

Journal

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News of The Cultural
Council Foundation
CETA Artists Project

Board of Estimate OK's \$5.9 Million New CCF Contract

By JUDD TULLY

By late Thursday afternoon on February 8 the atmosphere in the immaculately neoclassical Board of Estimate hearing chamber on the second floor of City Hall was brimming with tension. A parade of 181 items had passed through the calendar and number 111 was finally up for consideration on second call:

No. 111

"In accordance with SECTION 349 of the Charter, submitted herewith for approval of award is a proposed contract between the Department of Employment and Cultural Council Foundation of 175 Fifth Avenue, Borough of Manhattan, in an amount not to exceed \$5,898,412.58. The term of this agreement is March 3, 1979, through September 30, 1980."

The figure \$5,898,412.58 passed through the chamber like a buzz bomb. In the secular wooden pews Cultural Council Foundation administrators in Sunday best viewed the proceedings: Sara Garretson, CCF executive director, Rochelle Slovin, CCF/CETA Artists Project Director, Wayne Karmosky, public relations director and staff members Lloyd Stevens, Joe Giordano, Ellin Burke, and Liz Thompson. Someone had left a bouquet of flowers for Item 111 and nearby the premature fragrance sat a clump of CETA artists active in the CETA Artists Organization and general boosters of a new contract. Among this group, liberally spread out on the thick carpeted steps of the rear gallery, were Nina Kuo, Susan Ortega, Anna Goth Werber, Ken Sofher, and Nitza Tufino. The artists were clutching call slips for turns at the microphone and a few were scribbling their hastily composed comments for the imposingly raised semicircular of Borough Presidents, Mayor, City Comptroller, and President of the Council.

Parliamentary procedure gave the first public speaking crack to the opposition, and when queried on how many would speak against 111, four rows of hands shot up, and it looked like midnight oil would burn before the histrionics faded.

Not to keep anyone in undue suspense, the Board of Estimate unanimously passed Item 111 after only Assistant Commissioner of Cultural Affairs Gregory Millard had spoken a positive word about it, but for those individuals who waited with baited breath, the proceedings looked like they were on a downhill run to defeat.

The upraised hands represented the New York City Renaissance Coalition for Jobs and according to a three-page press release, over 30 organiza-

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Cathryn Williams, with class at Morrisania Recreation Center, Bronx.

Sarah Wells

CCF Artists Face Changes In 1979 Project

The new CCF/CETA contract approved by the Board of Estimate provides for several fundamental changes in the project and in the concept of community service. These changes include longer residencies, longer hours of community service, and a greater emphasis on the production of actual artwork out in the communities.

Short-term assignments, such as working in a senior citizen center once a week for three months, will be eliminated. Instead, artists will work in long-term residencies that will last anywhere from six or seven months (for renewed artists) to a year or 18 months for newly hired CETA artists. (The new contract runs from March 5, 1979, until Sept. 4, 1980.) Artists will work in two kinds of residencies—community residencies with up to five artists assigned to a local arts organization, and individual residencies providing for the placement of one artist in an organization for periods up to 18 months. Both community and individual residencies may include visual, literary, and performing artists. Job content will be altered too from being classroom-oriented to being

product-oriented. It means that, although teaching may still be a part of a community assignment for a painter, the main objective will be the production of art.

Artists not in residencies will work in specialized teams which reflect the growing demand for specific art products such as graphics and design, neighborhood histories, and large scale works of public art. Artists from different disciplines will be assigned to teams for the entire year and will be placed individually or in full teams as each job situation requires. Each team will function in a separate area including public art, documentation and neighborhood awareness, exhibition services, graphics and illustrative design, and literary works. Requests for services will be handled on a first-come, first-served basis except for public art projects which will be reviewed quarterly by a panel of art experts.

The new contract also provides for a performance ensemble of artists at Lincoln Center.

All artists will work a 35-hour week, which includes one full day off each week for artist-initiated time plus one half a day every two weeks for pay day and project meetings. This means, in effect, about 26 hours of community time each week. There will be a total of 325 artists in the project, including about 210 artists carried over from 1978 and 115 new artists. The figure of 325 artists includes 220 with CCF, 40 with the Association of Hispanic Arts, 30 with the Black Theatre Alliance, 30 with the Foundation for Independent Video and Film, and five with the Puerto Rican Dance Theatre.

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Board of Estimate . . .

tions—from the Alonzo Players Theatre to Rockaway Arts for progress—were on hand to urge the Board to delay their vote on Item 111 until “certain gross inequities are corrected.” Gross inequity number one, according to the coalition, was that not a single Black or Puerto Rican organization had been selected to be a prime contractor for any of the 650 plus slots of CETA Title VI funds. In effect, the Coalition was telling the Board they had been hoodwinked by one smoke-filled backroom, and that a predominately white organization, CCF, had spirited away 50% of all CETA artist jobs.

A dozen speakers hurled impassioned broadsides at Item 111 while spectators for passage looked on in mounting horror as blacks condemned whites and CCF just happened to be the only target in town. Sharon Williams, speaking for the Rockaway Arts for Progress, waved a condemning finger at the dais and said, “This is a flagrant slap in the face to the black and Puerto Rican communities. First you tell us we can’t have hospitals and now we can’t even see a play.”

Following the patient procession of naysayers was Gregory Millard, Assistant Commissioner of Cultural Affairs. Millard is a fellow artist—a poet and playwright—whose manuscript, “The Salvation Army is Comin’ in the Morning” will be produced this year at Playwright’s Horizon. Hired by DCA in late August, Millard had worked for the Pacifica Foundation since 1975, setting up a new listener-sponsored 50,000 watt FM radio station in Washington, D.C., WPFW (a sister of WBAI). Millard inherited the CETA mantle from DOE, and it overwhelmed his other duties—running the department’s small grant program and summer programs in the park.

As a black, Millard was placed in a surreal corner of defending his choice of a supposedly white organization which moments later, upon prodding by sympathetic board member, revealed the polyglot nature of CCF. Visions of quotas wafted through the vaulted ceiling and the big clock ticked away its roman numerals in Federal style abandon.

The board had been in continuous earshot of exhortations, threats, pleas, and cajolings since 10:30 A.M. Millard didn’t have the statistics that somehow would resolve the problem and he passed the dais over to Department of Employment expert, Bob O’Hare.

It seemed that the crux of the debate shifted to how much administrative money would go to CCF versus how much would filter down to sub-contractors. In a forbidding whisper, the gigantic figure of \$487,000 was whittled down to \$3,000 for incidentals split a dozen ways, which wouldn’t amount to an ant-hill of tokens. Of course, no one was informed that CCF had nothing whatever to do with distributing this money. The new CETA legislation passed in the Capitol in late October slashed administrative funds from a technically lean 15% to a seriously malnourished 10%. After infinitesimal pie cuts of a percent to City to push the reams of monitoring papers, CCF was left with a bare bones staff. So much for background. No one else heard it. Only the two figures—\$487,000 versus \$3,000.

So after the criticisms which contributed to palpitations among the baker’s dozen of CCF/CETA artists still conscious from the 90-minute hearing that didn’t bite or impose the death sentence after all, the contract, Item 111, was passed unanimously, and that was the last business of the day, and the gavel struck the cherry wood and the tribunal rose and left before the dazed spectators could jump up and shout for joy or curse in dismay.

Hurrying down the steps fronting the French Renaissance facade of City Hall, Millard was followed by an opponent. No blows were exchanged,



Virginia Maksymowicz drawing old microscopes at Bronx Botanical Gardens.

Blaise Tobia

but nasty expressions stung the frozen pavement. This was not the moment for rejoicing. The \$5.9 million contract was approved. All the legwork and exhaustive proposal writing and telephone courtesy calls and extensive lobbying and endless meetings and a year’s hard work which had been transcribed in an inch-thick proposal had survived a grueling and to some politically naive persons, undeserved flogging. The big news in the city’s dailies the next morning was not 325 artists getting a new CETA contract but Mayor Koch and President Carter getting the political shaft from New Wave Board of Estimate mavericks on Charlotte Street.

The bouquet of flowers was not abandoned in its lonely pew but the air around the park at City Hall numbed sweet scent-seeking nostrils. Shelly Slovin was right when she addressed a disgruntled and downright depressed CETA Artists meeting on February 2 and said (six days before the showdown at the Board of Estimate): “I do not anticipate any hiatus in this program.” Working artists who witnessed the perplexing arena at that Thursday afternoon Board of Estimate meeting got a magnum-sized jolt of political-real world drama and many are not so sure they want to go another round. □

CCF Artists . . .

The new contract is also designed to give artists the credits and skills necessary to improve their employability. Sponsors, in fact, will be selected at least partially on the basis of their interest in hiring an artist after the project is over. In addition, artists will be encouraged to develop new and more marketable skills. The project may include seminars in career development and survival skills for gaining both grants and unsubsidized employment.

While providing more stable working conditions for both artists and sponsors, the new contract will continue to bring groups of artists together to work on festivals, interdisciplinary projects, and performance series such as the 1978 “Artists by the Sea” at Sailor’s Snug Harbor in Staten Island, or the dance series at the Cooper Hewitt Museum. During 1979 at least one major dance event or festival will be presented in each borough. □

The Cave

You can hear them coming
to the cave of Madame de Banville
after the sea has been
closed off for the night
and souls search their closets
for the right colors to wear
in the long wasp room
an Abyssinian chef
churns camel butter
in vats still scarred
from the last apocalypse
is the butter real only
the scholars ask who
have bought their own darkness
from country diners
who hear doom in the eaves
of the Henry Hudson sky
the high rafted gamblers
rolling fixed white dice
down the long black
highways ending in dimes

— Grover Amen

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Charlotte Borchardt teaching macrame at Children's Arts & Science Workshop.

Sarah Wells

Teaching Poetry In the Community

By CASSIA BERMAN

I lived in the Bronx until I was 18, and in the course of a year I've had the strange experience of my CETA placements leading me on a chronological journey through my past. The first placement was in a senior center at Co-op City in the North Bronx, the largest housing development in the world, where many people from my old neighborhood now live; then I was sent to a center in Washington Heights, directly behind the Jewish Memorial Hospital, where I was born; the week of my birthday I was sent to a center in my old neighborhood near 175th St. in the Bronx, which was difficult not only for the personal reasons of walking through the streets of my childhood which physically have taken on the aspects of a movie nightmare: boarded-up buildings and streets strewn with broken glass and garbage, the first day seeing a bony hand parting the curtain on a broken window in what I thought was a deserted building. Each senior center—based around government-sponsored lunches and legally required to offer cultural programs as well as social services—has a personality of its own. But the directors in this particular center treated the people like wrinkled kindergarteners...

We as artists can bring people new ways of expressing themselves and of coming to a deeper experience of what they have and who they are, but I've learned, particularly through work with old people this year, that there are situations that have come about in our society where if you're really talking about expression and not playing little diversionary games with people, you'd better be prepared to deal with whatever you awaken, to be an artist in the oldest sense, a healer as well. Last spring in the Bronx I was not equipped to do much more than make peace with my own past.

The next assignment, a poetry workshop at the Bronx YM/YWHA, was not only biographically—it's the Y I belonged to when I was a teenager—but professionally a good placement. The people who chose this center have survived poverty and tragedy, ill health, deteriorated living conditions and loneliness. In this center people come not only for the lunch, but to do things they didn't have time to do when they were younger, and, although there is a small budget the directors have juggled funds and solicited grants and volunteers so that there is an active program of lectures and performances and art

and language classes. They had already had two very short poetry residencies so a group was ready and eager to begin. A strong point of our project is that we don't have to leave as soon as we are getting to know people, and because things worked out well it was possible to have my three month residency extended to eight months. A real feeling of love developed in the group, and I was able to plan classes that were personally valuable to them.

I realized early on that I had a choice of giving them what they sort of expected, which was to bring in poems about nice things, have them write about colors or brotherhood, exercise their imaginations in unsurprising ways, and generally act like the teachers I'd had in public school in the Bronx who seemed to know what they were talking about; or I could share with them what poetry is for me, which often has to do with what I don't understand, what I'm not comfortable with. And there's certainly a lot of that in their own lives, which is often passed over but doesn't disappear. I decided on the latter, and from early on they had to take more responsibility than they were used to in a class. After getting over the fact that what I was bringing in—Charles Reznikoff, Neruda, Wallace Stevens—didn't always look like poetry to them, (and I sometimes brought poems to discuss that I couldn't fully explain so they had to look inside themselves in ways they hadn't before to find the meaning), they started finding poems in the least likely places in their own lives. If their responses to modern poetry are not the standard academic ones, in the process they've each in their own ways expanded their awareness of their daily surroundings and claimed new ground in the workings of their own minds. While poetry is no panacea for real problems, I think they've all changed their attitudes a little by taking the perspective of poet, rather than victim, of their circumstances. After a difficult class on T. S. Eliot's "Prufrock," one woman, who sings a constant lament about how unfortunate she is, came home to find her apartment flooded, and inspired by "I have heard the mermaids singing each to each," wrote a wonderful poem instead of making herself more miserable. Another, who already wrote accomplished but often gloomy poems and often slipped into clichéd statements through rhyme, seems to be looking further into her own vision to the point where lately she's been surprising herself by finding light at the end of her poems. And another, who always deprecated herself and started out writing about nice thoughts like peace, has found poetry an outlet for her very vivid fantasies and daydreams, and by putting them on paper they become more a part of her life rather than a "silly" part of herself she's thought she had to hide away, and she's having

a great time now just being herself, accepting her own magic.

Rather than "putting in hours," I've been nourished by the time I spent with them, which is how work should be. Or could be. In December they gave a poetry reading to the other members of the Y, which was well received, and recently I put together finishing touches on a small anthology of their work which the Y will duplicate and distribute. In the course of a year, the CETA project has been a "training" program for me—the time I spent in other centers experiencing people's pain and not knowing what to do contributed to my understanding of older people. In some jobs you learn how to use technical equipment; in this job I've learned a little how to use myself.

Since, when you follow an image, it leads you somewhere, the biographical tour of my life continued through the fall and winter. My final assignment was to organize a poetry reading series at the CETA art exhibit in the World Trade Center where, after seven years of supporting myself by typing, I had made the decision exactly two years before, during a temporary job there, to go for broke and not type in an office again. When I returned to give my own reading, I brought back to the building the doorknob to the 63rd floor ladies room, which had fallen off in my hand then and which I had made into a sculpture to remind me... □

Night Light

At his desk
He's a crumpled doll
Bunched up
Head bowed
Legs crossed
Defying sleep
Clinging to his dreams
Before they're captured by the night

—Barry S. Levy

Short Takes

Bud Wirschafter... From 1946-1948, I studied under Hans Hofmann and throughout the fifties I was an abstract expressionist painter, having many exhibitions, both here and abroad. But in 1961 I began to feel that I'd carried abstract expressionism as far as I could. My work was becoming repetitive. I turned to film, which I'd always been interested in and worked on many film projects with other artists such as Andy Warhol and Albert Leslie. I liked the fact that film was a collaborative effort, and I liked working with other artists. It was the beginning of my journey as a media artist. I define media art as the use of media machinery to make art—the machine is between the artist and the work of art, whether it's a motion picture camera or a typewriter. (In this sense concrete poetry is a media art as is all graphic art).

While continuing to make and teach film, during the last few years I've become involved in an entirely new medium—xerographics. I use the color xerox machine at the Soho Media Co-op, a media arts organization I direct. It is also available to the public on a fee or hourly rental basis. The results have been very exciting. Not that it can reproduce a small painting in all its subtleties. But it does project colors in a style uniquely its own. It's an intricate matter. It's taken me over two years to learn what it can do. For one thing, it's a very inexpensive way of making small editions of prints—ten or twenty—which would cost a lot more by conventional graphic methods—silk

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Bud Wirschatzer working with color xerox machine.

Blaise Tobia

Short Takes . . .

screen or lithography. I've worked a lot myself with xerographic collage. The process is all, the sense of exploration, of operating on a new frontier, and I'm teaching xerographics at City College as part of my CETA assignment. I believe in embracing the new technologies in order to make a new art, not in being frightened by them. This is just the beginning. Think what we'll have to work with in another twenty years!

Phyllis Morse... My best assignment was at the Riverdale Senior Center where I started in August

and finished the end of January. The center had funds from the Bronx Council of the Arts to make a mural. That was my assignment. The kind of painting some of my students had done before I came was copying reproductions by the masters or even copying landscapes from magazines. They were very tight and restricted. I had to get them to expand, to feel, to not be afraid of having original ideas, of using fresh materials. I encouraged them to do spontaneous abstract paintings, to enjoy the paint itself and not worry about "correct" drawing. They worked first with colored chalks and poster paints. They listened. They became flexible. Soon they were saying "I'm not sure what I'm doing, but it's fun."

They worked beautifully together, showing much enthusiasm and talent. The project was all theirs and when it came to doing the mural, I didn't apply one

stroke of paint. They didn't draw and then fill in with paint. The only drawing was in the painting itself. They learned that "mistakes" can give painting character and originality. Sometimes it was most helpful if I suggested that they stop working when I saw them becoming overwrought and anxious about what they were doing. I would say "Leave it for today and see how it looks tomorrow." Usually it worked out that they were glad to have stopped when they did. There was so much interest in the project that they ended up doing three murals instead of one—two very figurative and one very primitive. And I believe that people of any age, given the care and incentive, can develop the enthusiasm necessary to produce and enjoy such work. □

Lynda Schor . . . As a writer with a family my job at CCF has been invaluable in providing a steady income and health plan. I think it's obvious that the CETA Artist Project is fulfilling its promise in giving artists, many of whom have free-lanced, collected unemployment or public assistance, a steady income and respectable work. This kind of program should, if anything, be greatly expanded and shouldn't be limited to an 18-month period.

I've approached this job with a positive attitude partially derived from the above circumstances and have eagerly accepted many kinds of work I'd ordinarily never choose to do or might never get a chance to do. So far I've worked with a videotaper creating a promotional videotape for a street theatre group. I've written articles for newsletters, including the P.E.N. American. The literary pool has given readings in various places, including the Pleiades Gallery and the World Trade Center. I love reading in public places and hope that the entertainment aspect of writing will be utilized more. I derive tremendous satisfaction from my workshops in Journal Writing and Autobiography at the Union Women's Center in Brooklyn. The warmth and openness of these women was surprising and inspiring.

At present I'm copy editing a book for the Fiction Collective, a group of writers who publish innovative work. Copy editing may be boring but it's a new experience for me, and I admire the Fiction Collective.

At first I was uneasy about the changing assignments; now I look forward to the surprise. □

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