

2 Artists Battle City Hall To Get Mural Uncovered

By ANGELA D. CHATMAN
Staff Reporter

A year ago, two artists hired by the city under the federal Comprehensive Employment and Training Act began a mural for the walls of the Welfare Department's Bassett Street offices.

Ruth Resnick and Terry Lennox worked on the project from March 1978 until early February when the mural — depicting in warm earth tones and bright blues and greens the poor and workers in the office — was unveiled. The artists' goal was to create a positive symbol for the office and its clients.

But just five weeks after its unveiling, the mural is damaged and faces the possibility of being blocked from public view.

A three-window, wood and plaster-board partition installed last week effectively cut off the view of the mural. That partition, built by young people in

an apprenticeship program, stopped midway along the mural and is anchored in a portion of the wall covered by the mural.

The partition was removed by early Monday, the day the artists first saw the new construction. But the matter has not been resolved and won't be until the artists are sure the work always will be protected.

Complaints began as soon as the partition was built. One person asked CETA administrator Thomas S. Corso to stop construction of the partition and give the artists, who were on vacation when the work began, the right to review any construction affecting the 6-by-70-foot mural.

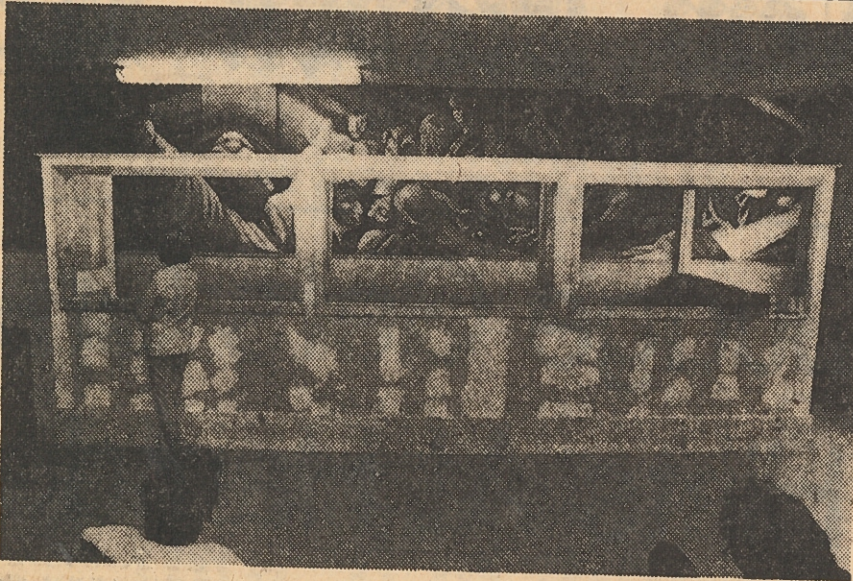
At the same time, welfare administrators last week learned that clients were dissatisfied because the partition obstructed their view of the mural.

Welfare officials made plans to re-

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When artists Ruth Resnick, left, and Terry Lennox entered the Welfare Department's Bassett Street office Monday, they viewed, for the first time, the partition which had been built in front of their mural. The upper portion had already been removed. (Staff Photos by Michael O'Brien)



The construction of a partition blocking the mural in the city Welfare Department office has angered the artists and upset people in the office. City officials say the top of the partition will come down soon. (Staff Photo by Gene Gorlick)

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place the top portion of the partition with a plexiglas partition suspended on two-inch-square steel posts through which clients can see the work, according to deputy welfare Director Carlton Boyd. Corso, however, insists that any plans affecting the mural must be approved by the artists, who met at the welfare office Monday with members of the staff and representatives of Ventures, the group constructing the partition.

The artists will meet again Thursday with Welfare Director Leota Tucker and her staff to determine what steps the department will take to protect the mural in the future.

"We are negotiating a lease for protection of the mural," said Ms. Lennox, one of the artists.

"We don't want to infringe on the staff's rights. On the other hand, we do feel insulted and angry that it (the partition) did go up," said Ms. Lennox. She expressed concern that neither she nor Ms. Resnick had been notified about the petition.

"We talked to some workers," she went on. "Some were outraged (by the partition) and some feel more secure."

She said neither she nor her partner favor the use of plexiglas in front of the mural.

"When we first heard about (the partition)," said Ms. Resnick, "we thought it was a slap in the face." She complained that the mural should not have been treated as "just another wall," and questioned why she and her partner were not consulted at first.

She expressed appreciation that the partition would be changed to permit people to see the mural, and said she is pleased about the public outcry in support of it.

Ms. Resnick added she hopes Corso's



The mural, on which the artists worked for a full year, was damaged when screws were used to attach the partition to the wall.

directive giving Ms. Lennox and her a say on anything affecting the mural will become general policy for other works of art in the city.

Boyd said the welfare office also is interested in making sure the mural is in view of everyone who comes into the office.

"We're trying to make this a more people-oriented office," he said. The artists believe the best way to keep the office people-oriented is by not putting up a partition.

