

# LEGACIES

A History Journal for Dallas and North Central Texas.

Spring 1995







*"Railroad"*

## Movement on a Grand Scale

### *The Transportation Building Murals of the 1936 Texas Centennial*

**By Evelyn Barker**

**T**HE MONUMENTAL SCALE OF A MURAL makes it an ideal medium for conveying social messages. In 1936 Dallas, the message was progress. On Fair Park's Transportation Building, Carlo Ciampaglia's murals celebrated the machine age and lent grandeur to the usually mundane topic of transportation. The murals portrayed the progress of transportation from historic means of travel to space ships. Though the murals have been painted over, these 1936 photographs taken by Dallas photographer Paul Clegg reveal their splendor.

Carlo Ciampaglia arrived in Dallas in February 1936 at the request of Centennial architect George Dahl. Dahl had met Ciampaglia while both were students at the American Academy in Rome. Born in Italy, 1891, Ciampaglia came to the United States as a child. After studying at the National Academy of Design in New York, he returned to Italy and won the Prix de Rome in 1920. By 1923, Ciampaglia had returned to the United States and embarked upon a career in the decorative arts. His talents were well received and he was elected an



*"Ship Transportation"*

associate member of the National Academy of Design.<sup>1</sup> In Dallas, he was commissioned to complete twenty-five murals on six buildings in time for the June opening of the Texas Centennial.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that an entire building was devoted to the subject of transportation attests to its importance. Automakers and railroad companies recognized a potential market in the Southwest's vast spaces and expanding population. Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors all had large buildings packed with entertainment and advertising. A demonstration by the Frisco railroad line allowed visitors to vicariously experience a train ride, while the Missouri Pacific exhibit amazed visitors with doors that automatically opened with the aid of a photoelectric eye. The Transportation Building (now the Centennial building) exhibited farm machinery, motorcycles, travel destinations, and Galveston port activity. Other attractions were Chinese and Moroccan gift shops, a barber and beauty shop, a diorama



*"Rock"*





*Ship*



*"Sail Transportation."*

depicting the sulphur industry, replicas of the first reaper built by Cyrus McCormick, and a mechanical cow that chewed cud, moved its head, eyes, ears and tail, breathed, mooed, and gave milk.<sup>3</sup>

The first portico of the Transportation Building featured murals of railroads and navigation. As seen in the photo "Railroad," Ciampaglia presents symbols of railroads, signals, and trains, while "Ship Transportation" illustrates its topic with a compass rose, pilot's wheel, and ship's bell.<sup>4</sup>

The second portico proposed space travel as the future of transportation. The background of the photo "Rocket Ship" includes planets and the Milky Way. Juxtaposed with this vision of tomorrow is the photo "Sail Transportation." On the bow of a ship (thought to be the *Invincible*) the figure of Mercury leads the way. To the right is a covered wagon while at the bottom a seated figure holds a ribbon picturing a stage coach, an early model automobile, a ship, and a chariot.<sup>5</sup>





*"Air Transportation"*



*"Auto Transportation"*

The third portico represented modern transportation. The photo "Air Transportation" features an airplane, ground beacon and light tower. "Auto Transportation" depicts two figures holding a rib-



bon on which are all the various branches of the automobile industry.<sup>6</sup>

Ciampaglia's "semi-classical, sweeping style" was presented through the use of "happy colors for which he was noted among the Centennial artists — lovely clear roses, greens, yellow-greens, and blues — distinctive warm earth colors against a blue-green background."<sup>7</sup>

Carlo Ciampaglia died in 1975. Sadly, only the mural on the Administration (now Maintenance) Building remains intact. Friends of Fair Park have succeeded in recovering part of the Rocket Ship mural while continuing efforts to secure restoration funds for the remaining five.

<sup>1</sup>Press release regarding Carlo Ciampaglia. Dallas Historical Society, Centennial Collection, Box: Artist (Bios.).

<sup>2</sup>Natalie H. Lee, "Lost Art," *Dallas Life Magazine* September 24, 1989, p. 12

<sup>3</sup>Galley proofs. Dallas Historical Society, A38.3, Box 103, Folder: Buildings Publicity

<sup>4</sup>Press release regarding Transportation Building. Dallas Historical Society, Centennial Collection, Box: Art.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid

<sup>6</sup>Ibid

<sup>7</sup>Press release regarding Carlo Ciampaglia. Dallas Historical Society, Centennial Collection, Box: Artist (Bios.).