

## New Haven, Conn., Welfare Mural

Since 1976 over fifty murals have been painted in New Haven, mostly with CETA funds for the unemployed.

New Haven artists Terry Lennox and Ruth Resnick have, between them, supervised over half of those murals, as CETA employees working with neighborhood groups and in the summer youth programs. Theirs is an all too familiar story- that of skilled artists using their art to build community identity and pride. Often such artists live at much less than acceptable poverty standards themselves, while expending vast amounts of energy and time.

By March of 1977, Ruth Resnick and Terry Lennox had decided it was time for their own professional development as artists. They applied for a grant from the Connecticut Commission on the Arts for painting three murals in New Haven, that would combine what they had learned.

States Ms. Resnick;

"We were aware of the large population of New Haven in need of state and federal assistance. We wanted to paint murals in the most neglected of agencies, like The Welfare Department, which had an institutional green wall which showed the shoulder and hand marks of hundreds of thousands of people as they waited. We wanted to paint a mural that does not blame the sufferers, but includes the staff as well as the recipients. Our proposal was for a mural six feet tall and seventy feet long, that stretched from the front waiting area through a walkway and into the work area of the Welfare Department staff."

The Connecticut Commission on the Arts thought their idea was a good one, but that local interests ought to cough up the salaries of the artists for the one year project. The Commission's job, after all is to foster local, continuing support for the Arts.

"The Catch 22 of this otherwise fine philosophy," says artist Terry Lennox, "is that our public consists of the unemployed and underemployed people of New Haven." But, fortunately New Haven Mayor Frank Logue and CETA Manpower Administrator Tom Corso had the vision and the guts to help write a new proposal, which when funded in July of 1977, matched the \$3,385 from the Connecticut Commission on the



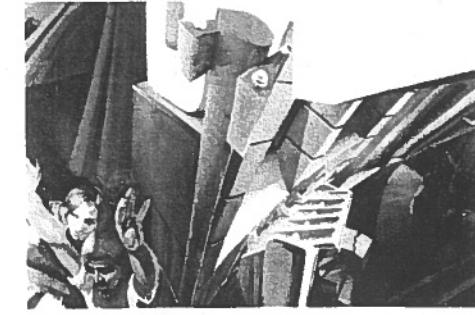
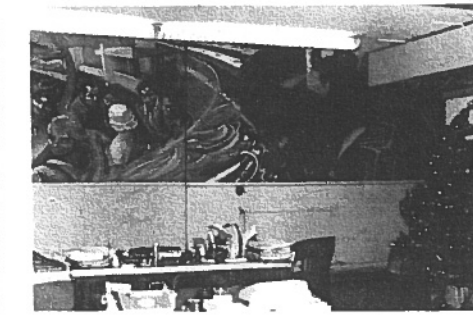
Terry Lennox  
and Ruth Resnick  
at work.  
Photo by Virginia  
Blaisdell,  
New Haven Advocate

Arts for supplies and materials with better than \$16,000. for the two artists salaries (CETA). Legal assistance was donated by the Corporation Council of the City, Susan Johnson, and the City Planning Office, Zoning Department, Building Department, Department of Public Works, Board of Education, Fire Department, and other Manpower Offices eventually all got into the act.

Not content with just painting their mural, artists Resnick and Lennox held a Mural-in-Progress public exhibition of pastel drawings for the proposed mural which lasted three months. During this time, they got the Welfare Department workers involved in the discussions, and the result was that portraits of many of the staff appear in the mural!

There would be three panels-

1. LOBBY (Left) PANEL was designated by the artists to celebrate the improvement of neighborhoods and their own lives, to show the joy of achievement, celebrate work toward civil and human rights, justice and dignity; to celebrate local culture, family and society unity.
2. WALKWAY (Center) PANEL would say NO to the myth that most welfare recipients do not want to work, stop blaming the victims, look instead to the priorities of our society, communicate the feeling of hopelessness during poverty, acknowledge the justification of anger against the cycle of poverty and discrimination, and to focus on pride, incentive, and inventiveness as strengths for change.
3. STAFF OFFICE (Right) PANEL visualized a society where people of different races and heritages enjoy their uniqueness, unity of human needs, and realization of potential through rights, the vote, jobs, housing, education, health and social care.



Welfare Office staff during painting. Virginia Blaisdell



Such an ambitious project took longer than the original nine months to incubate and be born. It took more like twelve, with additional backing from CETA funds.

Now they are done. Terry Lennox and Ruth Resnick feel the mural speaks for itself. It helped the Welfare Department get some new furniture. There is a bit more courtesy and understanding in the air there now.

If you don't believe us, the artists invite you to go and see for yourself. The mural, as yet untitled, can be seen in the New Haven City Welfare Department at 196 Bassett Street.

The artists have been invited to design a book cover for a major Boston publisher, using a mural, as a result of this project. We hope they will, like many other CETA assisted artists who have been "discovered" by state arts commissions and other foundations, be found among the best known American artists of the 80's.

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