including individuals, corporations and foundations," notes Mehney. "The people rallied to support the project with complete enthusiasm, from inner city school children who sold popsicles for the mural to the Bethel Pentecostal Church choir which held a benefit concert to raise money. This says a lot about the spirit of Grand Rapids, and I'm honored to have been involved in this wonderful effort to honor our President."

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Donors contributing \$200 or more to the group received reproductions of the mural personally signed by both the artist and President Ford. The reproductions were limited to an edition of 150.

Paul Collins views his mural on the life of Gerald R. Ford in simplistic terms. He believes that its potential historical value will reside in its forthright portrayal of Gerald R. Ford, a presentation that allows the viewer to see the President in human terms without the pomp and formality that Presidential portraitists have traditionally relied upon. "I've captured significant moments in a man's life, the life of a President," says Collins, "moments in time that are timeless."

The Gerald R. Ford Mural

NEWS RELEASE

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PROFILE OF PAUL COLLINS, CREATOR OF THE GERALD R. FORD MURAL

Paul Collins has earned a lasting place of prominence in the world of art for his mystifyingly real portraits of people. A painter in the tradition of the great classical realists, Collins, 39, is known for his skillful use of textures and light, and attention to finite detail, in creating portraits of life-like dimension. His subjects range from African marketwomen, rural tribesmen and boatbuilders, to such figures as Dennis Banks, Russell Means, and Frank Fools Crow, chief of the Oglala Sioux of Pine Ridge, South Dakota.

Although Collins's work has been exhibited in galleries and museums throughout the United States, and in such far flung locales as Moscow, Nairobi and Paris, the artist may be best remembered in future years for his large-scale mural depicting the life and accomplishments of another from his hometown of Grand Rapids, Michigan: Gerald R. Ford, 38th President of the United States. The mural, which measures 18' by 8', was recently completed by Collins after more than a year of continuous effort.

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It includes images from Ford's boyhood in Grand Rapids, the Declaration of Independence, the Presidential Seal, and striking likenesses of the Ford children. Collins's preparations for the mural included sketching sessions with the President at Vail, Colorado.

Paul Collins's career as an artist began inauspiciously at the age of 19 following his graduation from Ottawa Hills High School. He and Randolph Brown, another Grand Rapids artist, organized Ran-Col Associates, a commercial art studio that specialized in large-scale graphics and lettering. Commercial art was a field then successfully penetrated by few blacks. While supporting his family with commercial work, Collins's experimented with various fine art methods and techniques over the next decade, searching for his own milieu. Collins eventually settled on oils, which he now uses exclusively.

"I spent much of my time in libraries and museums," Collins says of his early years, "studying the works of the old masters. They taught me that there is no substitute for self-discipline and a knowledge of the basic rules of art."

After a brief flirtation with surrealism, Collins chose to pursue his career as a representational painter. Dissatisfied with available materials, the artist developed his own medium, dry-oil, the formula for which he refuses to divulge.

During the turbulent '60s Collins immersed himself in the

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struggle for black self-realization, emerging as a powerful, visual spokesman for black America. His paintings of this period, including portraits of Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, reflect much of the conviction and self-determination of the black movements.

In 1968 the artist ventured to West Africa with author, Tom Lee, where he lived and travelled for 18 months, sketching and painting vignettes of the life surrounding him. Collins's son, Michael, also accompanied the painter.

The result of Collins's unique venture was the Black Portrait Collection, a series of 30 paintings that captured the substance and spirit of life in contemporary West Africa. While the collection includes several still-lives, most of the paintings are portraits of people Collins came to know personally. The collection was published in the book Black Portrait of an African Journey, with text by Lee, in 1971.

The Black Portrait Collection was exhibited extensively in the United States, Europe and Africa, and firmly established Collins as an artist of international stature. The collection was also featured in the motion picture Save the Children, released by Paramount Pictures in 1973.

In 1973 Paul Collins moved his studio to the Pine Ridge Sioux Reservation at Pine Ridge, South Dakota, where he planned

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to create a series of paintings on the life and culture of contemporary native Americans. Collins's work gained for him the respect of many Sioux tribal leaders, and led to his becoming the first black ever initiated into the tribe as a full member.

Circumstances placed the artist near Wounded Knee, South Dakota, just prior to the occupation of Wounded Knee by Members of the American Indian Movement. Collins became visual historian of the events surrounding the occupation with a sensitive and moving series of paintings entitled the Other Voices Collection, to be published in the forthcoming book, Other Voices.

During the Wounded Knee occupation Collins was asked by tribal elders to lay down his brush and participate in treaty negotiations with the Federal Government. The artist is credited with a major role in the peaceful settlement of the conflict by many Sioux who were present at Wounded Knee.

Although primarily a fine artist, Collins has created illustrations for a number of book covers, including Justice G. Mennen Williams's Africa for the Africans and Black Self-Determination by Reverend Arthur Brazier.

In 1975 Paul Collins was commissioned by Budweiser to create one of a series of black historical paintings for Great Kings of Africa, an informational advertising campaign sponsored by the brewers of Budweiser. Collins's painting for the series,

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a portrait of Shaka, a powerful and charismatic 19th century leader of the Zulu nation, has been published in numerous publications, including Ebony and Jet.

The majority of Paul Collins's commissions are portraits. "I prefer people as subjects, rather than inanimate objects," says the primarily self-taught artist, who continues to work from his inner city studio. His work reflects a strong empathy with his subjects, a positive and hopeful view of humanity. A humanist's view.

"The people Collins paints," wrote Marilyn Schaefer in a recent issue of American Artist, "radiate positive qualities: gravity, patience, shrewdness."

Collins is presently at work on a series of paintings and drawings in Harlem, where he maintained a studio for several years.

Whether he is at work creating a mural on the life of the President, Harlem street scenes, or a portrait of an aging Indian woman crippled with arthritis, Paul Collins brings to his art a strong feeling for people, though he does not sentimentalize. One comes away from Collins's work with the feeling that there is reason to hope.....that there will always be a tomorrow.

September 11, 1976

President
Portrait

Paul Collins
mural

Dear Tom:

Thank you for your generous letter of September 1.

You have produced a handsome press information folder regarding the Gerald R. Ford Mural. I was delighted to see the illustrations you provided and the information contained in the news releases.

Sincerely,

Philip W. Buchen
Counsel to the President

Mr. Tom Lee
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