

art workers NEWSLETTER

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A TRIBUTE TO
KEN DEWEY
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Director of MOMA Richard Oldenburg expressing himself: "Stuff it"

PASTA and MOMA stuck in sauce

Since last July, the bargaining committee of the Professional and Administrative Staff Association of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City has been negotiating for a new contract for its members.

Richard Oldenburg, acting director of the museum, says there is a deficit of \$1.3 million and that it is unable to meet the association's demands. Susan Bertram, chairman of the bargaining committee as Pasta-Moma for short, and other members of the bargaining committee were interviewed by a reporter for The Art Workers Newsletter.

Herewith are excerpts from the tape-recorded interview, giving Pasta-Moma's side of the story:

"At this point we are only \$20,000 apart and we feel that this is a small amount of money to be holding up the agreement with the board of trustees, which has 40 members. The members of Pasta-Moma do not wish to be involved in any sort of job action or strike, if possible.

Agreement on Fringes

"Agreement has been reached on fringe benefits: pension, health care, maternity benefits, and a re-evaluation of certain departments, such as the Conservation Department, which has been grossly underpaid for many years. That department is involved in all traveling shows and its members are as important to the museum as the curators. They make \$10,000 a year. In other museums, these jobs pay \$20,000.

"The conservators (members of the museum's professional staff) perform services for the board of trustees that are invaluable. Private collections are kept in an impeccable condition. But the public—through the New York State Council for the Arts—and the staff are asked to subsidize these private collections.

"One of the problems was to go over the job structure and to come up with a realistic titling of jobs, rather than 500 or so 'assistant' categories that exist now with a salary structure that ranges

from \$5,700 to \$10,000.

"Pasta-Moma did not receive information on these job categories in time for the negotiations. One of the major problems now is to get an equalization of salaries for comparable job responsibilities, across departmental lines. Management failed to come up with the letter stating the title structure in time for the negotiations.

"They have come up with titles for the curatorial staff, such as curatorial assistant, assistant curator, associate curator and full curator. But they have not come up with rational titles and salaries in the Administrative Department.

"All of our demands have been accepted as rational and would have been supported (by the trustees) if they had the money. The same figure that was used during a previous strike has again been mentioned: a deficit of \$1.3 million. But when the annual report came out the true deficit figure envisaged was \$800,000—a half-million less than \$1.3 million.

"The State Council of the Arts has given the museum \$280,000 for 1971. The annual report of the museum showed contributions of \$400,000—which seems to be an amazingly low figure, when one considers the sta-

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Artists of SoHo Face Crisis

Real Estate Speculation, Gallery Invasion,
Sports Palace, Greed of Some Artists
Threaten Community's Existence

by GERHART LIEBMANN

Like their comrades at Westbeth the artists of SoHo are in trouble. Their fight for legalized living/working quarters began three and a half years ago and by now their lofts have been protected by zoning for over a year and a half. The first flush is over and hard facts are setting in, as everyone knew they would.

Success and failure are balancing out but it is a precarious balance. It can be tipped either towards failure or success. Unless the City of New York can find men and money to enforce existing, carefully worked out codes, the balance will tip towards failure.

During the euphoria that accompanied the final, successful public hearing of the Planning Commission that created SoHo, Chairman Donald Elliot made a sober

New Service for MEMBERS

The United Buying Service, now in its 12th year, services some 800 organizations representing more than two million members in Greater New York.

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Merchandise available through United Buying Service includes appliances, furniture, photographic equipment, and luggage, etc.

U.B.S. also has an optical-hearing aid plan. Through it, members, employees, and their families may purchase eyeglasses at the fixed contract price of \$14.75, including the optometric examination necessary to prescribe the glasses.

To participate in this buying service program, all you have to do is become a member of NAWC by sending \$5.00 to our office.

pronouncement. He said that SoHo was the first neighborhood to be created in New York that would be asked to police itself. It would have to police itself in order to work and on its success hinged the fate of artist housing throughout the rest of the city. Those who had worked to create SoHo accepted the challenge: the SoHo Artists Association, Planning Board 2 and the Citizens for Artist Housing among others.

Don Elliot forgot to lecture the City Buildings Department on their part of the pact. While SoHo would police itself, the actual enforcement of the building codes and zoning ordinance would be in other hands. The artists wanted no part of serving summonses. It was hard enough to blow the whistle on wrong-doers without making like policemen. It was the Buildings Department's duty to enforce the law. And there is the problem.

Cassandras predicted that upon legalization the vultures would gather. Landlords, boutique vendors and real es-

tate developers moved in on what the idealism and hard work of others had created. Rents in SoHo went up and buildings passed from hand to hand, adding profit to sky-rocketing profit. For example: a building at West Broadway and Prince St. sold three times in two years. Across the street an artist received \$3,000 in fixture money only to have the landlord demand \$1,000 of it or he would not let the deal go through. The landlord not only got the fixtures as a building improvement, a higher rent because of the improvements BUT one grand on top of that.

A well-known real estate tycoon, the pet of NEW YORK Magazine, who has been touted twice in its pages as God-sent to artists for his outdoor sculpture shows, pays for these shows by getting \$400 rent from a space 25 by 80 feet with all improvements by the artists.

Artists Vs. Artists

Sadly, the artists discovered that it wasn't only the established old-time enemy they had so often fought who were the vultures. With the usual complaints against landlords the SoHo Artists Association found almost half the complaints brought to their attention to be against other artists.

The matter of fixture money has always been a sore point. Artists could sell a sink and a toilet to another artist for astronomical sums. It was a refinement on key money. It had always been that way because lofts were in such demand that artists just did not dare question the sums involved. He could pass it on when he gave up the loft, with a bit added, too. To this day neither the SoHo Artists Association or the Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts have been able to get artists to use a lease form

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Some unwinvited "rip-off" artists in SOHO

CITY WALLS



photos by Joel Witkin

Nine outdoor wall paintings in the New York metropolitan area have recently been completed under the administrative guidance of two public art organizations: City Walls, Inc. and Cityarts Workshop. The murals vary in style, from a community-rendered depiction of the immigration of Asians to America to a highly professional artist's use of color and geometric line.

City Walls, a non-profit public art organization responsible for executing over 25 wall paintings in New York, has announced the completion of two more walls in Manhattan — an 80-foot multi-colored landscape by Mel Pekarsky at Houston and Crosby Sts., and a brightly colored geometric painting by Richard Anuszkiewicz on the south wall of the WYCA at 50th St. and Eighth Ave.

Both wall paintings are highly visible and evoke striking contrasts to the areas in which they are located. The murals were executed by professional sign-painters and riggers working from the artists' original designs, and were made possible through a matching grant from the National Endowment and from individuals and private foundations.

Three other murals were completed with the administrative assistance of Cityarts Workshop, a publicly-funded community arts program. Under the direction of Alan O'Kada, a wall at Catherine St. and the Bowery was completed by residents (aged 18-23) from the Asian community who participated in the planning, designing and painting stages of the project.

Standing amidst the restaurants, shops and urban-renewal sites in Chinatown, the mural represents the contributions the Asian community has made to the growth of America. Another recently completed mural, situated on the corner of Grand and Pitt Sts., was executed by three dozen members of the Henry Street Settlement Playhouse.

Arnold Belkin's wall painting, "Against Domestic Colonialism," which stands on a

six-story wall facing a park on 46th St. between 9th and 10th Ave., is another project from Cityarts. Working with a team of 10 youths from Urban Corps and Neighborhood Youth Corps, Belkin executed the work during a 14-week period from July to September, 1972. The mural is figurative in style and political in content, its theme being community control. A multi-racial group of people bearing placards reading "THE NEIGHBORHOODS ARE FOR PEOPLE; NOT BIG BUSINESS" and "WE THE PEOPLE DEMAND CONTROL OF OUR COMMUNITIES," are shown

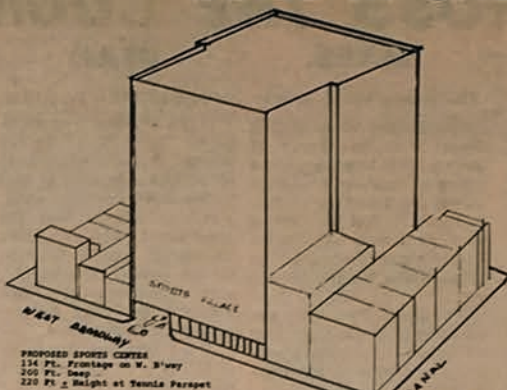


holding up a model of a well-planned neighborhood of the future as an alternative to the high-rise buildings, drugs and poverty which now exist. The 4,000 sq. ft. mural was proposed by architect Michael Altschuler as part of a City-sponsored project to re-build the 46th St. park. Funds were donated by McGraw-Hill.

The New Jersey State Council on the Arts and the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs worked closely with City Walls, Inc. in initiating New Jersey's first City Walls program. Mel Pekarsky, Vice-President of City Walls, acted as consultant in the creation of four murals in Jersey City. Darby Bannard, Richard Anuszkiewicz, Clarence Carter and Reginald Neal have created wall paintings for the central business district in Jersey City as part of the "Jersey City Awake" program of cultural events. The four artists chosen for the wall projects are all residents of New Jersey.

While City Walls and Cityarts may explore different directions of public art, both organizations are striving for essentially the same goal — to break down the barriers of art (e.g. galleries, museums), and to enhance the urban environment. Cityarts stresses community-involvement, leaning toward figurative murals which reflect the attitudes of the people, whereas City Walls dedicates itself to vivifying the urban landscape and allowing artists to explore their range of activity.

SoHo in Crises



Perspective View of Existing Block with Proposed Sports Center
cont. from pg 1 Proposed 20-story Sports Palace

which would make the landlords responsible for a bath and kitchen, for once and all.

Now that living in SoHo was legal artists found a new way to bilk other artists. An Israeli sculptor, for example, walked away with a building from those artists who had found the building, negotiated with the owner and assembled the artist-buyers. The sculptor was the last artist needed to complete the roster. The night before closing he slipped off and offered the owner \$10,000 more for the property. He got the building — to hell with the founding artists — and later sold it for almost \$100,000 profit.

An English artist has found it lucrative to take over buildings and kick out the artists who had been there for years. When the State Attorney General put a stop to his efforts to co-op

this artist invented a legal tangle whereby he wins all. In his bid to become a real estate tycoon, he has threatened the existence of the Paula Cooper Gallery, the pioneer gallery of SoHo.

Artists have sold their co-ops for large profits. An artist in a West Broadway co-op found that unemployment insurance didn't cover his maintenance, so he sold his loft for a \$11,000 profit. Subleasing a loft is a fine way to pay an artist to live abroad. A Wooster Street co-op is plagued by absentee owners who are never there to share the troubles of running a building. Chop up a loft into small studios, rent them out and live in Pennsylvania. It's a good life. The artist's image of himself as an idealist needs a bit of re-vamping. The SoHo Artist Association advises, whenever

dealing with another artist, get everything down in writing.

Complaints against other artists in SoHo, however, are growing fewer. Perhaps it's because SoHo is the first community of artists where their numbers are large enough and the ambiance is such that they are beginning to learn about such things as leases, agreements, lawyers and the like.

Some Good, Some Bad

SoHo has had many birth pangs. Experiments were tried and discarded. What seemed such a good idea, arranging tours of lofts where an art buying public could deal directly with the artist, flopped badly. Those on the tours were more interested in the House and Gardens aspect than in buying art. Gallery tours continue but anyone requesting a loft tour of the SoHo Artists Association is told, "No thanks." They are on their own.

Rents have found a level, finally, albeit a sky-high one. The SoHo Artists Association has never been able to get a ruling from the Internal Revenue Service on whether or not living/working lofts come under Phase Two guidelines for rent increases. Actually they have had two readings; the New York office says they don't and the Washington office says they probably do. It will take a test case to find out. The artist and the Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts wearily plod on, trying to get an answer out of bureaucracy.

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alternatives to gallery system

Almost a year ago, NAWC initiated a Free Exhibition Spaces Program based on the premise that alternatives to the gallery system would provide for a greater flow of artwork with less expense to the artist. Since then, NAWC has been contacting people at possible exhibition locations (banks, offices, theatres, etc.) and trying to find artists to exhibit at these locations. So far, we have interested the managers of a few choice spaces, including an executive luncheon club, two universities and several banks and theatres. And we have helped in making arrangements for several exhibits. But we have only begun work on this program. We need artists who are willing to become "involved" in changing the structure of the present exhibition system.

Now that the gallery season has begun anew, it is time to put the art scene in its proper perspective. The essential part of the "art world" are the artists — us — you and me and many others. While galleries may open and fold and art critics may speak and then become outdated, valid artwork remains as the living statement. Without the artist, no one could get rich on art; and yet few artists become affluent. Most of us face a poverty existence

or must moonlight at other work in order to support ourselves.

At present, galleries are the main outlet for artwork yet only a minority of artists are involved with a gallery, and only a minority of the public patronizes these galleries. This limitation alone has fostered the false notion that valid art is created by a select few for a select audience. And galleries nourish this notion because it reinforces their elitism and their high profits. Under this type of pressure, artists must compete with each other for the privilege of being ripped-off by a gallery.

The general public also suffers from the present elitism in art. Most people work and live in a sterile environment, feeling that galleries and museums are for the rich, and that so-called modern art is beyond their comprehension and ability to purchase. And so the gap widens as the galleries continue to look for art to excite the bored rich and the artists and the public become more resentful of their non-involvement.

NAWC's Free Exhibition Spaces Program is designed to bridge this gap by creating a greater flow of artwork into the general community.

Public exhibitions would not only give more artists a chance to exhibit and sell, but also enhance understanding and receptiveness to artwork by the general public.

The National Art Workers Community has begun a file of available, free exhibition spaces for the visual arts and the specifications of such spaces. Artists are also given advice on setting up an exhibit — such as press releases, hanging, etc. As a future project, our organization is considering the possibility of a lease/buy project. This proposed project would provide a framework for: 1) office buildings and public places to lease selected works of art; 2) opportunities for the employees or the business itself to buy artwork; and 3) arrangements for long-term payments on purchased work.

Now we need you. The program needs volunteers willing to search out and track down possible exhibition spaces; we need people who know of possible exhibition spaces to give us leads; we need volunteers to structure lease/buy proposals for interested businesses; and we need artists who want to exhibit. If you are interested in alternatives to the gallery system, please call 533-0150.

SoHo

There have been a few bright spots. The Multiple Housing Law was amended once again to ease the conversion of lofts. The Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts have been a help beyond measure. The artists have few if any harsh words for the 4th Precinct or the local Fire Department. There have been individual spats but both branches of uniformed men have the good sense to look the other way at violations that aren't downright dangerous. A good rapport has been established with Captain Manning of the Fourth Precinct, which means problems can be talked over and solved without muscle. It is another story the next level up.

The first boutiques have moved into SoHo. So far the items they sell are those hand-made, often by SoHo artists and no one has gotten too uptight. This may change as a St. Marks Place boutique has just moved in and is about to open. Where else but in a building owned by our friend, the English artist.

Galleries pop up over night and there are now three co-op galleries, an old idea being tried again. SoHo has a gallery strictly for women artists and a gallery only for North American Indians. All the galleries seem to be holding on while the art world tries to find itself once again. During the past three years of tight money someone was perhaps the Emperor had no clothes on. The public started questioning: Was this all art?

Gallery rents are still way below those of Madison Ave., which means it will take a bit longer for new galleries to go broke. It is a tough, expensive business, even in SoHo, where the costly appearances of art are not necessary. Baby buggies and shopping carts are still parked amid the art.

There are now 47 artist-owned co-ops in SoHo. Those who sold body and soul to buy into a co-op are sitting pretty. At least they control their own destiny. Taxes go up and each year the City invents new licenses and permits. It is still cheaper to own than to rent. It takes a hefty first investment and that is the stumbling block. The animosity between renters and owners grows a little less apparent, certainly less than in the founding days of SoHo, perhaps because there are not the weekly meetings of the SoHo Artists Association where the two sides could confront each other.

Best of all, the artists in the over-sized lofts are still there after legalization. This was an issue that threatened to blow SoHo apart until an agreement was reached with the Borough President's office before the Board of Estimate approval that created SoHo.

Two Different SoHos
SoHo exists on two levels, the public SoHo and the artist SoHo that meets in two



"\$1000 buys artist a two-week show" photo by S. Reiss

favorite bars. The restaurant called FOOD seems a victim of its own success. Artists stick their tongues out at Scarsdale matrons over a bowl of soup. Nightfall sends both the matrons and the factory workers back wherever they came from and the artists have SoHo to themselves and a blessed quietness.

The relations between SoHo and the neighboring Italians of South Village teeter back and forth, depending upon the latest threat to the area. The problems of one neighborhood more than likely are the problems of the other neighborhood and when the problem lies on West Broadway then the problem is obviously shared. The first good relations were cemented even more strongly when SoHo and the South Village gathered to defeat the proposed half-way house for graduates of the Women's House of Detention. The South Village had their reasons for not wanting the women and the artists had theirs, mainly a fear that the creation of a dormitory would open the door to NYU's expansion into SoHo. Lofts were hard enough to find without that.

Relations grew stronger when SoHo and the South Village gathered in a vacant store on West Broadway to laugh down Park Commissioner Heckscher's scheme to change the name West Broadway to Jackson Pollack Place. Now the Sports Palace has caused a rift between the neighborhoods that never existed before.

It seems almost a carefully

calculated rift at times. The message was sounded out loud at a public meeting at St. Alphonsus Church, "The artists get everything." The two churches of the South Village feel that anything is worth it to get sports facilities for their children. The artists of SoHo point out that it is a pie-in-the-sky promise.

Anyway, say the artists, that isn't the main point. The Sports Palace is a monster which will dwarf the neighborhoods and create a chaos of 1,000 cars traveling in what the Environmental Protection Agency calls already one of the most polluted areas of the city. Because it will cost over \$12 million any entrance fees will be far beyond the reach of artists and South Villagers alike. The suspicion grows that the Sports Palace is for Wall Street sports clubs alone.

More than that, the Sports Palace will bring everything neither neighborhood needs, expensive restaurants and other fringe commercial ventures that associate where there are so many types of money. Rents will skyrocket even more with growing land values both in SoHo and in the South Village. Developers will pick up adjacent property and to pay for the increased value rents will go up. Beware, South Village, say the artists, we are already victims of such ventures.

Unions No Help
So far it has been the artists, with a growing number of factory owners, who see the problem of growing land values. The unions whose 28,000 members work in So-

Ho have yet to be heard from. The SoHo Artist Association has tried to establish contact with unions to help them fight off developers but with no luck. Gerald Coleman, a Planning Commissioner and head of United Hatters International Union, tried to get help during a convention in Miami. So far, not a word. Industry will have to leave SoHo and some industry is already leaving because of rising rents.

It was foreseen by the founders of SoHo, especially by the City Planning Commission, that rents would rise, thereby threatening industry. To thwart this rise of rents two provisions were placed in the zoning ordinance which created SoHo. First, only certified artists could live in the area and, secondly, only in specific buildings of 3,600 square feet and under.

All very well but who enforces the code when violations are pointed out? Four buildings with specific violations were studied by the SoHo Artists Association and the Planning Board 2. They were then pointed out to the Buildings Department whose duty it is to enforce the correction of such violations. So far, not one building violation has been corrected. Over-sized buildings continue to be occupied, non-artists continue to live in these buildings and industry continues, thereby, to be kicked out for the higher rents artists bring.

While violations against zoning, that is non-artists living in buildings and buildings of oversize being occupied, continue to be ignored, building code violations are pressed against owners who are trying, with the aid of architects, to follow the letter of the building codes. Scandals are coming to light throughout the city concerning the Building Department and the bribes paid for Certificates of Occupancy. To date, not one artist-occupied building in SoHo has been granted a Certificate of Occupancy.

At a high-level meeting with officials of the City Buildings Department, these four buildings were named and a report on what is happening to the violations was requested. Those present in-

cluded the SoHo Artists Association, the Citizens for Artist Housing, the City Planning Department, the Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts and an aide from the Mayor's Office. One of them pointed out that his department had too few men to inspect violations and no money to hire more. Furthermore, he pointed out that the problem is almost unsolvable because a good lawyer can keep evictions away for years. He brandished a violation dating back to 1967 as proof. It is still not corrected.

This is the same problem that almost every committee of Planning Board 2 pointed out to Don Elliot when he met with the public to talk about his Master Plan for the City of New York. What is the good of reporting violations time and time again, asked the Chairmen of the Zoning, Landmark and Art Committees, when nothing is done to enforce their correction? Now can concerned citizens keep up their faith year after year to act as volunteers to make this city a better city?

We are beginning to see what happens when citizens find they can get no help from that huge, stuffed-up bureaucracy that is the City of New York. First they create block associations or groups of affiliated interest like the artists of SoHo and the SoHo Artists Association. This is a period of hope when they expect to use their numbers and voting powers to force attention from the City. Generally there is an initial, small success. Then comes years of nothing. Nothing but frustration.

What happens to SoHo in particular? Artists tend to pull together only in case of emergency. So far the rumble against being "boutiquized" is only a threat of breaking windows at night. If non-artists take over the lofts, if the Sports Palace is built, if rents go even higher, who is there to fight against?

But saddest of all is the realization that as SoHo goes so goes artist housing in New York City. The Planning Commission will not create another artists' area and will not threaten industry if SoHo doesn't work.

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