

HISTORIC AND DESIGN REVIEW COMMISSION

October 06, 2021

HDRC CASE NO: 2021-481
ADDRESS: 301 ALAMO PLAZA
LEGAL DESCRIPTION: NCB 423 BLK 24 LOT S IRRG 69.18 FT OF 14 OR A8
ZONING: D, H
CITY COUNCIL DIST.: 1
DISTRICT: Alamo Plaza Historic District
APPLICANT: Andi Rodriguez/Centro San Antonio
OWNER: Frank Ruttenberg/H E SAN ANTONIO I L L C
TYPE OF WORK: Mural installation
APPLICATION RECEIVED: September 09, 2021
60-DAY REVIEW: Not applicable due to City Council Emergency Orders
CASE MANAGER: Rachel Rettaliata

REQUEST:

The applicant requests a Certificate of Appropriateness for approval to install a mural on the west elevation of 301 Alamo Plaza.

APPLICABLE CITATIONS:

Historic Design Guidelines, Chapter 2, Exterior Maintenance and Alterations

2. Materials: Masonry and Stucco

A. MAINTENANCE (PRESERVATION)

- i. *Paint*—Avoid painting historically unpainted surfaces. Exceptions may be made for severely deteriorated material where other consolidation or stabilization methods are not appropriate. When painting is acceptable, utilize a water permeable paint to avoid trapping water within the masonry.
- ii. *Clear area*—Keep the area where masonry or stucco meets the ground clear of water, moisture, and vegetation.
- iii. *Vegetation*—Avoid allowing ivy or other vegetation to grow on masonry or stucco walls, as it may loosen mortar and stucco and increase trapped moisture.
- iv. *Cleaning*—Use the gentlest means possible to clean masonry and stucco when needed, as improper cleaning can damage the surface. Avoid the use of any abrasive, strong chemical, sandblasting, or high-pressure cleaning method.

B. ALTERATIONS (REHABILITATION, RESTORATION, AND RECONSTRUCTION)

- i. *Patching*—Repair masonry or stucco by patching or replacing it with in-kind materials whenever possible. Utilize similar materials that are compatible with the original in terms of composition, texture, application technique, color, and detail, when in-kind replacement is not possible. EIFS is not an appropriate patching or replacement material for stucco.
- ii. *Repointing*—The removal of old or deteriorated mortar should be done carefully by a professional to ensure that masonry units are not damaged in the process. Use mortar that matches the original in color, profile, and composition when repointing. Incompatible mortar can exceed the strength of historic masonry and results in deterioration. Ensure that the new joint matches the profile of the old joint when viewed in section. It is recommended that a test panel is prepared to ensure the mortar is the right strength and color.
- iii. *Removing paint*—Take care when removing paint from masonry as the paint may be providing a protectant layer or hiding modifications to the building. Use the gentlest means possible, such as alkaline poultice cleaners and strippers, to remove paint from masonry.
- iv. *Removing stucco*—Remove stucco from masonry surfaces where it is historically inappropriate. Prepare a test panel to ensure that underlying masonry has not been irreversibly damaged before proceeding.

FINDINGS:

- a. The property located at 301 Alamo Plaza is a 2-story corner structure, fronting Alamo Plaza. The west (rear) elevation faces Losoya Street. The building is clad in buff brick with red brick skirting with minimal fenestration on the west elevation. The building currently houses the Plaza Wax Museum and was constructed circa 1950 for the H.L. Green Department Store. The site was the former location of the 1886 Grand Opera

House. Centro is hiring local artists to enliven the streets, reflecting positive energy onto local businesses within the neighborhood. Centro San Antonio's initiative, "Art Everywhere," is designed to bring color and life to the urban core. These temporary art installations are intended to grace buildings downtown and tell the community's stories with artistic vibrancy. The mural proposed is "The West Side" by Luis Valderas. The proposed mural is temporary and can be removed at the owner's request.

- b. **PUBLIC ART** – The applicant has proposed to install a mural on the west (rear) elevation of the structure. The mural proposed is "The West Side" by Luis Valderas. The mural features three mariachis from the past with a backdrop of San Antonio's future. The mural may be as large as 12' x 30' feet. Composition of the piece is proposed as artwork on a removable substrate which will not harm the environment nor the building; this mural is temporary and can be removed at the owner's request. Staff finds the proposal appropriate.
- c. **MURAL INSTALLATION** – The applicant is requesting to install a public mural that will be painted offsite on a substrate material that will be installed on the brick. Previous mural installations on brick have been approved to use Polytab, a non-woven fabric that is commonly part of large public mural art projects. Polytab is applied to masonry often using Nova Gel and squeegeed to the surface. A gel coated is generally applied at the edge seams to create a seamless effect. The Polytab can be easily removed using hand tools with minimal, if any, damage to the existing brick. Centro has proposed to install the mural on a thin vinyl substrate similar to Polytab, that does not need to be primed with multiple coats of acrylic, as it is already weatherproof and provides a cleaner removal of the material and adhesive. Centro has proposed to use eco-friendly ink and adhesive that will not contain petroleum solvents. As the proposal does not include painting the exterior historic brick façade, staff finds the proposal consistent with the Historic Design Guidelines but finds that final product specifications for the substrate should be submitted to staff for review.
- d. According to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, historically unpainted brick should not be painted. Brick structures built prior to the 1870s were largely constructed of handmade bricks, which were generally softer, more porous, and weaker than bricks made at the turn of the 20th century. These handmade bricks were frequently painted or coated because the strength of the brick was insufficient without a coating for stabilization. However, as machine-made bricks became the standard during the latter half of the 19th century, bricks became inherently stronger and did not require paint or coatings for protection and strength. These bricks commonly featured harder "dress" surfaces, which were meant to face the exterior of the structure and remain unpainted. Painting historically unpainted brick on structures of this era can lead to trapped water in the porous material, eventually destroying the brick due to the damaging effects of water infiltration and freeze-thaw cycles. The existing brick on the east façade was formerly a parti-wall that was devoid of ornamentation. Staff finds modifications to non-primary facades and parti-walls appropriate and finds that the proposed temporary mural and paint product on a removable substrate will not negatively impact the integrity of the existing masonry.

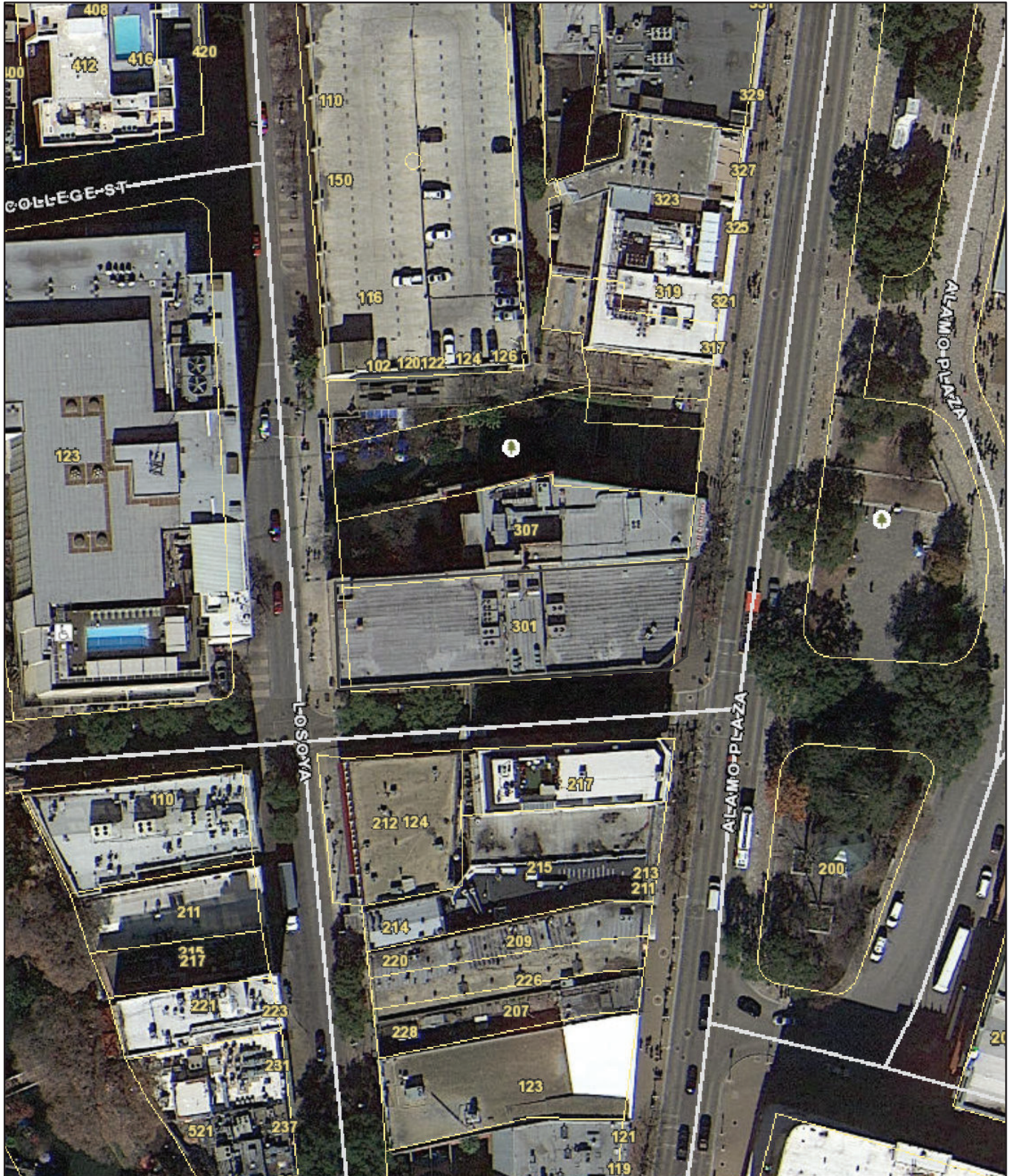
RECOMMENDATION:

Due to the applicant's extensive research into the proposed application and the request to install the mural on a temporary removable substrate, staff finds the proposal appropriate.

Staff recommends approval based on findings a through d with the following stipulation:

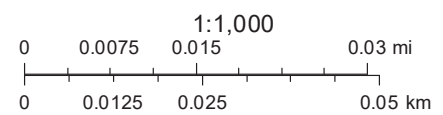
- i. That the applicant submits final product specifications for the proposed substrate to staff for review and approval prior to the issuance of the Certificate of Appropriateness.

City of San Antonio One Stop

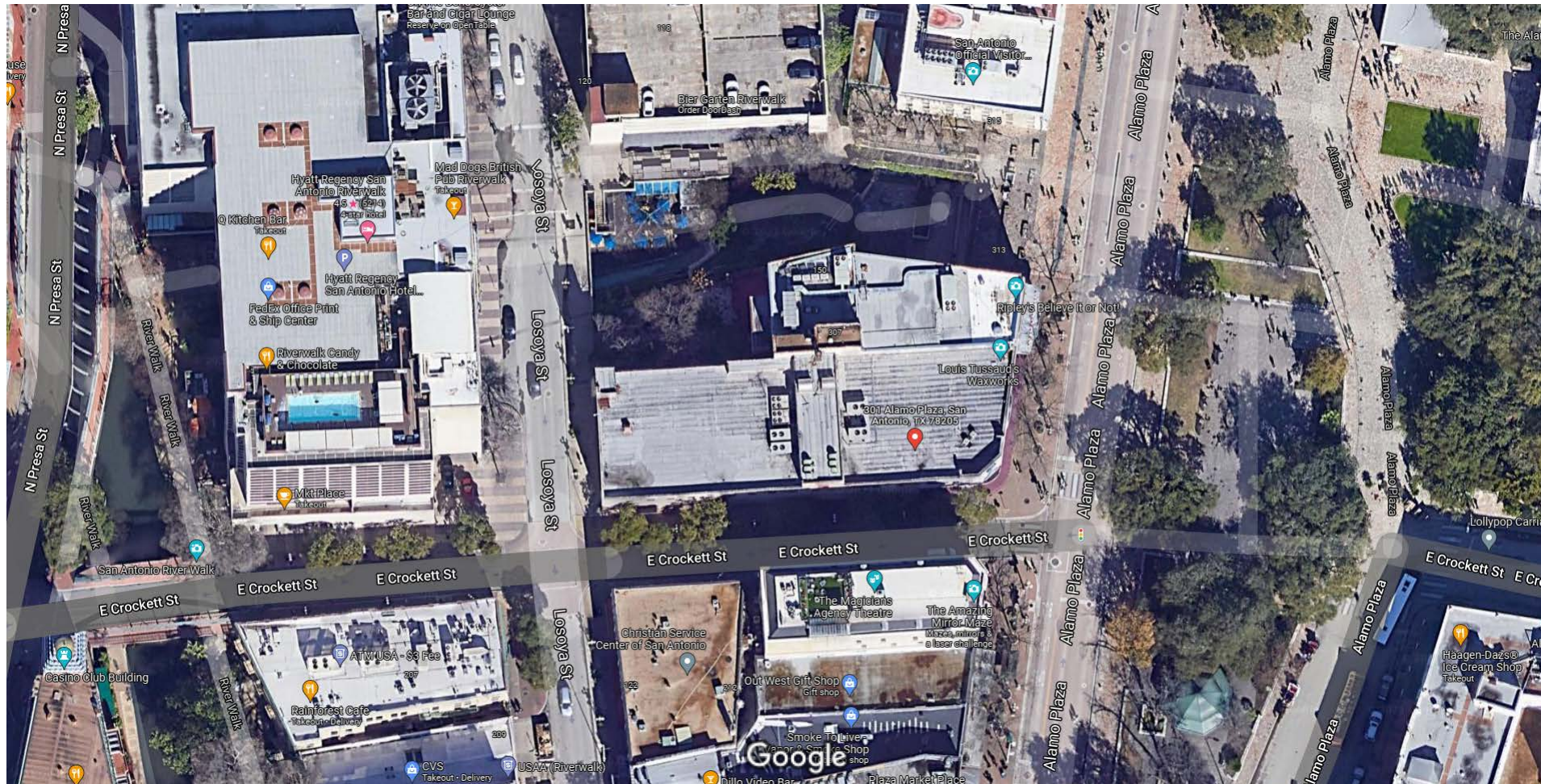


October 1, 2021

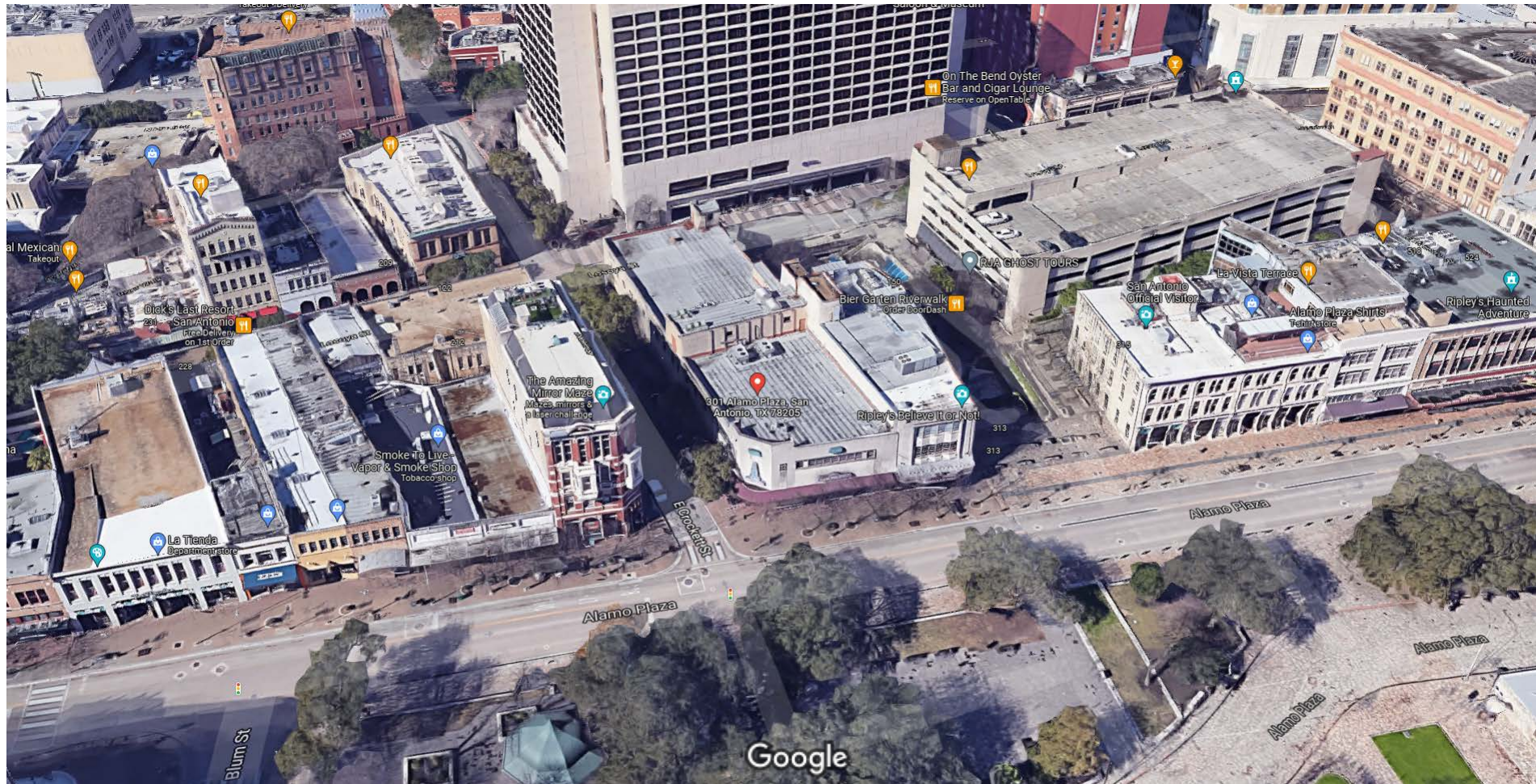
— User drawn lines



Google Maps VIA Metropolitan Transit - Downtown Information Center



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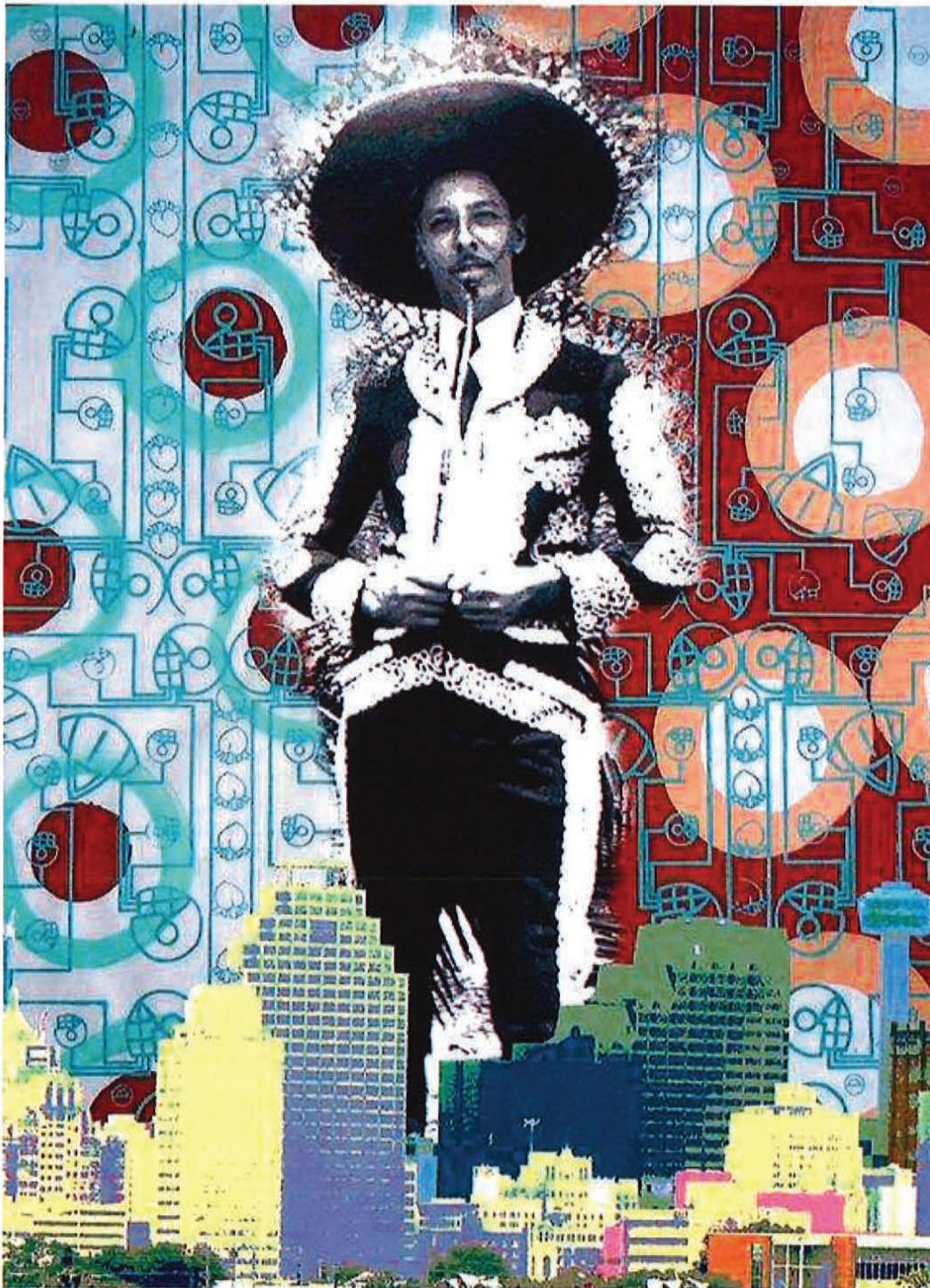


Imagery ©2021 Google, Landsat / Copernicus, Map data ©2021 Google 50 ft





123 Losova



2012

digital print of mixed
media photo collage

33.5 x 42.5

The West Side

San Antonio, TX

United States

El mariachi is the

heroic icon that

represents San

Antonio's cultural

heritage moving from

the past into the

future. I find sites and

sometimes create

Guerrilla-Art

Photographs by

superimposing the

image of my father

dressed in his 1930's

mariachi outfit onto

the already existing

surface compositions

such as billboards,

advertisements,

walls, train boxcars,

etc. I then further

alter these

photographed

images by adding my

icons and glyphs to

the compositions and recreations. The photo-cutout image of my father becomes my expropriation tool to make social commentary—a trope. Just as the campy garden gnome represents an ancient guardian of the earth and can be an offensive insult aimed at someone thought of as small and ugly. The arrangements I create represent El Mariachi as the street band hero that holds the songs of a culture and a world recognized icon of a Latino cultural stereotype.

