



SAN FRANCISCO ARTS COMMISSION

MEMORANDUM

August 20, 2009

GAVIN NEWSOM
MAYOR

LUIS R. CANCEL
DIRECTOR OF
CULTURAL AFFAIRS

To: Jewelle Gomez, President, Library Commission
CC: Luis Herrera, Director, Library Department
From: Luis R. Cancel, Director of Cultural Affairs
Re: Bernal Heights Library Mural

I wanted to address the Library Commission today on the occasion of your discussion on the future of the public mural that drapes the exterior of the Library. I apologize that I cannot attend in person.

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The staff of the Arts Commission has reviewed both the history of the mural as well as the present physical condition of the mural – I personally visited the site several months ago. The idea for the mural originated with the former Bernal librarian Ruth McGuinness, Kate Esposito a community activist, and a volunteer neighborhood group. This organizing group selected the artist Arch Williams to do the mural.

The mural design went through public review in the community and was ultimately discussed and approved by the Arts Commission in 1980, and the mural took two years to be completed.

Time has not been kind to this mural and large sections of the original design have flaked off of the building, leaving large gaps, especially along the sides and back of the building. The mural on the front of the building still retains most of the original design and can be salvaged.

The SFAC staff's recommendation to the Library Commission, and what we will recommend next month to the Visual Arts Committee of the Arts Commission, is that only the portion of the mural on the front of the building (Cortland Avenue) should be preserved and that the remaining three sides should be removed.

I do believe that there remains significant aesthetic and historical value in this communal work created by Arch Williams to recommend its conservation and restoration. The mural is indicative of a style of mural creation and community involvement that speaks well of San Francisco.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Luis R. Cancel
Director of Cultural Affairs



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SAN FRANCISCO