

## THE ALBINA MURAL PROJECT RESTORATION

### BACKGROUND:

The Albina Mural Project was a CETA funded public arts project designed for the exterior walls of the Albina Multi-Service Center, Vancouver & Alberta streets, in NE Portland. The series of 16'x20' murals (5) plus a bas relief sculpture over the entrance illustrate incidents and figures in the local and national history of Black Americans. The artists, Isaac Shamsud-Din, Henry Frisen, Chonitia Henderson, Charles Tatum and Jenny Harada, intended their work as a gift to the community. It was in such spirit that the public ceremonies at the Albina Multi-Service Center in July 1978 dedicated the murals to the community and the City and State.

In the 5 years since its completion, the murals have been a source of great pride to the community and have attracted attention "of the countless visitors to Portland from all over the U.S." - Ken Mahar - Asst. Director, Albina Multi-Service Center).

### PRESENT:

In April 1983, Selina Roberts, Executive Director of MAC, was contacted by William Nickerson, owner of the building which houses the Multi-Service Center, about the deteriorating condition of the murals. Nickerson wanted to see the murals preserved and, though the Commission had not been involved in the initial project, he thought that MAC would be concerned about the state of this public arts project. Many questions were raised as to who is responsible for the murals. This is somewhat complex. The execution of the murals was funded through CETA. The Center for Community Mental Health was the community based sponsoring organization. Their connection with the project ceased with its completion. The site was chosen because of its high visibility and the steady use by community residents. An assortment of public service agencies tenant the building and it is leased from the owner by the GSA. Though the GSA and the various public service agencies are pleased and proud to be associated with such a major art work, they neither own nor bear responsibility for the murals. Permission to place the murals at the site was requested of and given by the building's owner, William Nickerson. Nickerson was honored to have his building so chosen and was very supportive of the artists. He gave his permission with the understanding that, if the building were to change tenants or owners, the murals might have to be removed. He looked upon them as community property and claims no ownership or legal responsibility.

In the last year and a half the murals have begun to show the effects of the damp environment. The 4'x8' particle board panels which make up each 16'x20' mural are warped and, in some cases, pulling away from the framing. They are at street level and, though they were spotless for 4 years, in the last year they have been vandalized in places. Some think that this was brought on by the neglected appearance which the murals had developed. According to several contractors sent to the site by GSA, all of the panels need to be rehung. The

grid support system needs more 2"x4"s to resist the warping action of the panels. In addition, caulking, waterproofing, flashing and double the number of fastens are advised, plus repainting in many areas. Without immediate action, all concerned feel that the murals will shortly be beyond repair and that they will constitute a hazard to pedestrians.

Since no designated agency or individual had been given ownership and responsibility for the "community" murals, there was lots of genuine concern - but no one to take action on the restoration project.

#### MULTIARTS:

At a recent meeting of the MultiArts Steering Committee a request from the Humboldt Neighborhood Association (NE) to use its Neighborhood Arts funding to support restoration of one of the murals by its creator, Isaac Shamsud-Din, was reviewed in the context of all that was known about the deteriorating condition of all of the murals. The committee recommended that it use its remaining Emergency funds (\$1,800) to pay the artists, Shamsud-Din Chonitia Henderson and Henry Frisen, plus a technical coordinator to work on the restoration of all of the murals. Darryl Clegg, MultiArts Technical Assistance Coordinator (and former Documentarian for the Mural project, 1977) was asked to inform all those concerned of the committee's response and to coordinate the first phase of the effort.

MEETING: ALBINA MURAL PROJECT RESTORATION, July 7, 1983 at the Albina Human Resources Center

Attending: Lew Winchester, Exec. Director; Ken Mahar, Asst. Director, Albina Multi-Service Center; Carolyn Brown and Oper Strong, Humboldt Neighborhood Association; Henry Frisen, Chonitia Henderson Henderson, artists (Shamsud-Din was unable to attend, but was informed by Brown following the meeting and agreed to the terms) and Darryl Clegg, MAC, MultiArts.

Clegg explained the history of the project, the role of MAC and the need to organize a permanent mural preservation committee to assume present and future responsibility for the murals. He estimated that the materials and rental fees would cost about \$1,000. This sum or its equivalent in material donations would have to be raised by the restoration committee.

The Humboldt Neighborhood Association agreed to represent the community by assuming trusteeship for the murals. Their responsibilities include soliciting materials and donations and contacting a technical advisor coordinator for the restoration. The Association belongs to a NE businessmen's group and expected a great deal of cooperation from them. All future concerns related to the mural will be their responsibility. It was agreed that, in light of the action by the Steering Committee, Humboldt would be at liberty to use its Neighborhood Arts money to fund a new project.

The artists have ample time to devote to the restoration over the next 3 months. They will develop a work schedule after consulting with the technical coordinator as to the amount of time needed for the project.

The staff of the Albina Human Resources Center agreed to supply storage space and security for the materials. They also will work with the owner to have two trees which are blocking two of the murals, transplanted.

MultiArts agreed to be available as a resource to the Humboldt committee and to provide financial support to the artists once the work plan has been developed.

Besides the restoration, a placque commemorating the project artists and its community supporters, which would be affixed to the building, was also discussed.

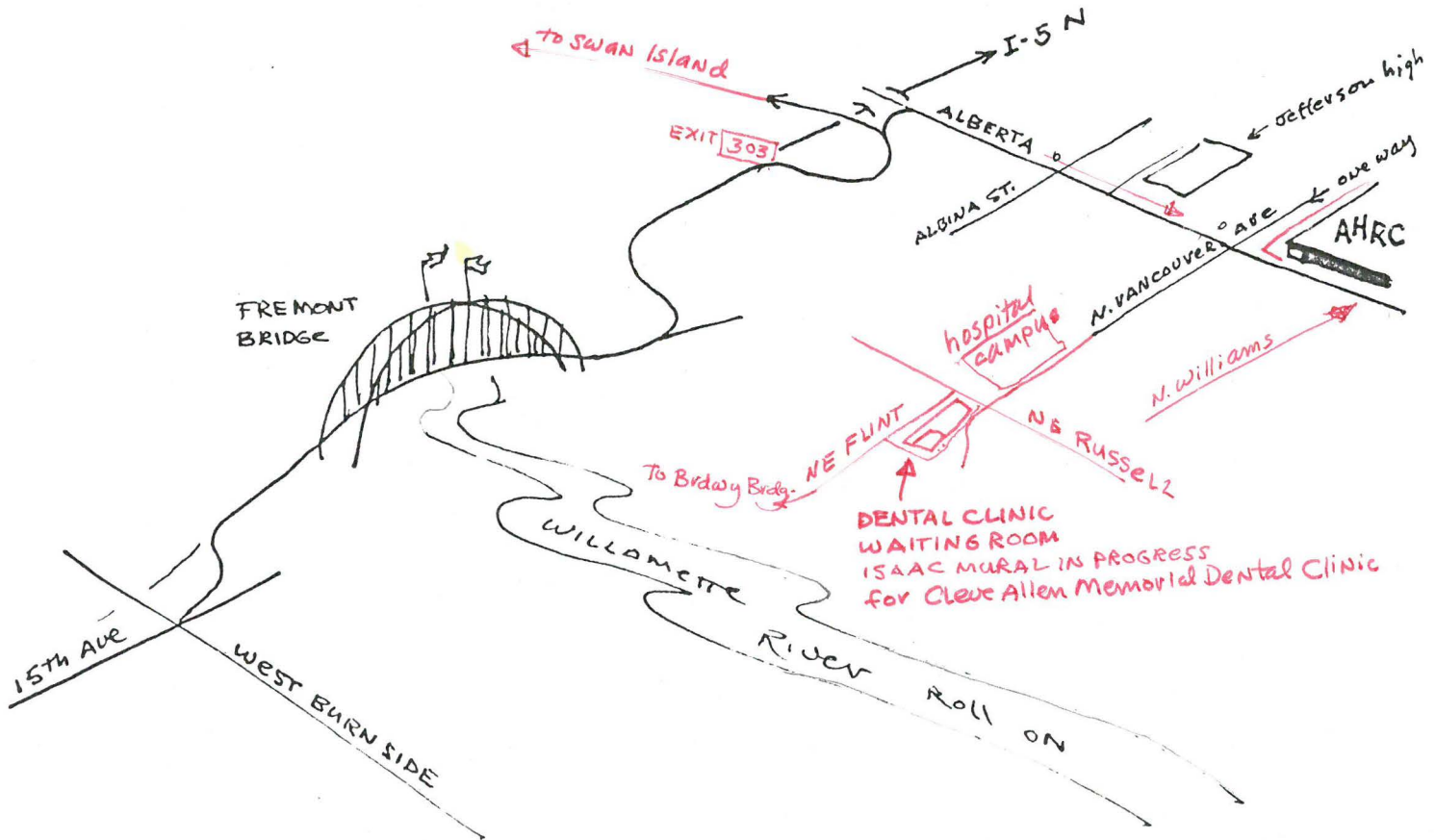
# SUNDAY IS BEST FOR SEEING OR PHOTOGRAPHING THE MURALS OF THE ALBINA MURAL PROJECT

& DENTAL CLINIC - update 4/15/81

ADDRESS: ALBINA HUMAN RESOURCES CENTER  
5022 N. VANCOUVER AT ALBERTA

THE LARGE PAINTINGS (@ 20x20) ARE CLOSE TO THE STREET, ON SATURDAY & WEEK DAYS THE STREET IS BUSY AND THE USERS OF THE BUILDING ARE PARKED AT THE CURB. A 50MM LENSE PUTS THE PHOTOGRAPHER IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STREET IN ORDER TO FRAME AN ENTIRE PAINTING.

A VERY DIRECT ROUTE FROM PORTLAND'S WEST SIDE IS OVER THE FREMONT BRIDGE TO I-5 NORTH & TAKE THE FIRST EXIT TO ALBERTA STREET. THE AHRC IS JUST ABOUT 5 OR 6 BLOCKS EAST OF THE FREEWAY.



THE OTHER ISAAC MURALS: <sup>before</sup> Since the Hospital slide you saw, are at PSU's Smith Memorial Center in stairwell at the south end of the building, between the 2nd floor (where the White & Lithman Gallery's are, & the 3rd floor. A great 1964-65 painting 14' high. 1979  
A more recent, & less important mural is in the Salvation Army Moore St. Community Center multi-purpose room at 5430 N. Moore street at Killingsworth, just a few blocks north of the AHRC site (up Williams) but only open weekdays, 9-5.