

" A MURAL IN PROCESS "

by

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The intention of this exhibition of pastel studies and scale drawings for our mural in the New Haven City Welfare Department is to have a dialogue with the New Haven community. This is the stage before the actual painting of the mural on site. These works represent only a part of the process of making a mural. In this case they are the result of months of thought, research, discussions and interviews, and practice drawings. The actual mural in the New Haven City Welfare Department at 196 Bassett Street will be almost six feet tall and seventy feet wide. When it receives the final approvals, the mural will take about two months to paint on location, and will extend from the front waiting area, through a walkway, and into the work area of the welfare department staff.

This mural is the first project from a one year grant we have been awarded by the Connecticut Commission on the Arts and CETA. This grant is very important to our development as artists doing community oriented murals. We have been concentrating on improving the communicative power, and the aesthetic and technical quality of our work as artists and as muralists.

For the past two years we have both worked in various programs as coordinators of group murals in New Haven. As artists, our commitment to the community we live in has been strengthened through the process of painting murals. From the beginning of our work as mural directors we have been inspired by the vitality and heritage and humanity of this community. We have been inspired by children, teenagers, adults and senior citizens as we have worked with them to express their joys, angers, and hopes. We have been inspired by our team members who have grasped the confidence to effect positive change in their personal lives and in their community by being part of the visual dialogue a mural creates. And we have been inspired by the enthusiastic support of the community whose walls we paint. Now, in this grant, we want to applaud the dignity, the vitality, and the identity of these people, of our community.

We hope that our reception will help achieve the continuance and intensification of art projects sponsored on behalf of the public.

We have chosen the City Welfare Department as one of our mural sites because traditionally it has been a social service organization last considered, if considered at all, for public art projects.

We want to communicate the injustice we feel is taking place against people on welfare, not only in terms of their suffering, but because society tends to blame exactly these people for their suffering. William Ryan calls it 'Blaming the Victim' in his book of the same title. When society points an accusing finger at a child who isn't learning well in school and doesn't bother to understand that it's because the child hasn't eaten breakfast and in general has a poor diet that he or she has trouble learning in school - then that's 'blaming the victim'. When the proposed benefit levels of new welfare legislation will still be below the federally established poverty level of \$5,500 for a family of four, and will be grossly below the Labor Department's 'minimum but adequate' budget of \$9,700 per year for the same family, then we feel that the blame belongs on that society, and not on the individuals who suffer in it.

For these reasons and for reasons more complicated and more poignant which we haven't even begun to mention in this essay but which surely and painfully exist for too many people in this society, we hope that our mural continues that dialogue of shifting the blame to where it really belongs - not on the sufferers, not on the 'victims', but on the institutions and society who haven't planned, who are unfairly managed and who don't assure the basic necessities of life to all the individuals within that society. When a society is made so that these basic necessities of food, shelter, clothing, educational opportunities, jobs, and justice are not assured to everyone in that society, then the whole society suffers, not just those who feel the immediate and specific deprivations. When people must devote their lives to just surviving, and have no energy or time or ability to live out their potential, then their society suffers the loss of the richness they could have offered to it. Our outrage now is against this unnecessary suffering, against this injustice, and our intention in making this mural is to continue speaking out against this injustice and for the potential fulfillment of individuals which is lost as a result.

We have learned from our experiences working in the community as