

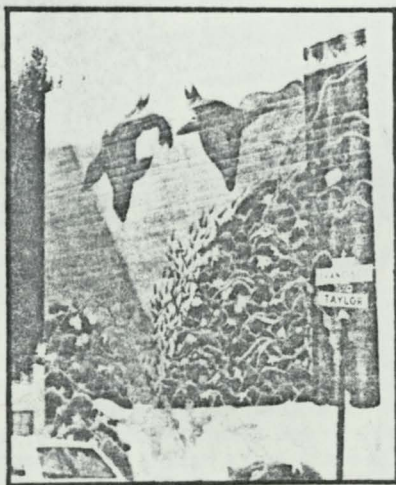
UNITED STATES

Bay Area

Bumper Crop of Murals in San Francisco

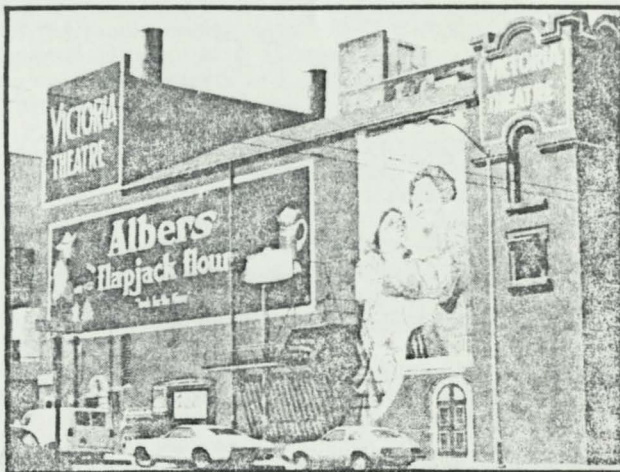
In San Francisco, 1981-82 may be remembered as a banner year for community murals. In many sections of the city, murals have been painted, often the fruits of several years of support work by artists and community groups. Many have been funded out of some \$100,000 in neighborhood Initiated Improvements Grants from the Office of Community Development, which the city's Mural Resource Center has finally been in a position to secure and administer a portion of for murals. Meanwhile, when the impasse over a viable contract between muralists and the city (*Community Murals*, Fall 1981) was broken and resolved in the muralists' favor, painting was able to begin on several previously deadlocked projects.

Among those then able to be painted was the wall facing Stockton Street in the Ping Yuen Housing Development. Josie Grant, who had painted five other murals in the Ping Yuen projects, first applied for an N.I.I.P. grant for this wall in 1979 as she was about to leave a five-year CETA funded position as a muralist and art teacher. While Ping Yuen's gardener had suggested the "Eight Immortals" and Chinese Zodiac symbols that appear in her earlier murals, Josie decided on the theme of t'ai chi postures (for their visually suggestive names, like "carry tiger back to mountain") for this 20' x 160' wall. Opposition had been voiced by members of the San Francisco Art Commission's Visual Arts Committee (who must approve city-funded projects) who felt it was inappropriate for a non-Chinese to paint that subject matter in that Chinese neighborhood. In her defense Mr. Lee of the Chinese Tenants Association said "Nobody paints the old Chinese style in Chinatown any more except Josie Grant". She has applied for funding for one more mural in Ping Yuen, this one portraying the "Monkey King" from Chinese Opera, protector of households.



COMMUNITY MURALS MAGAZINE/FALL 1982

In North Beach Housing Project a mural of the California coast's frolicking seals and underwater life was completed by Kim Sites, who laid the groundwork for this project with the housing project's tenants while she was working under CETA funding in 1980.



North Mission Association Organizer Victor Miller laughs as he recounts how the neighborhood association chose muralists for four spaces along 16th street to be funded by an N.I.I.P. grant from O.C.D. Tales of lost slides, heated tempers, impatience with the machinery of city funding, breakdowns of continuity as neighborhood residents dropped in and out of the choosing procedure and last-minute decisions by the committee in the overheated back room of a 16th St. cafe are his recollections of a process in that neighborhood that began in fall 1980 when a dozen sites were first screened for suitability. While community decisions (and their implementation) are not always simple things, in this case the results justify the struggle. Of 16th street's four murals funded, two are completed and two on the way.

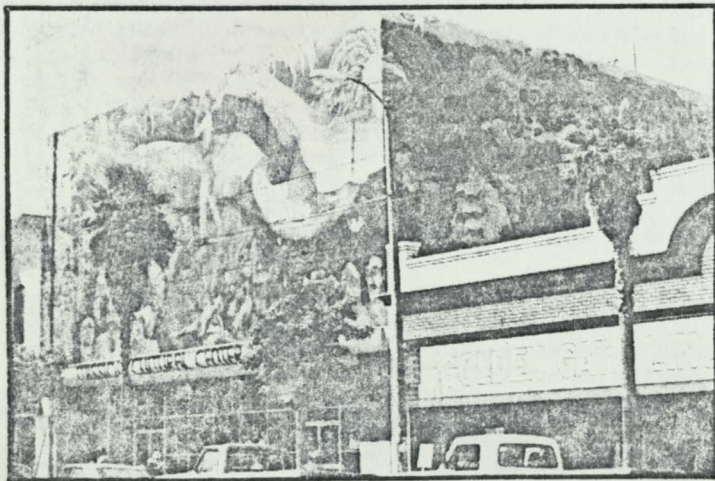
On the side of the community-oriented Victoria Theatre Claire Josephson and Monica Armstrong painted a pair of embracing young lovers in a style reminiscent of a Mexican movie poster of the 1940's, except using modern Mission District teenagers as models (in a photo session prior to painting the image the kids joked about how the girl's boyfriend would like to see her with his buddy in a clinch three stories high!). Beside it a neighborhood sign-painting company restored a painted billboard from the 1920's.

A smaller mural on the same "entertainment strip" on 16th street of small restaurants, neighborhood bars and theaters was painted by Mike Mosher, depicting a neighborhood professional baseball team of the 1920's and an amusement park of the 1880's that played and stood a couple blocks from that site. Soon to be installed are two murals on landscape themes by John Rampley and Cynthia Grace, being painted on plywood panels.



The front of Mission Cultural Center, the San Francisco Art Commission's Neighborhood Arts Program's multipurpose center at 2868 Mission Street oriented towards the needs and interests of the Mission's large Latino community, has just been decorated with a mural by Carlos Loarca, Manuel Villamor and Betsie Miller-Kunz, all Mission-based artists. The Center's jaguar symbol, a figure with a feathered headdress and other Aztec/Maya motifs exists beside melancholy modern campesinos, campesinas and the cadejos — dogs of Mexican folklore that lead drunks home to safety that have figured in Carlos' easel paintings. Skeletons dance while other musicians and dancers evoke the activities and classes going on inside the Center. The mural's purples, steaming greens and fleshy waves of red and orange attract the eye to the Cultural Center even on this busy street.

The minipark on 24th street between Bryant and York in the Mission has contained several murals since 1974 but some had become seriously graffiti damaged, unpopular and of dubious aesthetic distinction in the eyes of the neighborhood. On one such wall a new mural has been painted by Miguel Ventura Rios along with Chris Velásquez, "dedicated to the memory of Maria Martínez" — a long time community activist in the Mission District who died earlier this year — and "also to the mothers and children of the world".



Doves of peace fly and a film strip of an astronaut ripples above the heads of a unified and strong sampling of La Raza that observes the mural's lesson illustrated in massive building blocks: A is for Aztec, one heritage of the Latino people, showing the carved Quetzalcoatl of the temples; B is for Bomb, the threat of the atomic ones threatening all life on the planet, while C is for literate and healthy Children, everybody's hope. Upon its completion Rios was awarded the Citizen's Certificate of Merit

from the City of San Francisco, and funding has also been provided for the restoration of his earlier mural of indigenous Mesoamerican life, just across from his recently completed mural.

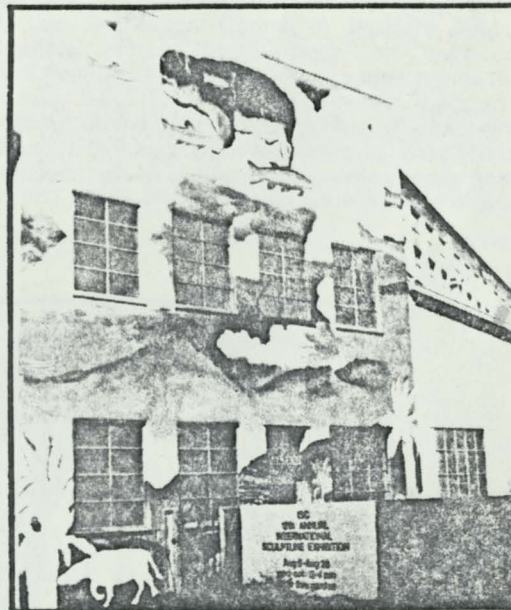
Along the back of the park Emmanuel Montoya has begun a mural on three walls (one the back of a three-story apartment building, that will show, in illusionistic windows, domestic scenes typical of the neighborhood. Clean new plywood panels to replace old ones have been installed and primed.

The new 24th Street minipark murals represent the culmination of a campaign by interested parties in the neighborhood to correct and improve past beautification efforts. Replacing a hodgepodge of murals with a more unified design, leaving up the ones they have lived well with, the visual impact of the minipark site has grown along with the mural consciousness of the neighborhood.

At Folsom Playground, Folsom at 21st Street, Ray Patlan directed a project resulting in a mural on the back wall of the tennis courts, with "VARRIO FOLSOM" in monumental letters, unity handshakes, sports, flags, classic cars and symbols of San Francisco. (See adjacent article.)

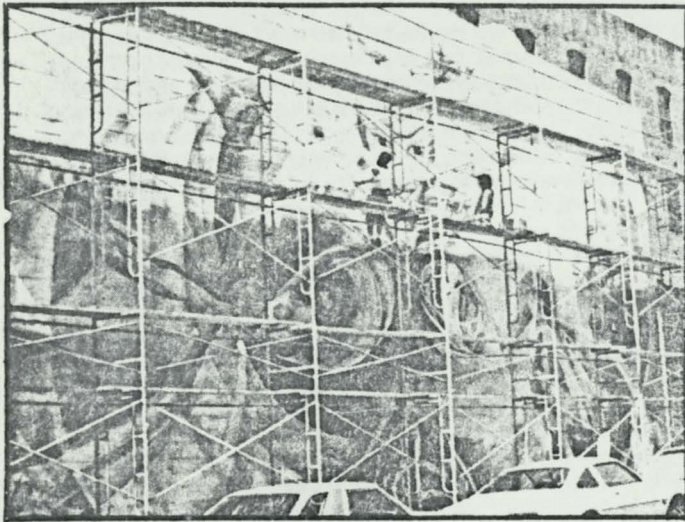
Fran Valesco has completed two prominent outdoor murals in the city in 1982. The first, of desert plants with a border of Mayan Motifs representing the passage of time, is on a 10' x 60' wall outside St. John's School. The school, students and neighborhood were all supportive and helpful in the painting process; the only problems encountered were technical ones, where an oil base primer has hopefully checked an efflorescence that appeared on the cinder block surface.

Her second mural commands a two-story wall on the South of Market Cultural Center. The neighborhood consists of small industrial/warehouses/commercial concerns, Pilipino and Vietnamese families, and artists lofts, so Fran thought a "West meets East" theme was appropriate. The American Bison and trout hover in a western sky above a water buffalo and tropical plants in a composition which is suggestive of some of Fran's own silkscreen prints. Funded by an N.I.I.P. grant, painting help included teenagers working in the city's Summer Youth Program, friends, and volunteers from the Sunset Mural Workshop across town.



- 8 Two other murals similarly funded in the South of Market area are Judy Jamerson's rainbow in the playground of the Pilipino Educational Center, and Bob Gayton's Peoples' Park mural on Sixth street. The controversial People's Park ("Wino Park"), provided by Glide Memorial Church, faces an uncertain future (might the fact that it's on prime downtown real estate have something to do with it... ?) so it is fortunate that the inspirational images of men involved in careers and community are painted on panels attached to the wall. A questionnaire circulated in the area asked the park users what they would like to see on the wall before designing and painting began.

In San Francisco County Jail Number Two, in the Hall of Justice on Bryant street, Mike Mosher completed a four-wall cycle of images sketched inside and outside jail in a project initiated by Deputy Andrea Elukovich of the Sheriff's Department, organizer of its Jail Arts Program.



Just across Gallagher street from the housing for elderly that was wrested as a concession from the developers of the Yerba Buena district (destroyers of the Yerba Buena neighborhood in which many seniors lived) Claire Josephson, Selma Brown and Johanna Poethig are completing a 32' x 40' allegory of life's more natural transformations on the side of Saint Patrick's Day Care Center. The working title is "Cycles of Life" or "Elements of Infinity" or "Which Came First...?" — there are both egg forms and a chicken in it — depending on which artist is asked. A tree of life at the center of the mural is clustered with faces that represent successive generations.

The mural now covering three sides of the Ortega Branch of the S.F. Public Library is the latest for the Sunset Mural Workshop, a group of artists living in the Sunset district assembled in 1978 by Henry Sultan and Julia Marshall.

The workshop evolved out of an initiative six years ago by the Sunset Community Education Center of the S.F. Unified School District to find artists for a 225' long wall on Ortega St. in front of the Library and Center, and painted its "History of the Sunset" there with its all-volunteer team. Shortly after its dedication in 1979 they began soliciting funds for the Library murals from private sources, with funding coming from the Zellerbach Family Fund, Chevron USA, the Friends of the San Francisco Public Library and the Noriega Merchants Association. Though over \$6,000 was raised, the entire Library project — which includes two walls yet unpainted, a children's mural and a staircase connecting the "History" mural with the Library's — costs are running to nearly \$10,000, so a novel fundraising scheme was hatched. For a \$25 donation via Friends of the Library a benefactor's name can be listed as publisher (vanity publication... ?) on his or her favorite book, painted in the large bookshelves that are a major part of the mural on the wall of the Library visible from Ortega street. The murals' visual interplay "works beautifully" according to Ortega Librarian Mary Landgraf, who explains how each wall's theme reinforces the passerby's perspective of the site: at the east entrance, where children are visible in the nearby playground and A.P. Giannini Middle School, a swirling "mandala" filled with active youth was painted. From the north, where the inside of the Library is visible through large windows, the painted shelves filled with the mural's supporters' favorite books; and from on the west wall, where the ocean wind is at your back, you see a blue sky over the dunes filled with intricate kites that were painted on plywood then affixed to the wall. Other members of the Sunset Mural Workshop are Jim Cotter, Rob Langenbrunner and Paul Kensinger.

At other Branch Libraries around town, Arch Williams is completing his mural wrapping around the playground side in Bernal Heights on Cortland street and Margo Bors has painted a small mural depicting events in the history and growth of the neighborhood at the Potrero Hill Branch on 20th at Arkansas streets.

Elsewhere in San Francisco Jim Dong continues work on a mural on Japantown Community Center, visible to cars travelling west on Sutter street. Betsey Green has a project at Florence Martin Children's Center on Page St. in the Western Addition, and Patricia Rodríguez will soon paint upon the San Francisco Women's Building. At the Joseph P. Lee Recreation Center in Hunters Point, Dewey Crumpler, whose "The Fire Next Time" mural covers the front, has begun an outdoor wall which will be the largest mural in San Francisco when complete. It's been a year of accomplishment in this city for muralists as a whole to be proud of, with new work appearing in many diverse neighborhoods, which will further give inspirations and impetus to next year's struggles and satisfactions of public art▲

Mike Mosher

Photos: Martha Edwards

