

Ode to a Nebraska Mural

By Matt Mason, Nebraska State Poet

--For the Pershing Mural and the Pershing Mural Historic Preservation
Committee

--after John Keats

You haven't moved now in seven decades,
holding poses – jump shot, star-crossed lovers,
mid-punch, mid-buck, mid-box step, mid-parade—
oh, my friends, made inch-by-inch from colors
and, here, finally a blink of rest
before your song resumes.

Will you miss your city view?

The Sower up on his dome,
these neckties and dresses headed to debate—
their dry words you watch, year-by-year fade?

Thankfully, the opera you've been singing
won't change its single note, only your view,
your grapple kicks back off in trees, in peace,
centuries left perfecting each still move
you've held for a lifetime already
and now keep holding lifetimes more:
the acrobat's suspense—will he catch her?—
circus performers in world record balance,
hockey shot in neverending overtime,
spirit, culture, shaded tiles that spell our lives.

What do you teach us, you abstract atlas,
your lines and shades, your curved topography,
your hints of our broad state, our Nebraska,
our friends here, our neighbors, our family
eternally in this single breath
that you'll still breathe long past my death:
you are reminders and promises preserved,
our differences we build with, our grit,
our truth—choreographed mid-move and, here, elevated—
our beauty—so necessary to be celebrated.