

## THE ACME BREWERY MURALS

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### **Acme Brewing Company**

The Acme Brewing Company of San Francisco was established in 1907 by Leopold Schmidt, owner of the Olympia Brewing Company of Tumwater, Washington. The latter business began trading in the Californian city during 1905 purely as a bottler of Olympia Beer. However, after the great earthquake of 1906 which saw the demise of numerous San Franciscan breweries, the opportunity arose for the company to begin producing beer. The new Acme Brewery was located next to the bottling plant on Sansome Street, at the foot of Telegraph Hill. As the head brewers were unable to reproduce Olympia Beer due to the difference of the water to that in Washington a fresh beer was launched under the name of the brewery.

In 1917, with a decline in revenue due to the growing influence of the prohibitionist movement, the Acme Brewing Company amalgamated with five other breweries to form the California Brewing Association. Four of these breweries closed leaving just the Sansome Street plant and the National Brewery, 741-762 Fulton Street. However, when prohibition was finally enacted in 1920, both sites had to diversify, turning to the manufacture of ice cream, soft drinks and 'near' beer. After prohibition's repeal 14 years later the Acme brewery was leased to another brewer, the Globe Brewing Company, and beer production was now concentrated at the Fulton Street plant.

In 1935 the California Brewing Association built new administrative offices at 762 Fulton Street (page 36). This art deco style building also housed its sales department and hospitality and tasting room (the refridgera-

tors for storing the beer, under the west wall window, can be seen on page 40). The company commissioned the Spanish artist, Jose Moya del Pino (1891 - 1969), to paint a mural on three of the walls of this room.

### **Jose Moya del Pino**

Born in the small town of Piego, Cordoba, Moya studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Madrid. He was subsequently employed by King Alfonso XIII, together with two other artists, to reproduce 41 paintings by Valasquez which he then took on a tour of America. Unfortunately, by the time the 'Exhibiciones Valasquez' had reached San Francisco, 1926, the Spanish government was close to collapse and funds were drying up. Moya decided to stay in California and gradually his reputation grew, firstly as a portrait painter. In the mid 1930s he undertook a number of murals, the most famous of which is to be found in the Coit Tower. The Acme Brewery murals represent a significant moment in American art history, and they are among the earliest examples of San Francisco's first great era of public art.

### **The Acme Brewery murals**

The following text is taken from a plaque on the hospitality/tasting room wall.

*The Gathering of the Hops - North Wall* (pages 38 and 39 top). Shows farmworkers harvesting two essential ingredients for making beer, hops and barley, and their preparation before delivery to the brewery. Bay Area

farms were leading producers of these items in the 1930s.

*Making and Bottling Beer - South Wall* (page 37). Displays several steps in beer brewing as the brew master and his assistants carefully keep watch over each step. At the time of the mural painting, the Acme Brewery was producing over 300,000 barrels of beer each year.

*A Family Picnic - West Wall* (page 39 bottom). Represents 'typical Americans' enjoying the bounty of farming and brewer's arts while they share the joy of family and the Bay Area's incomparable vistas. In this panel Moya del Pino has been freed from the sort of specific documentation the other two panels' subject matter required, and has included a view of San Francisco Bay, Mt. Tamalpais, the Golden Gate [pre bridge], and the

surrounding topography, favourite visual topics which he also included in this Coit Tower murals and his well known portrait, Chinese Mother and Child (1933, The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco). The model for the central female figure is believed to be the artist's wife. Bottles of Acme beer can also be seen on the picnic blanket.

*The author would like to thank the Center for African and African American Art and Culture, who now occupy the Fulton Street building, for permission to take the following photographs.*

**Sources:**

- <http://brewerygems.com/acme.htm>. Retrieved 16/01/2015
- <http://www.moya-rhs.org/moya-del-pino.html>. Retrieved 16/01/2015









