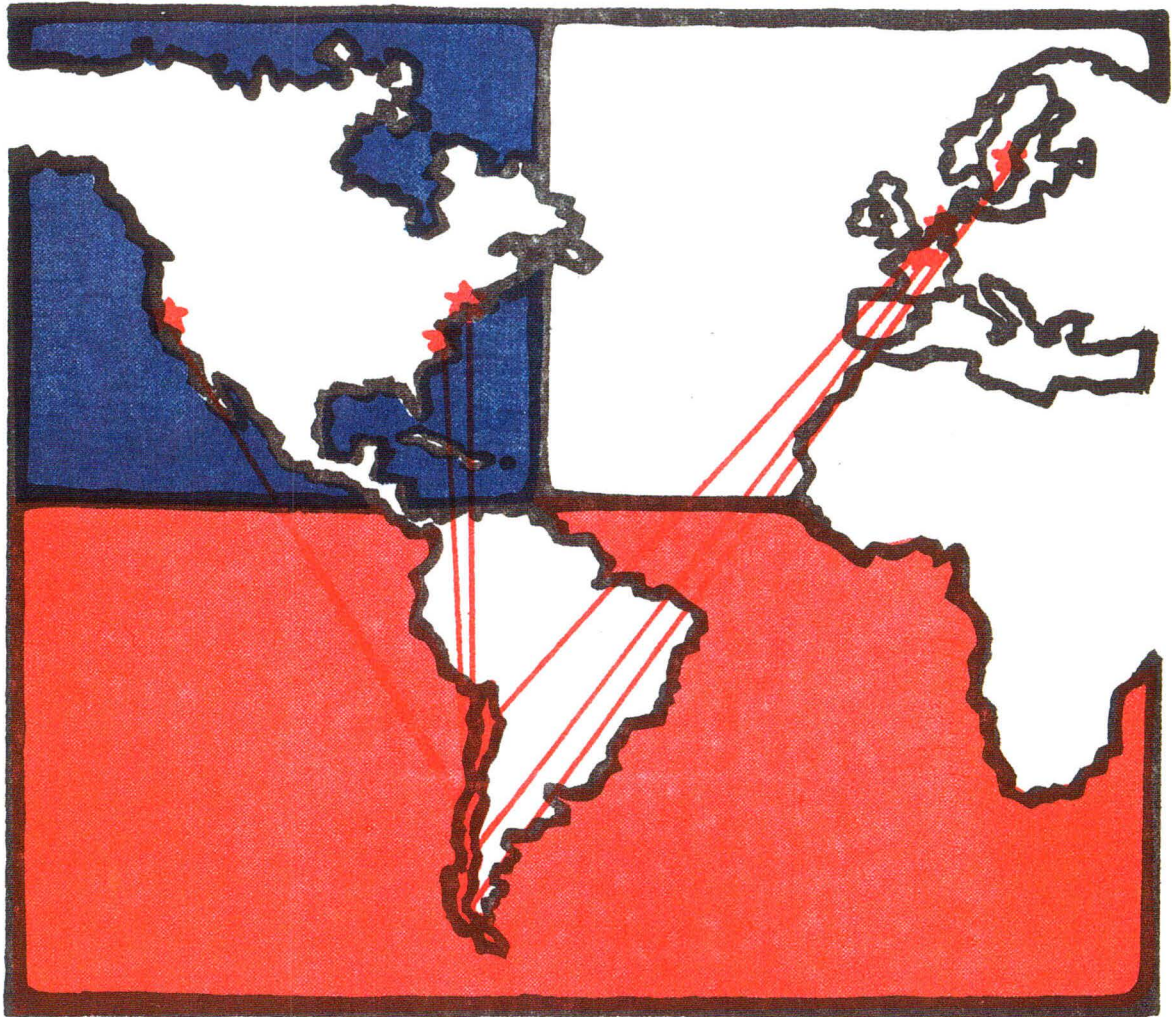




INTERNATIONAL NEWSLETTER WINTER 1979



CHILEAN MURALS IN SWEDEN, NETHERLANDS, FRANCE, NEW YORK, WASHINGTON DC., BERKELEY

This issue of the Community Muralists' Network Newsletter is dedicated to the spirit of Chilean muralists, who prior to the brief tenure of Salvador Allende as Chile's legally elected President, dared to paint murals throughout their country to express their hope for a new future. During Allende's term of office there was an extraordinary flowering of the arts in all fields, including murals throughout the land. In the reactionary destruction of Chilean democracy that followed, muralists were imprisoned, tortured, and even murdered by the new dictator's police, and their murals whitewashed.

Chilean artists who escaped this horror have spread out across the world, and through their art, music, songs, words and images have kept alive and growing the spirit of beauty and freedom their country treasured for its brief moment.

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

In putting together the information in this issue of the Newsletter, we have noticed several items worth mentioning. First is the growing vitality of murals in an increasing number of countries. Murals of all types are being painted, but of special interest to members of the National Community Muralists' Network are those expressing opposition to racial, sexual and economic oppression. In country after country community activists are developing public art as an integral part of their communities' efforts to gain control over their own lives on every level; the importance of artworks being done "with" or "by" a community instead of "to" or "for" it.

The issues treated by muralists concerned with local issues bear a disturbing resemblance to each other. Notice, for instance, the struggles of neighborhoods against "developers" who would destroy their homes in favor of higher-priced, often speculative, "upgrading" of an area. Murals exposing these forces have been painted in Holland, Sweden, London and Paris, as well as throughout the U.S. At the same time, notice the similarity of attitude of public architects and builders and government officials who try to use art merely as a means of "offsetting" dull and lifeless architectural environments. Paris, Holland and Scotland all remark on this tendency — and their community art opposes it.

This Newsletter issue begins to bring together information about mural activities in countries other than the U.S. Clearly, artists' attitudes toward murals and toward issues facing their communities recognize no political boundaries. But we are also conscious of the lack of information in this Newsletter about socialist countries, about the role of public arts in Cuba, for instance, or the extensive murals and mosaics to be found in the German Democratic Republic. Certainly more information, and especially photographs, on these countries is important, and we hope readers will send materials to us.

For that matter, the countries discussed here are by no means given the thorough treatment they deserve. Information has been gathered from letters, news articles, lectures, conversations, and brief trips we have taken over the past year, but in all cases more information and more and better photographs would help us to get a clearer idea of mural activity in other countries. Given enough new information, we will try to publish another international Newsletter, but in any case, the materials received will be shared with the entire Network through these Newsletters.

Mural Newsletter
P.O. Box 40 383
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NETWORK INFORMATION AND NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

The Newsletter is now mailed to over 700 people in the United States, and about fifty in other countries. So far, this has been supported by donations from individuals, a large contribution from the Midwest Region, and a quickly shrinking private savings account. If anyone knows of an organization, foundation, etc. that might be sympathetic to a proposal from us to support another year of publishing, please let us know.

The next Newsletter is planned to reach you in May. To accomplish this, deadline for submissions is Wednesday, March 21, 1979. Only if we have the information by then can we be sure of being able to include it in the next issue. Please realize that this leaves less than a month from the time you receive this issue! SEND US INFO, LEAFLETS, POSTERS, PHOTOGRAPHS, DISCUSSION OF ISSUES, IDEAS!! And hurry.

We figure that this is a relatively slow time for most mural activity, and that you will have a moment to scratch us a note. We are especially interested in responses to the discussion section of the last issue, and in black and white photographs of current projects. See the guidelines in the last Newsletter, too — the context of a mural is as important as its address and dimensions, at least.

Two final points. One is that copies are not returned to us if you have moved to a new address, so if you move, let us know. Second is about the promised Spanish translation. Finding people with the necessary skills and time and attitude has proven very difficult. It would cost about \$1,700 to have the last issue translated professionally, and we obviously cannot afford that. Still, we are determined to find people who can do five or six pages for us, and when we do, the translations will be made available to all the Regions, and anyone on the mailing list who lets us know they would like it.

Tim Drescher
Fran Valesco

In addition to those named in the articles, the following people have contributed significantly to making this issue of the Newsletter possible: Per H. Reimers, Chief Architect, A.B. Storstockholms Lokalfrafik; Sara Alexander; Rosa Lindenburg; Sybrand Hekking; Moira Whyte; Kukuleku; Frances Fitzgibbons, Social Planning Dept., City of Vancouver; Jane Norling for design and production; Jo Seger for help in mailing.

SWEDEN

from Stellan Lindblad.

In January of 1979 the Museum of Modern Art in Stockholm will have an exhibition of mural painting. There will be about 20 mural groups painting for three weeks. "There's hardly a mural movement in Sweden, maybe the Art Establishment is even more conservative here than in the U.S. . . . There are Art Squads working all over Sweden, most groups work illegally during nights." Like the rest of Europe, weather is a factor, making it impossible to work outside during the winter. Chilean muralists are also working there, as are other groups working in institutions painting indoor murals. Stellan was part of a group of 5 people who received a commission to paint a pedestrian underpass. It was a breakthrough for murals in Sweden and they were paid salaries as well as getting publicity in the papers and radio.

Sven Sandstrom: Institute of Art History, Lund University, article from Urbanisme #65/166, 1978.

The article is an inquiry into public art in general and speaks about some sculptures in a suburban housing project near Helsingborg. What follows is a condensation of the translation from French to English.

In the art world, we rarely speak of the real functions of works of art and rarely think about those who use them. We consider the work as an experience offered to an ideal viewer. However, in Sweden, art brings an effective contribution to the quality of life, indispensable for assuring a decent, and better yet, agreeable existence.

In 1962, the state started offering financial aid to builders to decorate their constructions with art work. A research team was formed at the Institute to study how people living in mass housing used works of art placed in their environment. The housing project, Fredriksdal, consists of 2,800 people. 1,000 are directly affected by the placing of four sculptures in their neighborhood. They were official commissions one by the municipal Housing Office, three by the Cooperative Housing organization of Sweden. The Municipal Housing Office chose Asmund Arle, one of the best known sculptors in Sweden, to do a lifesize horse rolling on its back. The Cooperative Housing Organization asked three local artists to each execute a more or less figurative sculpture. One was a semi-abstract by Elma Oijen, in which one could discern three geese with their beaks joined to form a cone. Ake Joneson's represents a mother and child. That of Karl Bertil Nilsson represents a simplified form of two bears playing together.

The residents were neither consulted nor given any complete or explicit information about the works, so rumor played an important part in the

reception of the horse of Asmund Arle. Word had it that the horse with its four feet in the air was in agony, when the intent of the artist was to depict good health and joy. The origin of this misunderstanding was the knowledge that an important cavalry battle had taken place earlier on the same location. The people assumed that the horse must be a symbol of this historic event and was treated with honor, as a monument. But it was under the windows of an old people's residence and was objected to. Once moved, it lost part of its cultural prestige. The other sculptures had a more positive effect. They helped to identify their neighborhood environment; became symbols identifying their locations. People who had a higher level of education were more inclined to accept abstract work; less educated and older people preferred more "realistic" work, especially the mother and child, which had the most touching theme.

Sandstrom concludes that it is of crucial importance that the inhabitants be well informed of works of art which are offered to or imposed on them. Public authorities developed the policy of financial aid to alleviate the drabness of modern architecture but did little to change buildings so badly planned that it was difficult to live in them. It was created to come to the aid of artists for aesthetic considerations and economic reasons. "The way in which authorities treat the works, notably by where they place them, expresses symbolically some of the attitudes and values which influence appreciation and interpretation by the public."

Subways from Per H. Reimers

Prior to the 1970s subway stations were built with walls of brick, often covered by tile or ceramics, and vaulted ceilings of poured concrete. The new stations use the esthetic values of caves, with soft forms of "nature" contrasting to technology. Rough sprayed cement against polished terazzo, cavern shadows against shiny aluminum. "To compensate for the loss of contact with the landscape under which people are riding and to facilitate orientation each station has been decorated by one or more artists." The artists are appointed through the Traffic Art Committee within the Stockholm County Council in cooperation with the Greater Stockholm Public Transport Co. and the Swedish Artists' Union. All stations are equipped for handicapped people and persons with baby carriages. Noise barriers are used and ventilation and temperature are well controlled. Much farsighted planning was required for the collaboration between artistic creation and construction, as several years were required for the work. The artists themselves have written of their involvement in the project, of how they felt. They used art as a problem solving tool. For example Ingegard Moller and Torsten Renqvist say: "Underground, one of the most frightening things is that light is of

no help in getting one's bearings. There is no feeling that light comes from a given direction. I wanted to enhance the feeling of space in the rock by creating illuminated and shaded sides, by directing the light as if it comes from a definite direction. This . . . both widens the tunnel and enhances the feeling of architecture." P.O. Ultvedt: "It would be wrong to try and flaunt my own artistic 'persona' in a job like this . . . I often thought of the Russian way of building underground railways . . . it has to be as beautiful as possible . . . in a place which is owned by all, which all have a right to use." Karl Olov Bjork and Anders Aberg: "You have got to be there in person walking backwards and forwards; you've got to experience how it feels to be there, tired and feeling generally lousy and waiting for a train . . . Art is not just for a small elite! Rather it has got to do with one's view of humanity." Sigvard Olsson: "I have assumed that the walls will be defaced by graffiti . . . My whole idea is that folks do leave traces of their existence . . . I think that the whole of the underworld has been deeply insulted. It is about time we did something about it." Helga Henschen: "I want to provide people with joy and fantasy and awake a feeling of solidarity . . . Play is not something superficial . . . Playfulness is not utterly forbidden. you have got to use your fantasy."

LONDON

There is mural activity in and about London, and it is primarily the result of three groups. First, in number of murals executed, is the Greenwich Mural Workshop (Greenwich is a couple of miles downriver from London itself; is in effect, an industrial suburb). The Wandsworth Mural Workshop also does murals, in London proper. Third includes miscellaneous murals, often primarily decorative or super graphic in design. Of these groupings, the Greenwich Mural Workshop's work will be described at greatest length because that is the group we have the most information about. Thus, what follows here is not so much a thorough catalogue of English or London murals, but a sampling of some recent efforts. We welcome further information.

Probably the best known of the London murals is "The People's River," on a three-story gable end in Greenwich. It depicts the Thames River, which flows through London and Greenwich to the English Channel, and is a major economic thoroughfare. The mural shows the clash of interests between residents and industrial-development corporations which are trying to move out residents and develop the rivershores into higher income townhouses and the



like. Comparable instances in the United States might be Old Town in Chicago, Venice in Los Angeles, restoration of older brick buildings in Boston, Georgetown near Washington, D.C. Another mural on a similar theme is the nearby Floyd Road mural, which utilizes the architecture of a two story side of a house to depict people in the community working together to refurbish it and the adjacent neighborhood. The idea is collective self help rather than outside "development."

The leaders of the Greenwich Mural Workshop are Carol Kenna and Stephen Lobb, and their leadership and example has given the workshop a growing reputation throughout the country.

Another project is ISEP, where two school walls were painted, one brick at a time (the building is very large, three story brick school) resulting in a mosaic effect. The walls, approximately 45' x 20' each, were divided into eight rectangles, and each rectangle reproduces designs submitted by the grammar school students. It is a spectacular amount of work and detail, made more so by its location in the middle of a deteriorating area receiving little if any help from authorities.

The outstanding piece of work from the Wandsworth Mural Workshop is the Battersea Bridge Approach, on a brick wall surrounding a factory across the Thames from the now-fashionable Chelsea district of London. The struggle here, and the issue depicted in the mural, is the growing threat of the "development" forces in London to move across the Battersea Bridge into the area across the river for "upgrading" real estate development. The mural is quite clear in attaching faces of local figures to bodies and situations showing their relation to the scheme: neighborhood activists are shown helping residents build playgrounds, pools, parks; developers are shown ruining people's communities, riding the roller coaster of speculation, etc. The wall is prominent and is viewed by thousands daily on the approach to or from the bridge.

Other names of people who have done murals, but about which information is scant, include Kershaw (giant flowers, the side of a building as if the side had been removed, thus exposing stylized occupants and their activities), Newton (similarly as-if-wall--were-removed design, but abstractions instead of naturalistic depictions), Bernstein (hang-gliders), Pusey (in central London, a realistic three-story mural of people building a garden — the garden they built is below the mural itself).

The Greenwich Mural Workshop has done other murals in and around Greenwich, one at a school, another one or two in the Meridian housing project (called "estate" in England). In all cases, there is a conscious attempt by the workshop to involve local residents, and to extend their worlds by what is depicted on the walls. One of the Meridian walls, for

instance, shows a space ship symbolizing the estate, and it is being repaired by people on the estate working together. Its goal is an ideal planet portraying equality of sexes and races and intelligent cooperation with nature (instead of exploitation without concern). The style involves a combination of Egyptian two-dimensional with more representational three dimensional.

In all cases, the constant struggle is for funding, too. The Arts Council of Britain is supportive to a limited extent, but, as with agencies in the United States, such support is uneven and unreliable, and dependence on it has caused serious problems for the muralists.

Tim Drescher

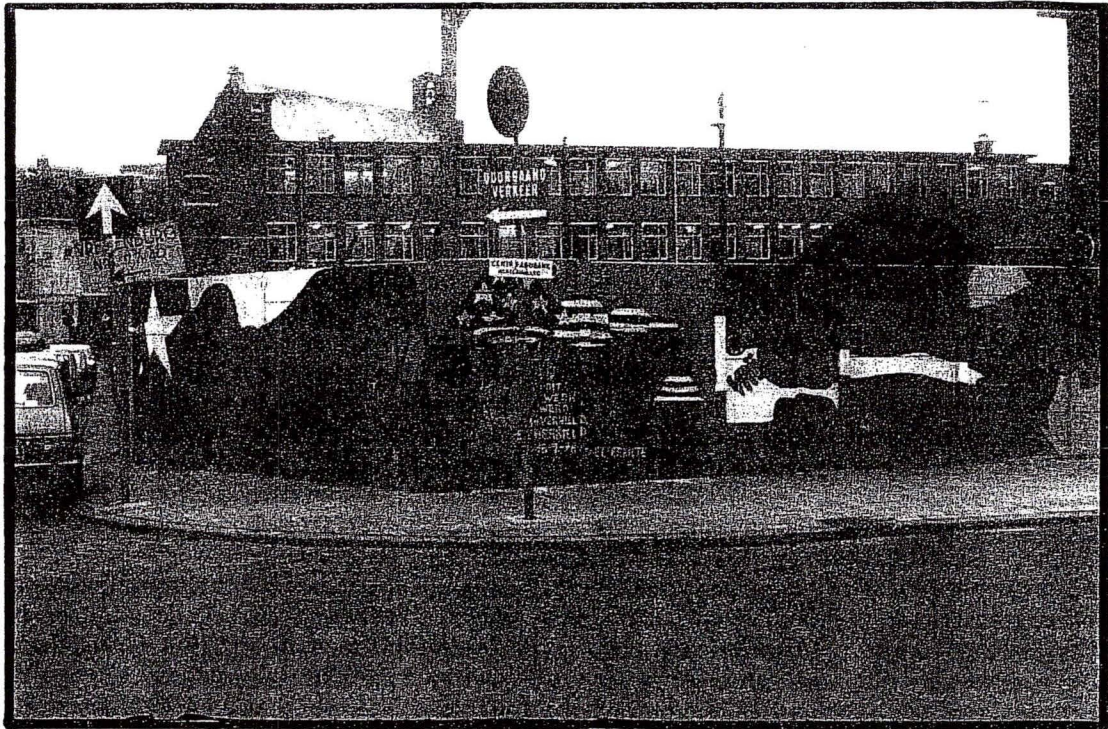
HOLLAND

Notes on the Dutch mural scene from Sybrand Hekking

We can probably start the discussion with the rebuilding of towns after the war. In 1949 there was started the "percentage-regulation," which meant that every government building was going to be a cooperation between the architect and a sculptor or painter. 1%-2% of the building costs had to be spent on artistic decoration. The government formed commission with towns to deal with procedures for following this regulation. At the same time a ½% regulation was passed which meant that ½% of the costs of a new town lay-out had to be spent on art.

In the early 50's the "Liga Nieuw Beelden," a group of architects, painters and sculptors started working on building projects. They invited internationally known artists, organized symposia on the integration of the arts, and organized exhibitions with the support of the Museum of Modern Art in Amsterdam. But it wasn't until 1957 that the first exterior wall painting was done by Liga Nieuw Beelden members Joost van Roojen on a playground designed by Aldo van Eyk. It is an abstract geometric design and was partially destroyed in 1959.

After this first outdoor painting the younger generation took a look at the role of architects planning and the organization of housing projects were expressed in stereotyped pre-fab blocs of flats. No one could tell in which house he was living. The situation was put into focus by *Forum Magazine* in 1959 which said that instead of just decorating the architecture it had to be given new functions. It had to be a point of identification and orientation, and heighten the quality of the environment. However,



this still didn't deal with the problem of camouflaging the wrong kind of building and bad town planning, or the official government institutions who didn't have any positive ideas about the functions of painting.

Until 1968 the art world in Holland was ruled by big art managers such as directors of national and municipal museums, leading elite artists, and municipal offices of arts affairs. Then a "small revolution in the art scene" took place in which more artists entered the commissions and insisted that those using the art, the people who lived in the district where the mural was to be placed, had the final decision on accepting the work.

There are several kinds of painting going on now. The types depend on the source of funding.

The ½% regulation paintings are executed through a municipal commission of art affairs and reflect the modern art scene. They have no open procedures, i.e., the artist is chosen by the commission. The 2% regulation painting comes through a type of CETA commission and the artist is chosen from a number of entrants, based on presenting an idea sketch. However, these murals are chosen through the same commission and tend to be mostly the same type (in spite of the dictates of the residents who have to live with the art). The main criteria these commissions go by are the executability of the work, expense, and aesthetic quality. These murals are done by a house painting firm under the guidance of the artist, and the budgets go into millions of guilders.

The second type of painting is done through another CETA-type regulation, a social-affairs regulation in which artists receive an annual amount of money to support themselves when they can't find commissions on the free market. In exchange they must donate art work, the quality of which is checked by the CETA-like commission. Since 1973 murals have been added as a possibility, mostly inside buildings, and mostly for semi-municipal institutions such as fire houses, hospitals, police stations, etc. Because the budget is more restricted (around 30,000 guilders, \$8,500) for the paintings are smaller. The art reflects more of a variety, from photo-realism to conceptual work.

The third type of painting is done through the social affairs department of the government. Starting in 1968, 50% of the costs are subsidized on the condition that the money be used for heightening the liveability of neighborhoods where houses will be demolished. Since this renewal can take more than two years, artists are allowed to build playgrounds and decorate places with murals, etc. As another condition, the public must become involved in executing the project. These projects have been used for experimenting with materials and allowing artists to work on a large scale for the first time. These murals are more political and are found in working class neighborhoods, in 19th-Century housing projects in bad repair, in urban renewal areas, and in parts of towns where people live under poor social conditions.

Two collectives are working in Amsterdam. One

is Kukuleku ("Cockadoodledoo"), and the other is Kunst & Samenleving ("Art and Society"), which is a national organization of artists, architects, social workers, and garden designers. The oldest is Kukuleku. The founder was working with artists in the peace movement of the 60's. They wanted to connect their work with social problems and started to work with people in neighborhoods trying to stimulate creativity by inviting people to join in the creation of murals. At first the work was decorative and used to heighten the liveability of the area, but recently their work has become more political. In 1978 they worked with unemployed people to create an unemployment painting. However, they aren't supported by the government and have to fight for funds for each new project and to maintain their studio.

"Art and Society" is part of a larger union for fine-art laborers. They started in 1972 as an offshoot of the artists' protests of 1968. Their goal is to improve the professional position of the artist. For them, murals are part of a large process that includes town-renovation problems. Their abstract murals include texts which express the feelings of the neighborhood. They refuse to make use of "CETA" money. For them, this is not a real working situation and they prefer to be aligned with laborers.

Other collectives such as the Chilean groups "El Frente," "Ramona Parra" and "Unidos Vencemos" work at the invitation of the Centre for Chilean Culture. The costs are borne by municipal councils of cities where a Chile-Committee secures a wall and permission to paint. The February-Collective, an agit-prop group that works for union meetings, political happenings, etc., originated through a cooperation with the Centre for Chilean Culture and Dutch painters.

The above sketch is based on Amsterdam but is standard for more wealthy cities in Holland. Small villages can't afford to pay the costs, don't have official art departments, and don't work together in the same way to execute murals. Amsterdam has more than 100 murals, including those made by the public on walls of torn-down houses. Rotterdam has more than 50 and several other towns have murals. Most are not signed. At the moment there is a crisis in mural development due to budget cuts and a slow-down in building.

Notes from Fran Valesco on Holland and visiting Kukuleku

In 1970 five people started the workshop and in 1972 decided to ask for money. After two years of negotiation they were subsidized by the city council and salaries and materials were paid by the national government. They received 50,000 guilders

(c. \$14,300) for materials and an equal amount for living expenses (this is about welfare level). In 1975 the money was discontinued and they are no longer doing work, preferring to concentrate their energy on research. They rely on volunteers, sometimes painters, usually the unemployed, and take a strong political stance.

Their idea is that all people can use visual language. If people don't understand the language you speak, you have no way of communicating. Individualism was not the answer but performing a social function was; as much needed as a doctor. They also see themselves performing a revolutionary function, not just a frivolous role. They also work with peculiarly Dutch problems. One is that urban renewal *doesn't* happen. Housing is a big problem. Also Dutch people have a more private mentality and so there is not much contact between groups; people are more isolated.

The process of doing a mural on unemployment involved doing drawings, deciding on a viewpoint, designing the work and transferring the art onto the wall (using eye only, which they feel is just as accurate as our peculiarly American desire for tools). They trained painters for two evenings, created giant pallettes of paint, and provided live music while painting, creating an environment of sound and imagination.

They feel that community artists are disliked by well-known painters and art commissioners. They don't like the fact that you have no trouble with the public and think it is brutal to paint on the street. You offend their idea of what art is. The well-known painters worry when you say art is not godly; after all if everyone paints then where would they be?

Slides I saw covered a multitude of subjects and media. They have done murals, created polyester 3-D masks, carried larger banner paintings and polystyrene and wood constructions at demonstrations. They have started a tradition of painting an annual march commemorating a strike against the deportation of Jews in 1941, and created a sculpture against the neutron bomb. This sculpture is used over and over again.

SCOTLAND

The visual public art field in Scotland reached a new stage ten years ago with the installation of David Harding onto the staff of Glenrothes new-town Development Corporation as "town-artist." Basically, Harding's job has been to provide visual and sculptural objects/decorations for the housing projects, and the results have been highly successful. Harding himself feels that "a new and exciting

dimension has been added to the residential areas; they have assumed more of a personality and have more readily allowed an opportunity for identification." (*Glenrothes Town Artist David Harding*. Glenrothes Development Corporation, 1975. p. 2). Similar positions were created in other new towns in Scotland and in England.

Town artists work with architects and builders from the beginnings of planning for towns, which are built from scratch. Art, given this sort of support, becomes an intrinsic part of life in the town.

A few years later, through this new awareness of improving the environment with art, various community groups and individuals in Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Dundee used mural painting to brighten up their surroundings. Sometimes they involved local artists, and always they tried to involve the people in the area.

The Scottish Arts Council's contribution at this time to the progress of the movement was to hold a limited competition for some contemporary established painters to design for gable-end murals about 80' x 40' for tenements in Glasgow. The winning designs chosen by the Arts Council tended towards the abstract, participation was not invited by the public in either planning or painting, and unfortunately even today the Council believes that this is the way to organize good "public" art -- whether the people like it or not.

In recent years, the type of mural work done by the community groups has become more succinct, and the Job Creation Scheme, an effort made by the government to reduce unemployment by providing temporary jobs, mostly for teenagers, has enabled several mural painting teams in different parts of the country to be formed.

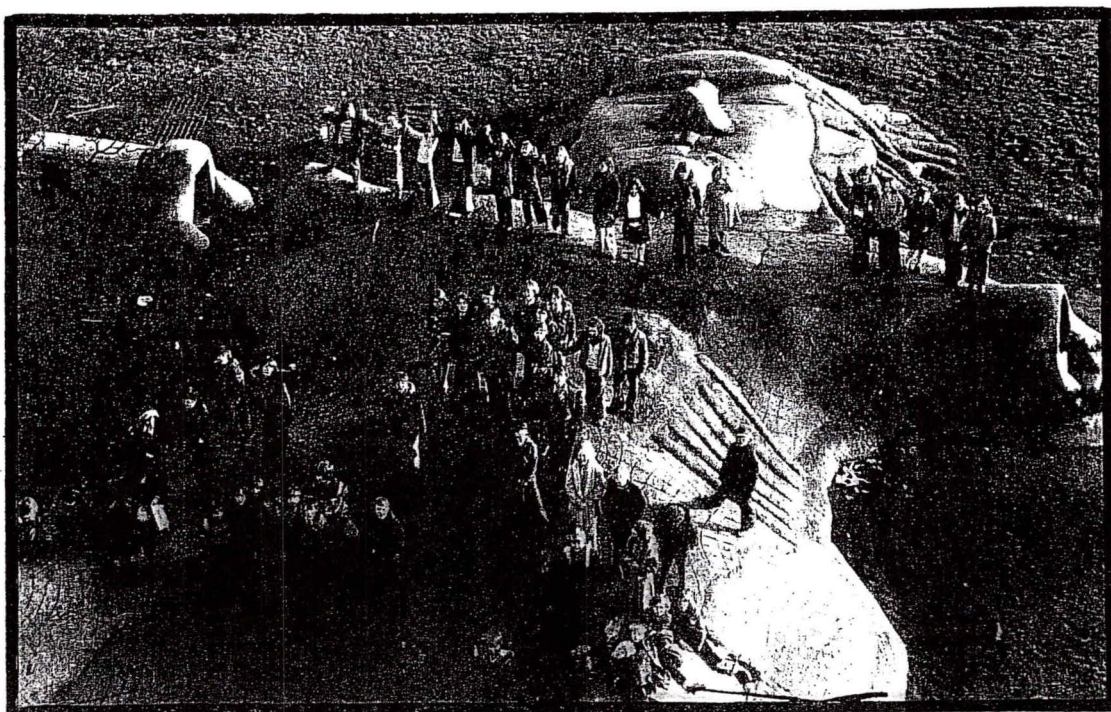
Michael Greenlaw is employed in just such a team, as an artist/supervisor. They work in a depressed housing project in Edinburgh called Craigmillar, and are sponsored by a powerful local community group called the Craigmillar Festival Society. The idea is to train local teenage assistants to paint murals and to upgrade the community through the landscaping of gap-sites. In this way, they are directly involved in having the power to improve their own environment. To date, they have completed twelve major murals and an extensive landscaping project.

Mention should be made of the mural work of Ken Wolverton and his wife, Chrissie. Ken is originally from the United States, and together they have worked with children, mainly, in Iran (Isfahan) and in Edinburgh at Hamilton Place, where they designed and executed with local youth a complex, largely abstract mural extending through an entire stairwell space, and utilizing automobile parts as well as paints.

Unemployment figures are 30% in Craigmillar at the moment (summer 1978), and to try to reduce this figure the Festival Society has initiated other efforts by employing a team of workers to build, in concrete, a figure of a man lying on the ground (see next article). He is 100 feet long, and 40 feet wide. Another team is doing painting, decorating, carpentry, and gardening for old folks and single parents, and yet another team does clothes alterations and selling.

In each case, emphasis is being placed on the training of teenage assistants by experienced supervisors.

Michael Greenlaw



THE GENTLE GIANT

What has a special unit for dangerous criminals, a powerful self-help community programme, Jonathan Swift, a famous Scottish comedian, two American artists and a gifted concrete worker got in common? Yes, you guessed it—a large concrete sculpture (half the size of a football field) of a Giant!!

It all started at the dedication of an excellent and unique mural in the Special Unit of Barlinnie Prison. The unit was set up to house eight of Scotland's toughest criminals and its object was to work towards a decision-sharing community and helping the inmates develop in a positive way. Beth Shadur (Chicago muralist—Hello Beth!) worked with the prisoners and painted a mural on a wall opposite the cells. It was an amazing project as nothing had been done in Prison before let alone in the famous 'Special Unit.' Yet, it was only one of the many successful projects this unit is running. Jimmy Boyle, one of the prisoners in the unit, has become a well-known Scottish sculptor and author and had helped Beth with the mural. He met myself and the leader of the Craigmillar Festival Society, Helen Crummy, who over the past 15 years built up a large self-help programme in a very poor area of Edinburgh *and used the arts to do it!* We all agreed that if possible we would try and build one of Jimmy Boyle's sculptures in Craigmillar.

Two months later Jimmy came up with Gulliver. His idea was that Gulliver would be built lying on his back and children would play on him. Hence the sculpture would be gentle in so much as the children would be the living Lilliputians keeping the giant Gulliver down.

We started the Jobs Creation Project (Scotland's answer to C.E.T.A.) and employed eight local people to build the sculpture. One of those employed to build the sculpture happened to have worked with David Harding the famous town artist from Glenrothes (a new town in Scotland) and had worked with him on various concrete projects. We added an American artist, Ken Wolverton (who is now a community artist in Scotland) who would work with the team for the initial two weeks and then they would be on their own.

And so it started . . . The team built an earth mould and then covered it in chicken wire. A rough concrete covering (see body in photograph) and then a fine concrete finish (see face). One year and 2000 tons of material later, Gulliver was opened by Billy Connelly, Scotland's best known comedian.

The Craigmillar Festival Society had proved again that local people living in deprived communities can reverse the decline of their community given the resources.

One child turned to me when it was finished and said, "Hey Mister, when is it gonna stand up?"

© Neil Cameron

FRANCE

Mural painting is often associated, in the United States, with a form of involvement in a community-oriented struggle. Most of the mural painters feel deeply concerned about the statements their murals make. This is also part of a tradition related to the Mexican heritage and the earlier creations of the WPA period.

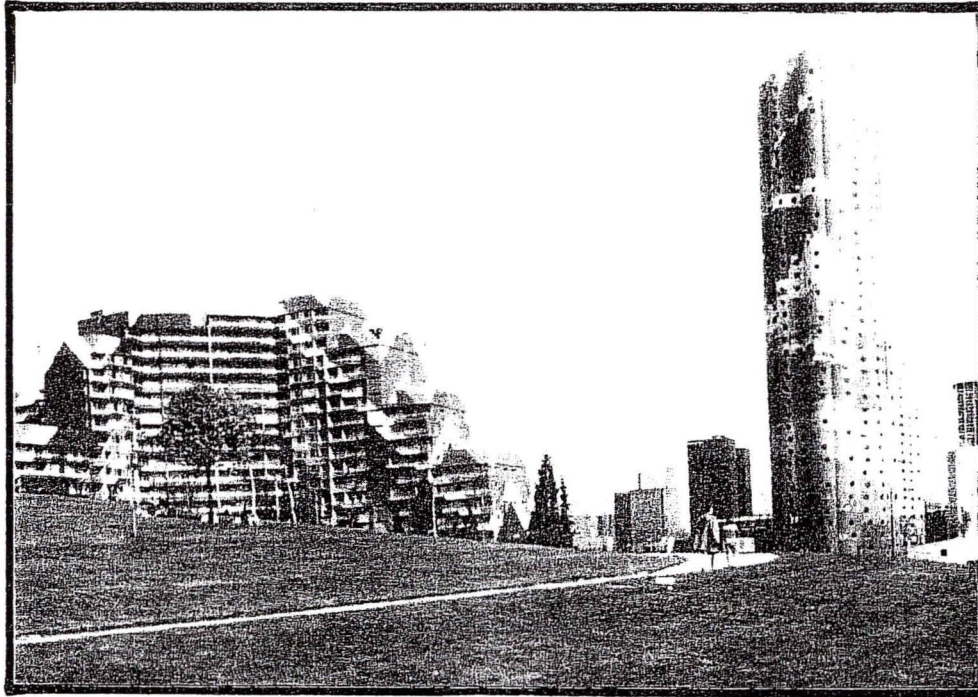
In France, artists have no traditions or references regarding this type of mural painting: murals never come from a social will or a popular tradition, but have always been the result of institutional decisions. Even now their creation depends on a legal as well as a technical element.

Public (government) Administrations hold control over any form of public decoration. Even to paint your door in red, you need an authorization from the public offices. The Administrator is the authority, makes the decisions, and has total control for any work created in a public space.

Technically, architects are the people responsible for buildings, including decorations. They are the ones who create the form, the structure of every edifice, and because architects are mainly interested in structure, it is part of a long tradition to neglect art or any decorations on buildings. Such things are considered the final, and unimportant part of construction.

For these reasons, and because of the bourgeois political ethic, almost no public art creations have been realized in France since the Renaissance. Artists expressed their political consciousness through different media. For instance, writing was always developed much more than any other medium, and even today public spaces are either ignored or left to architects and administrators.

It appears today that social concern and environmental responsibility take a larger place in the decisions regarding public spaces. Urban renewal, concentration of thousands of people in new, unfamiliar spaces, have changed the politics of the public administrators. New cities, where thousands of human beings are relocated simply on the basis of administrative decisions, needed some kind of human sign to relate to. So important was the trauma that even administrators realized this. We can see examples of this new politics in some of the new suburbs of Paris, where the Public Administration sponsors works of art to be displayed in the environment through sculpture, ceramics, wall designs, etc. These works are exclusively decorative. They have very few similarities with mural painting in the U.S.A., but in France, these monstrosities are what is generally meant when someone mentions a "Mur Peint" (Painted Wall). The projects are executed by professional artists, and they have not opened the way for any new artistic or social



expression. They are only an attempt to humanize the work of the architects and urbanists, with no other specific social motivations.

Progressive Projects

In the early seventies a group of artists, "Les Malassis," reacted against the "buy and sell" principle of the art market and galleries. A rare example of an artists' collective in France, Les Malassis rented their work to cultural centers and other places more accessible to the man in the street. One city-sponsored project executed by the group was on a supermarket wall in Grenoble. The artists accepted it only if they were given the authority to decide the theme of the mural. They decided to depict an allegory: "The Raft of the Medusa; already famous in a giant painting by Gericault in 1819, it shows shipwrecked people and cannibalism. The artists wanted to illustrate the contradiction of the economic crisis of the time by putting such a theme in a shopping center. The project was completed with many difficulties, especially from the city administrators, because of the strength of its political statement. But, at the same time, the artists failed to reach the people, who did not understand the allegory or the message because it was far too intellectual.

Some other forms of art appear in public spaces, independently of government decision, for example posters and silkscreens on walls. These are not included in the environmental structure itself, and are part of a popular tradition in France. Examples of it flourished on the walls during the national uprisings of May 1968: "Let the walls sing" The most significant work in this tradition today is

probably the work of Ernest Pignon-Ernest. His silkscreens are developed out of group decisions. They talk about a specific problem and the images are placed in highly selected locations, thereby utilizing the poetic and dramatic potential of the location to stimulate the awareness of what the images are trying to say. An example are life-sized silkscreens of North African people (against whom there is much discrimination in France). These images were pasted on the inside of chain-link fences, looking out at passersby as if from prison. In another instance, Pignon-Ernest contacted workers in Grenoble who were concerned by two accidents that had just happened in their community: a worker died of work-related cancer, and another became deaf for similar reasons, and had committed suicide. The art group worked with an actor from the city, who posed for photographs as if in pain. The artists then worked on accentuating the dramatic aspect of the picture by retouching certain parts of the body, especially the hands. These posters were then placed on factory walls and similar locations where the connections between the diseases/accidents and the workplace could not be ignored. Because of the locations selected, no visual background was necessary in the posters.

Such projects have powerful impact. They have a strong support from the community because of its participation in every step of the creative process and the collective concern the images represent.

Mural Projects

The interest in mural painting is growing in France today, especially due to the foreign examples of the United States, Portugal, Chile, etc.

Still, most of the mural painters are young artists without any real experience, often working on themselves. These people work illegally and cannot find sponsorship except for some paint and brushes. They work principally on temporary surfaces and the themes are often abstract designs or fantasies without any social or public concern. The only positive part of such actions is probably in the attitude they show, where artists try to find and utilize different sources of support to communicate outside of the gallery system.

Recently, three examples of non-institutional mural painting have appeared and should be noted:

1. A housing project in Grenoble, where a group of teenagers initiated and painted a mural. They got help from local organizations, parents and neighbors. They represented their lives, problems, culture and hopes.

2. In 1978 a group of fine arts students decorated the inside of the Place de la Republique subway in Paris. They spent months determining who were the users of this station and what were their concerns. This procedure represents a new direction for public artists today.

3. The mural of "rue Pernety," in Paris, depicting neighborhood people struggling against a bulldozer representing the powers of urban "renewal" which is systematically destroying their neighborhood. A workshop of young artists took an active part in the struggle that united most of the residents of the area. Accomplished in 45 days, the mural was supported by donations from passersby, and when, a year later, the proposal was made to cover over the wall, the people in the area simply would not allow it to happen.

4. Chilean muralists. There are three brigades of Revolutionary Chileans in France who do projects all over Europe, being invited by cities with progressive-leftist governments. For Chileans, all they have to do is contact such a city government, and then get to work. They start with a general idea, then improvise. They paint very fast, usually in a single day.

Herve Bechy
(translated by Jean Gindreau)



VANCOUVER

There are several government agencies which are involved with the arts. One is the Canada Council for the Arts (like NEA) where individual artists usually apply for lump sum grants. There is also a grants employment which deals with various contributions to the community. The Employment Center has make-work programs and the "Local Initiative Program" is seasonal. The Art Bank of Canada, which no longer exists, was responsible for a wide range of art commissions, one of which was a computer art mural done by Norman White at the Canadian Broadcasting Company office in Vancouver.

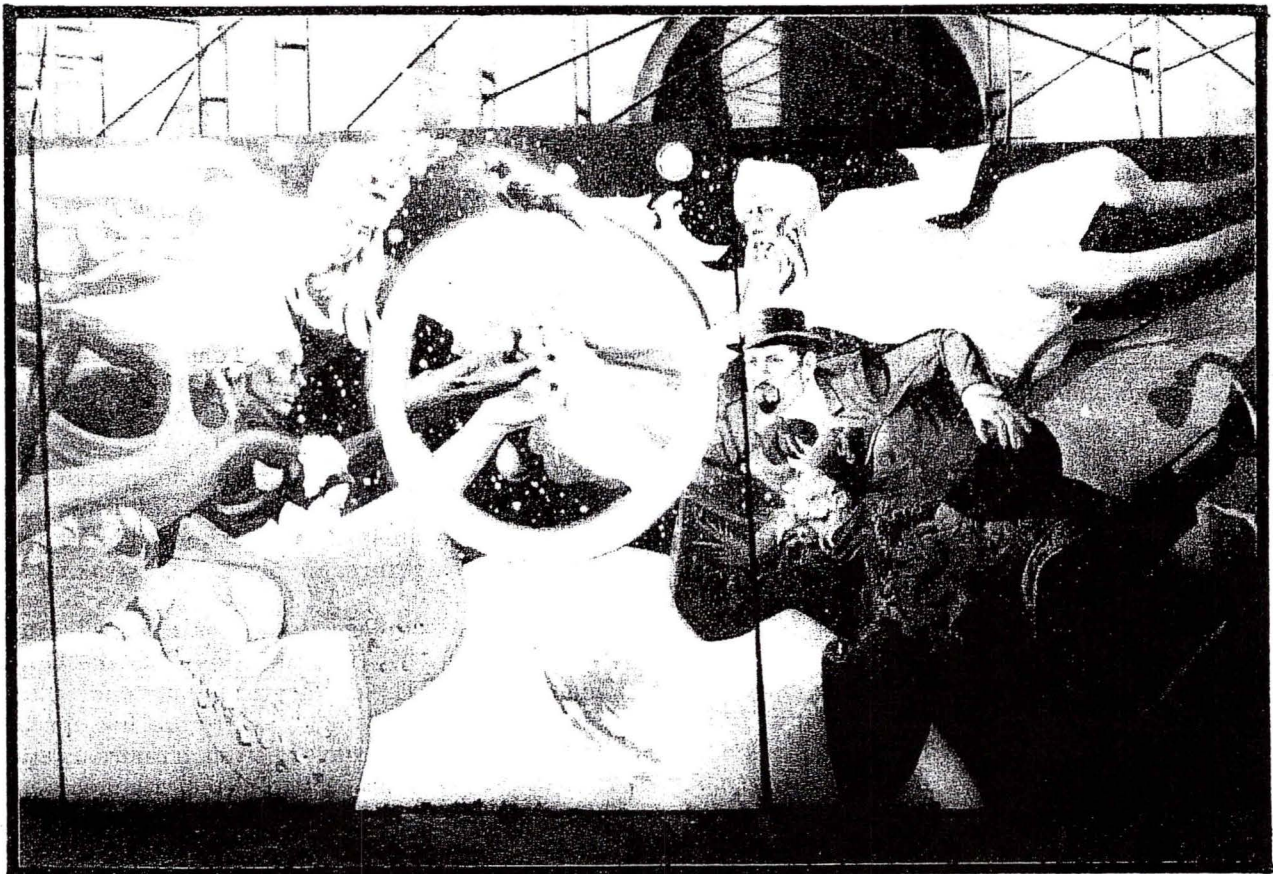
Few murals are being painted at present and most of them are fence murals around construction sites which are torn down at the completion of the project. A notable mural in existence now was done by Frank Lewis and The Pier Group of Artists. It surrounds the old Carnegie Library, which is being renovated by the city to be used as a community center. People in the neighborhood (which is multi-cultural, multi-ethnic) were involved in the project. There were few racial complaints, but some "left wing" groups in the community viewed the painting as a luxury. In

1976 the Pier Group got a \$50,000 grant to do a fence around a Daon Developments construction site. Professional artists did the work, which stayed up for 2 years, after which all the sections and panels were auctioned off for various charities.

In a conversation with Frances Fitzgibbons of the Social Planning Department we talked about funding sources, mural sites and other community arts projects. Seven years ago it was decided to pay visual artists and musicians a wage. They displayed art (much like the art bank) and supported concerts, exhibitions and festivals. The program was run by Frances for five years. Guidelines were established, a jury selected the work, artists were employed and the work paid for. Presently, they have 3,000 works of art, of which 90% are out on location in over 200 places such as government offices, schools, social service agencies, etc. In addition they also produce the *Urban Reader*, a free magazine addressing pertinent issues in the city of Vancouver.

I did not have the time to contact other muralists or any of the Pier Group but I do know of the existence of a few other murals. One is the bus depot downtown and another at a school out of the downtown area.

Fran Valesco



THE LOCATION OF PICASSO'S *GUERNICA* — AN UPDATE

Picasso's famous painting *Guernica* and 60 preliminary and associated studies have been on loan to the Museum of Modern Art in New York City since 1939. According to the background memo from MOMA, *Guernica* is "the ancient capital of the Basque people in northwestern Spain and was largely destroyed on April 27, 1937 by German bombers flying for General Franco during the Spanish Civil War. It was the first saturation bombing of a city in military history.

"Some months earlier, Picasso had been commissioned to paint a mural in the Spanish Republic building at the Paris world's fair. He had done nothing about it until the news of the *Guernica* catastrophe aroused him to a fury of action." The ultimate result is the famous painting *Guernica*.

The painting has been loaned to several cities during its tenure at MOMA, and recently, the government of Spain has considered asking for its return to that country. There is apparently no question by any party that the painting and its associated studies "belong to the Spanish Republic." But the transfer of the painting to the country, can "only be envisaged after the complete reestablishment of individual liberties in that country," according to a communique from Roland Dumas, the person entrusted by Picasso to carry out his wishes.

Dumas continues to note that "admittedly, some progress has been realized in Spain. And a not negligible evolution has occurred since the death of General Franco. But I cannot consider that this evolution has as yet terminated."

The result is that, while perhaps *Guernica* is closer to being placed back in its homeland, that day remains several years off, and is, furthermore, at the discretion of a single associate of MOMA.

*Information from Public Art Workshop
Resource Center, Chicago*

MEXICO

Political mural activity in Mexico is apparently beginning once again, but information about it is difficult to come by, and we haven't had the opportunity to travel in Mexico and check it out ourselves. One description of such an investigation is by Alan Barnett, and may be found in San Jose Studies,

Volume II, Number 2, May, 1976, pp. 4-30. The article is titled, "The Resurgence of Political Art in Mexico?"

What follows below is a highly edited version of a talk given by Rini Templeton at the National Community Muralists' Conference in Chicago last April. We invite responses, and, especially, information and discussion and photos from muralists living/working in Mexico. As Rini says, the Mexican mural movement is certainly still alive — "in many places throughout the world, as you yourselves show by your work."

As far as Mexico is concerned, it would be absurd to maintain that muralism continues as it once was, at its peak, in times historically quite different from today. Nevertheless, today the tradition continues in two principal courses: one seeks to use new visual and organizing technique to develop further the practice of monumental public art. The other course is that of artists who feel the need to practice a dialectical-subversive art, connected to peoples' struggles, and/or to break with the cultural systems and apparatus of the ruling class. These two practices are not necessarily mutually exclusive. What's important is that in Mexico, at least at present, both practices are possible.

Vlady is working on a huge mural in a building that was a convent in colonial times, fell into ruins, and has been beautifully reconstructed as the Library of the Treasury Department. Vlady is using fresco, frequently with aggregates for textural effects. Working with one assistant and a plasterer, he is about half way through this six or eight year project. The ex-chapel is painted with Freudian subject matter. The main wall of the nave carries the artist's interpretation of human history. Work has just begun on the side walls, which will necessarily be of a similar character, that is, surrealist, and highly individual, both in iconography and in viewpoint on the human condition.

Leopoldo Flores has painted frescos and acrylics in buildings in Mexico City and Toluca, he has worked closely with a weaving shop to produce a series of tapestries, and he has engaged in street art, both in huge banners in the center of Toluca, and painting the topography of a mountainside outside town. Flores' painting in the Casa de la Cultura in Toluca integrates the whole of the architectural space, with figures passing through obstacles, breaking divisions.

Jose Luis Soto has done a number of murals, among which "El Hombre, Man," in the Government House in Tepic, Nayarit, is outstanding for its architectural integration. "There are few muralists today because there have been such injurious attacks upon Mexican Muralism from the younger generation," he says. "But that same generation has failed to point towards a new muralism. That is, it's very

easy to criticize with words, but very hard to do so with works." Soto is one of the founders of Taller de Investigacion Plastica, with which he is now working.

The Movement of 1968 generated many cultural expressions, of which there is relatively little organized record. One example is the mural done at the University of Mexico by Mario Falcon. The repression of the '68 movement that erased so many lives also erased the cultural activities, but, slowly, things rose again, the publications, theatre and music groups, and visual expression.

In the Escuela Preparatoria Activa four artists led a team of students painting a mural in the staircase of the school. In response to the question, "do you feel any affinity with Mexican muralism?" one of the artists said that perhaps they felt an affinity "in the desire that our painting fulfills a social function by creating political consciousness. . . . At a given time [Mexican murals had a thrust] . . . toward the people. There was an atmosphere of struggle . . . an affinity of values . . . Problems began with the institutionalization of the revolution. That was the beginning of the end of a number of things, among them, muralism, which became an instrument of demagoguery, and grew stagnant on the walls of public buildings."

One further activity should be noted, and that is the formation of the Mexican Front of Cultural Work Groups in February 1978. The following declaration of the Frente was made to carry on immediate work, and will be refined and concretized in practice:

Confronted with the need to transform the relations of production of the capitalist system, and along with them their ideological-cultural significance, we declare ourselves:

- For an artistic and cultural production joined to proletarian and democratic struggles.
- For a position alternative to that of the apparatus of the ruling class for ideological, artistic, and cultural production and reproduction.
- For theoretical-practical study and discussion which must then materialize in real aesthetic-ideological results.
- For recuperation of the means of production, distribution and circulation of our work.

We undertake as our own the struggles of urban and rural workers against the exploitation of national and foreign capital.

Thus we join in forming the Mexican Front of Cultural Work Groups.

Signers: Grupo Proceso Pentagono, Grupo SUMA, Taller de Arte e Ideologia, Grupo Cligrama, El Colectivo, Cuadernos Filisoficos, Grupo Germinal, Grupo MIRA, Sabe Usted Ler?, Taller de Investigacion Plastica, Centro Regional de Ejercicios Culturales, Cooperativa Chucho El Roto, El Taco de la Perra Brava, Taller de Cinc Octubre.

photo credits

"The People's River" 1977, London, England, Greenwich Mural Workshop, Carol Kenna and Stephen Lobb. The design shows contending forces struggling for control of the land bordering the Thames River; mainly, the long-term [poor, working class] residents who are shown taking back control of their neighborhoods from urban developers and speculators. Photo: Greenwich Mural Workshop.

"El Frente" 1977, Utrecht, Holland. This painting has been destroyed and restored three times. After this photo, in January 1978, it was again destroyed by putting burning blankets over the plastic coating [to provide protection against whitewashing and dirt], which burned black. A new mural was made somewhere else in Utrecht in 1978 using the same design. Photo: Sybrand Hekking.

"Gulliver," 1978, Craigmillar, Edinburgh, Scotland. A giant sculpture designed by Jimmy Boyle, an inmate in a local prison, specifically for use as a children's playground. Craigmillar is an inner-city, depressed area of Edinburgh. Photo: Neil Cameron. [detail] Pernety Mural, 14th District, Paris, 1978. This mural is in an area destined to be torn down to build expensive new housing and a superhighway corridor between Montparnasse Tower and the circular highway surrounding Paris. It shows residents trying to push back the bulldozer of urban development which is destroying the neighborhood. Five artists painted on this wall. Financial support was from a donation box left at its base during painting. Photo: Fran Valesco.

La Defense," a new town housing project outside Paris, 1978. The camouflage-like designs on these monstrous buildings are actually tile mosaics. Tens of thousands of people are being summarily evicted from their old neighborhoods in Paris and forced to live here instead. The designs are supposed to "humanize" the environment; note the round windows. Photo: Jean Gindreau.

Vancouver fence mural, 1978, directed by Frank Lewis and Pier Group Artists around renovation of old Carnegie Library. Detail of community mural showing different cultural groups living in the area. Temporary fence murals seem to be the most usual form of mural in Vancouver. Photo: Fran Valesco.



NATIONAL MURALS NETWORK

INTERIM NEWSLETTER

First of all, we want to explain the brevity of this interim letter. When the March 21 deadline for the anticipated Spring Newsletter arrived we found that there was not really enough material to support a quality Newsletter, and that half the information was from the San Francisco Bay Area. We decided that this combination of circumstances did not justify a full-fledged production. There are, however, some significant items calling for immediate action, and others which we have received which have a wide importance, so we will mention those in hopes that any of you who know about them or similar items will respond with thoughts or information.

One reason for the lack of material sent to us might be the failure of the Post Office to deliver all the International Newsletters, which were mailed February 23, 1979. The Post Office's explanation is unsatisfactory ("It can't happen."), but the Galeria de la Raza in San Francisco says they have experienced similar problems occasionally in the past. The Galeria's experience continues to be crucial for our work, and we should note that the Post Office has a twentieth-century problem with a nineteenth-century operation.

Another reason for the lack of material might be "winter fatigue," but in any case the pickings were too slim. If you are interested in information about murals throughout the country, you have to send us stuff about your own area. Thoughts, leaflets, black & white photographs, essays, paragraphs, articles, lists--anything. The deadline for the next issue, the date by which we must have the material, is:

SEPTEMBER 28, 1979

Death of Jean Charlot

Master painter and member of the Mexican Mural Renaissance Jean Charlot died of cancer at the end of March, at his home in Honolulu. Charlot was the link between the Italian Renaissance fresco technique and the 20th Century Mexican Revolutionary muralists. We will include an appreciation of his work and significance in the Fall Newsletter.

Re: Protection of Rincon Annex Murals

The State (California) Historical Resources Commission met recently and voted unanimously to declare the Rincon Annex (the building) eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Their architect member spoke enthusiastically of the building as a rare and excellent example of the moderne style. A petition campaign is going to begin in June, with the petition which follows. Write to the Newsletter address and we will send you as many petitions as you want. They or any letters on the subject, should be mailed to either U.S. Postmaster General William F. Bolger, Washington D.C., or S.F. Postmaster Lim P. Lee, San Francisco, Ca.

"We favor making a legal landmark building of the San Francisco Rincon Annex Post Office (on Mission Street between Spear and Stuart Streets). We want the lobby, including its 27 mural panels of California History painted by Anton Refregier, to remain intact and open to the public as it has been since 1940. Our public funds (United States Treasury Department) paid for the murals and for the construction of the building. We, the public, do not want the building destroyed nor the murals moved."

Important Mural Detachment

We strongly endorse the following, not only to restore the mural, but because of the serious precedent the defacement sets, and because of the even more significant precedent which would be established if public pressure on the Savings and Loan could force it to repair its vandalism. One of our struggles is to force corporations like this one to protect and respect people's art.

"Dear Friends,

I am writing to those of you who have had an experience of my mural painted in the alley of the Palomar Arcade in Downtown Santa Cruz.

The mural was done in eight months during 1976, and has remained 99 percent intact since then.

During the last week in February, 1979, I discovered the mural entirely obliterated with beige enamel paint. Monterey Savings and Loan, who lease the building, ordered this work done without consulting

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This willful destruction of a public work of art, to Quote Charles Rowe, Santa Cruz County Planning Commissioner, was an act of corporate vandalism equivalent to the demolition of an historic structure without a permit or the bulldozing of an archeological site without public notice.

I am launching a campaign through public pressure to hold Monterey Savings and Loan Association responsible for the removal of the enamel paint and restoration of the mural. This is being accomplished through the acquisition of local signatures as well as letters and phone calls.

I am calling upon you to support me in accomplishing this goal in any way you see fit, specifically by addressing a letter to: Monterey Savings and Loan Association, 449 Alvarado, Monterey, Ca 93940. Or: Charles Rowe, Planning Commission, County of Santa Cruz, County Building, Santa Cruz, Ca 95060. Or: Santa Cruz Independent, 1383 Pacific Ave., Santa Cruz, Ca 95060. Or: Good Times, 104 Lincoln, Santa Cruz, CA 95060.

Sincerely,
Eduardo Carrillo

It is a good idea to send a copy of anything you write to the muralist: Eduardo Carrillo, c/o Oakes College, U.C.S.C., Santa Cruz, CA 95060.

Thanks to those of you who have sent in information for the Newsletter. We will keep it on file, and use it in the next issue. There are three broad issues raised in what information we do have, that we specifically want folks to write about:

1. In Boston there has been picketting of a mural being painted by a woman. The union picketed her because she was not a member of the union. She was being paid out of public funds for the mural at a Transit Authority station. What is more, the union has been traditionally hostile to women. This whole story raises a number of tremendously important issues about unions, community muralists, women and Third World muralists and unions, the relation of public funding to workers' jobs, etc. Please tell us of any similar incidents you may know of, and write us analysis/ideas about any of these issues.

2. CETA positions for artists seem to be dying in several places in the country. Let us know about any cutbacks of funding from *any* public source in your territory. Also, if you can, some reasons why, and the expected consequences or political implications of the cutbacks.

3. We are preparing for the Fall Newsletter a "manual of contracts and legal guides for community muralists." We want to print at least one or two sample mural contracts protecting various rights due to the painters of murals, and also we want to include a brief but helpful, we hope, discussion of points to consider in drawing up a contract to protect yourself and your work. Please send us any ideas on these lines, and also, especially, copies of any contracts you have relating to murals.

4. Since the next Newsletter deadline is after the summer painting season, send us information about murals painted in your area!

For the Editorial Group

Tim Drescher

Rupert Garcia

Emmanuel Montoya

Fran Valesco

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