

Why the Apocalypse Mural is Considered an Asset by the Johns Hopkins Community

by Bob Hieronimus, Ph.D.

“It’s really thrilling to see the mural coming back to life,” said **John Astin**, Academy Award nominee, actor, and director of the Theatre Arts and Studies Department at Johns Hopkins. Best known for his role as Gomez in “The Addams Family,” John Astin is also considered a Hopkins icon. A graduate of Hopkins himself, Astin believes more arts and creativity will strengthen Hopkins’ strengths. He sees fewer arts offered to the students now compared to when he was a student. “While I was a student at Hopkins there was a wonderful cross current among the disciplines. I had a very exciting time there.” On an interview on 21st Century Radio, Astin said **“There isn’t as much of the arts as there was back then, and not only could Hopkins benefit from more of the arts, but the students seem to demand it.”**



Professor John Astin and the Apocalypse Mural Team



The Egyptian altar and red and purple flowers of rebirth

When asked if the “Apocalypse” is related to what Astin is trying to do, he answered, “Oh, absolutely. It’s right in the ballpark. Because it’s new thinking. **There’s creative thinking in that “Apocalypse” mural, and you can’t look at it without being stimulated in a very positive way.**” The restoration of the “Apocalypse” mural was “very exciting,” because “the Hopkins students are very intelligent, and they have –for the most part – a seeking spirit, and I want to answer that seeking spirit.”

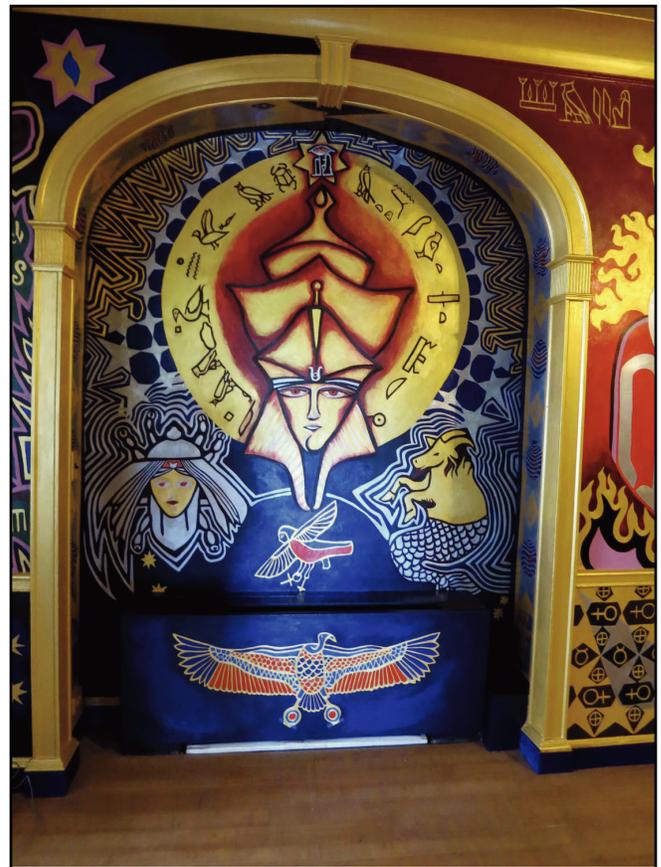


Professor Bill Leslie and the Apocalypse Mural Team

Another Hopkins icon is **Professor Stuart “Bill” Leslie** who is presently writing a new history of the Johns Hopkins University due out in 2018. Leslie called the “Apocalypse” mural “one of the real treasures of Hopkins and a completely unappreciated one.” He believed it “absolutely” belonged at Hopkins because it was “a reminder... **Here’s something that tells us where Hopkins was and how exciting a place it was in 1968.**” On 21st Century Radio, Leslie related a story about taking a group of students to see the mural during a January intersession course. **Not only were they stunned that they never knew it was there, but “I could hardly pull them out of that space.** And remember, this was pre-restoration. Just think what it will be like when it’s redone.”



The Christos/Gnosis alcove



The Osiris alcove



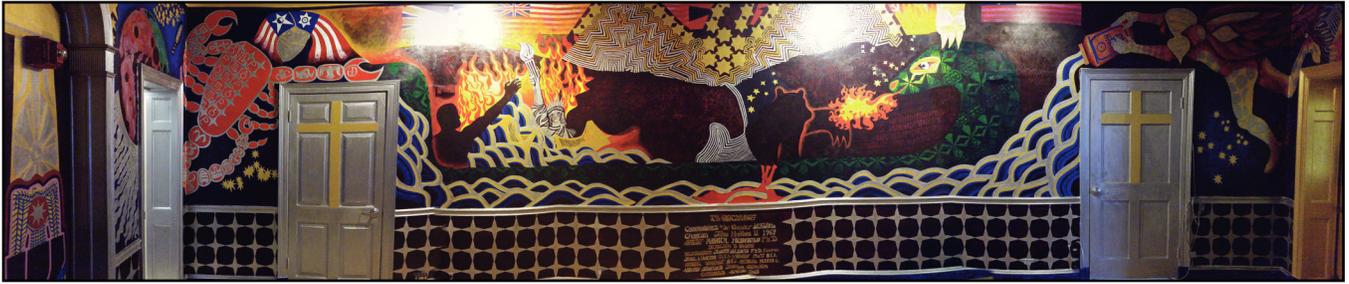
The ceiling of the stairwell entrance (left) and the Apocalypse pyramid in the main room ceiling (above)

Bill Leslie introduced us to a **visiting Iranian musician Bahman Panahi**, who was immediately impacted by the feeling of the space when he visited the mural. Almost immediately, he said “You know this a space that I have to play my Tar in. **I have to give a concert in this space.**” As Professor Leslie added, “It has an energy that people feel, but they only feel it when they finally know it’s there.” Bahman Panahi is also a world-renowned artist and calligrapher who we consulted about correcting the design of the Islamic symbols in the “Apocalypse” mural. He has performed Setar and Tar in concerts, and taught workshops, conferences, courses, and shown exhibitions in Iran, France the Maldives, Cuba, Holland, England, Syria, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Nigeria, Morocco, Spain, Mauritania, Poland, USA Belgium and Switzerland.



Professor Bill Leslie, Bob Hieronimus, Ph.D. and Bahman Panahi feeling the vibes of the Apocalypse Mural room at Hopkins

Bahman Panahi currently lives in Paris, where he performs actively and is pursuing a doctoral project entitled “The Musicality of the Lines and Points” at the Sorbonne University. Leslie added that Bahman **just wrote him from Paris to ask “when can I get back?”** He wanted to thank us for being able to walk around that space “with you pointing out all the different intricate details of it. He really enjoyed that.”



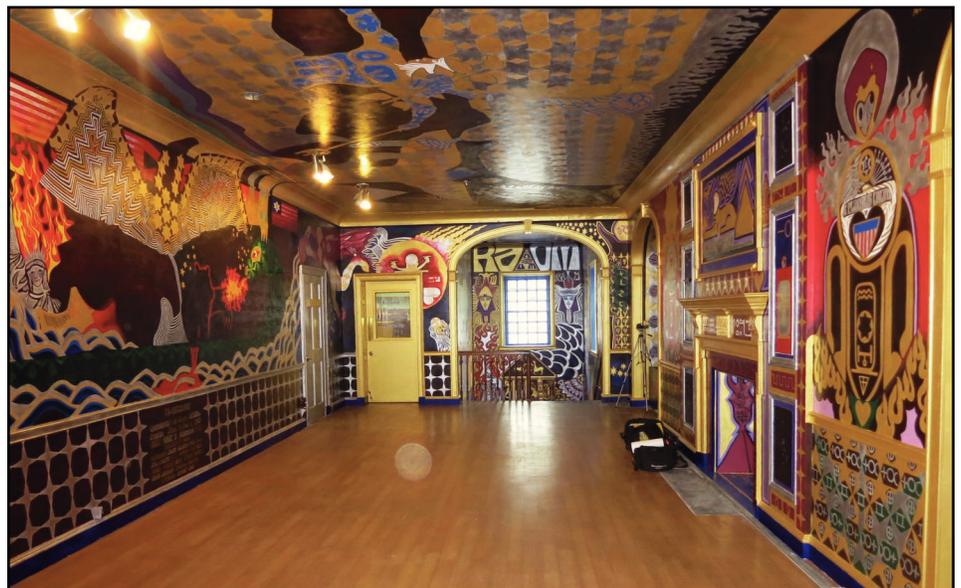
Panorama shot of the Eagle wall from Scorpio to Aquarius



Instructor Phyllis Berger reunites with old friend Bob Hieronimus, Ph.D., reminiscing about the original painting of the Apocalypse Mural in 1968-69.

Many others have **reported unusual experiences and sensations while visiting the “Apocalypse” mural.** The supervisor of the Photography program for The Center for Visual Arts in the School of Arts and Sciences at Johns Hopkins, Phyllis Berger, says **“My times spent there at the mural were pivotal in my growth and helped me become the person that I am.”** Berger is also a full-time instructor at Hopkins, teaching interdisciplinary courses including Writing Seminars, History of Science and Political Science and in the Master of Liberal Arts programs. She was around when the mural was originally painted in 1968 and has very fond memories. **“I have always loved the mural,”** she said, **“and was heart-broken at the way it was abandoned over the years. I had an out of body experience in that room that gave me faith and belief in the human spirit.”**

The main room seen from the rear



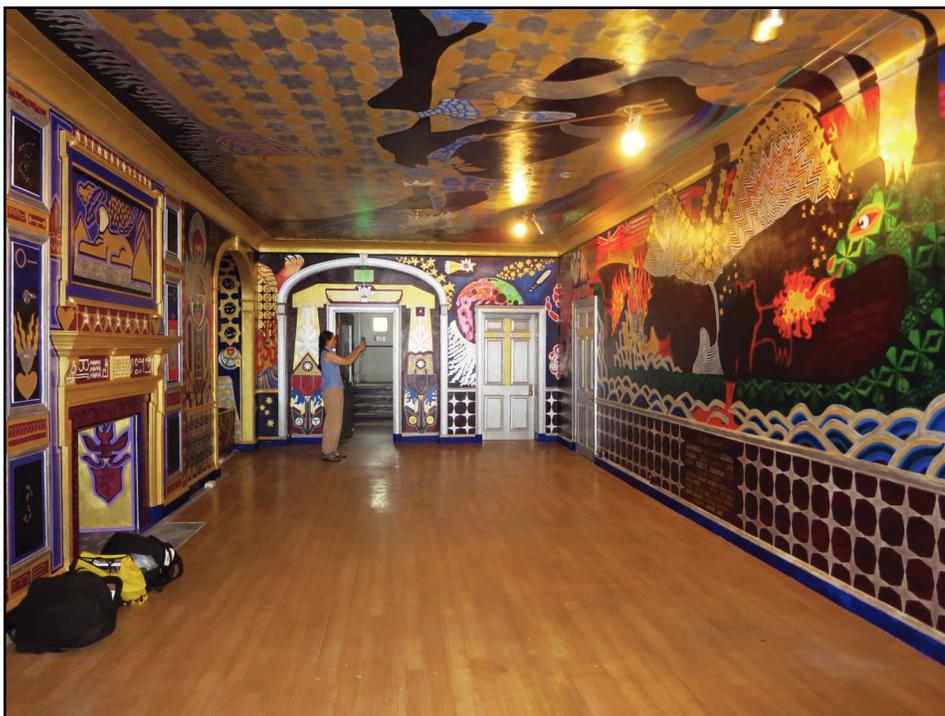


Panorama shot of the wall opposite the Eagle wall, from Taurus to Leo

When she learned the mural would be restored Berger said, “This is great news! **I am thrilled that the mural will re-achieve its former glory.** I would love to bring my students by to meet you. I bet one or more of them might like to document the restoration process. I never would have guessed all those years ago that I would be revisiting the mural as part of the Hopkins faculty. Seems like a miracle!”

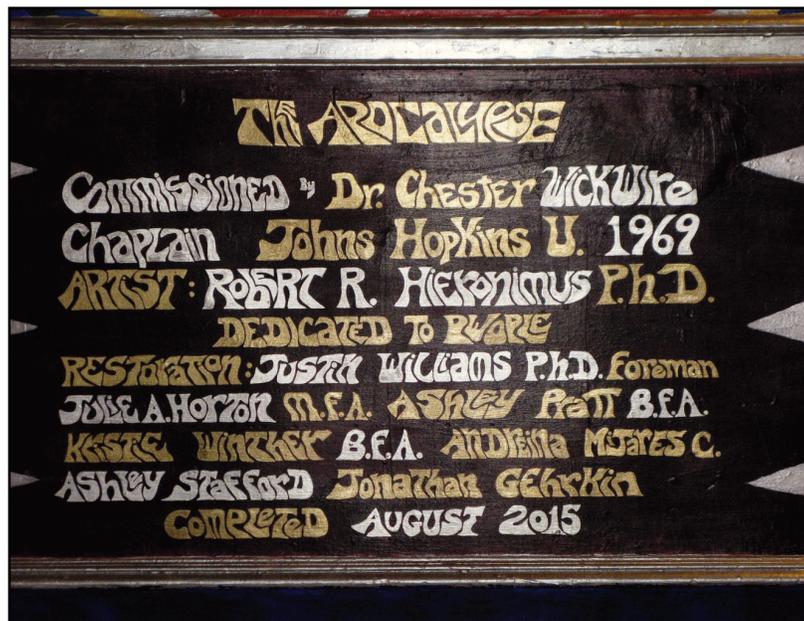


Segment of the Eagle wall showing the dedication (right)



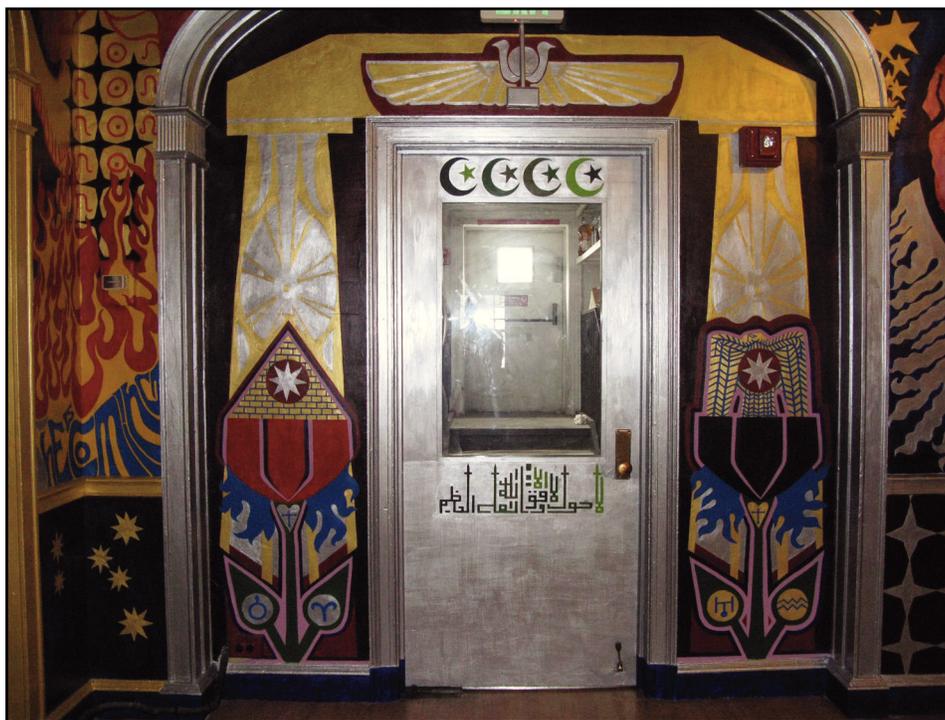
The main room seen from the front

Professor Leslie was enthusiastic about how much of an untapped asset the “Apocalypse” mural was for the Hopkins community. **He hopes the restoration reminds students about the previous social justice activism that flourished on campus during its original painting in 1968-69.** “Hopkins students are often branded as apathetic,” he said, “and they all want to be pre-med, and don’t care about anything outside of good grades.” Like John Astin, Bill Leslie agrees that reputation is misplaced. He points out that Hopkins students have “a long and proud tradition of getting out there and really making a difference in Baltimore.” **The “Apocalypse” mural is “a good reminder for the current crop of students that their predecessors were out there in the front lines for civil rights, and even gay rights activism.”**



The Dedication “To People” and the names of the contributors to the restoration of the Apocalypse Mural 2015

The “Apocalypse” mural is an asset to the Johns Hopkins University.



The Isis Temple at the rear of the mural

Leslie describes the reaction of the students he took to view the mural in January as something “I won’t forget,” and he looks forward to taking them back to see it restored. “I hope they will be inspired like they were when a group of students started a petition for reducing the carbon footprint by de-investing in carbon stocks for the university. They got a petition together, and I thought, **they’ve learned a valuable lesson about activism starts right there where you are.**”



Bob Hieronimus as he appeared in 1968-69 when he painted the original "Apocalypse" mural

The Bob Hieronimus
"We The People" Mural
St. Paul, Baltimore, MD
July 2013 1,750 square feet

21stCenturyRadio.com

Photos by Stuart Zolotorow

