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Lighting renovations will reveal ceiling paintings in Welch Hall



UT art alumna and decorative painter Zita Raymond restores the ceiling in the Welch Convocation room Wednesday afternoon. The original detailed painting was done over 75 years ago.

Photo Credit: Marisa Vasquez | Daily Texan Staff

TAGS

[Pablo Ruiz](#), [Robert A. Welch Hall](#), [Welch Hall](#)

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BY [BOBBY BLANCHARD](#)

On the ceiling of [Robert A. Welch Hall](#)'s lecture theater lies decades-old paintings displaying shades of orange, yellow and red.

Painted by an unknown artist at the University's inception, some

have called it beautiful. But there's a problem — students can't see it.



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For years, the room has been equipped with steel light fixtures that left the decorative ceiling in shadows and kept the artwork out of sight. Pablo Ruiz, a project manager for the UT construction services department, is heading an approximately \$450,000 construction project for the room that will add new lights and make other repairs. In addition, to improve the room's safety, Ruiz and his team are removing the north wall and replacing it with a fire-resistant wall. There has also been termite damage on the east wall they are working to repair.

The 12 new light fixtures will be much brighter and will come with several lighting options, Ruiz said, so professors can keep the lights on during lecture or dimmed during video screenings. The new light fixtures will use light-emitting diode bulbs, and will shoot light both downward and upward.

“They will illuminate the ceiling and make it come alive,” Ruiz said. “They will put out a lot of light and will last for about 15 years.”

Welch Hall, which was completed in 1931 and underwent renovation in the '60s and '70s, is one of many buildings on campus that has architecturally significant interior spaces. The room in question, also called the Convocation Center, is noted for its decorative artistic ceiling. The painting was done when the University constructed the building, but no one is quite sure whom the artist is.

“It is so dark that you can't appreciate the beauty of what someone painted over 80 years ago,” Ruiz said. “Doing this means bringing something back to life that has been there for many years and people haven't been able to appreciate it.”



Ruiz said the old light fixtures were not the original ones, and were added sometime in the past.

“But they are just nasty — they just don't put out any light,” Ruiz said.

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The new light fixtures will match the decorative ceiling, both in architectural style and color. Ruiz said the new fixtures were chosen with the artwork in mind. He also said the University hired an artist who specializes in retouching paintings so they could patch up a few areas. Because the art is so old and fragile, Ruiz said they were taking some precautions in dealing with it.

“We are touching it up in a couple of places. Somewhere along the line there was some water damage,” Ruiz said. “The ceiling is going to be brushed, we don’t want to use soap or water or anything like that. We are just going to brush it to clean it.”

Additionally, Ruiz said the team was doing other repair work to Welch Hall.

The deadline for completing the project is Aug. 10. Ruiz said they are currently on schedule to complete the project in time.
