William Walker and Olivia Gude: The Mural and the Community

Where we come from... Where we’re going?
1992, Olivia Gude

Childhood is without Prejudice
1977, William Walker

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Intro Seminar - Arts Organizations in Society
Group Project
Introduction

These two murals provide a framework to discuss the history of murals and their relation to policy, politics, education, and the community. Each of us has taken an aspect to focus our analysis. Caroline has researched the history of community murals, and the artists William Walker and Olivia Gude. Andrea considers the historical development of the mural and the effect it has had in the community. Heidi focused on the role of policy and politics for mural artists and the groups who fund public art. Chiara discusses the evolution of the mural as a direct or symbolic educational tool used to address the represented community. Maissa has assessed the community’s interaction with the murals. Our research included readings, interviewing community residents of Hyde Park, research at The Historical Society and Chicago Public Art Group, and an opportunity to discuss these details with Olivia Gude. The issues of murals within and intended for members of a community raise many complex questions. What messages are appropriate and how should the messages be conveyed in the public arena? Is it an honest representation or utopia? The question of government being better involved in community based projects of both cultivation as well as preservation as an honest discussion. Should education focus more on the messages murals address and should the artists play an active role in educating the public through their art? Ultimately, is the mural a fundamental message for the community or is it merely a form of artistic expression?

Historical Reference to Murals and the Artists

The first recorded murals date to prehistoric times. These paintings often depicted people, animals, and objects associated with everyday life. Modern times have brought more complexities to issues in everyday life and this has been reflected in the practice of public art. Politics, social classes, race, and ethnicity are a few examples of contexts used by artists. Northern Ireland is arguably the leader in politically motivated murals. Since the 1970’s, over two thousand murals have been painted representing political and religious tolerance and intolerance. Mexican murals have also been a great influence, especially artist Diego Rivera. Rivera had a distinct style and radical beliefs. The subject matter of his murals was often Mexican history and revolutionary themes. The larger
part in the history of murals has been primarily about the representation of one race or one ethnicity, American muralist in the 1960’s and 1970’s changed the focus to statements of diversity and inclusion, not exclusion of different cultures. This shift has dramatically altered the landscape of the mural in American cities.

William Walker is one of the most respected muralists in Chicago. He was a participant in the painting of the famous Civil Rights mural, “Wall of Respect,” in 1967. This was one of the first murals to be painted on an outside wall. Formally, all murals painted on buildings were facing inwards, away from the public they were intended to address. There were no associated sponsors; it was a community project in every sense of the word, which was meant to lift up the black community and present positive images of success. In the 1970’s there was an outcry from black artists in America for better representation. With the gentrification efforts and renewal projects, many black communities were being pushed out and separated. Black artists were under-represented or not represented at all in most museums so public art projects became an outlet for self-expression and, as Michael Harris explains, “…black artists elevated the walls of their urban landscape by putting up murals. They transformed their environment and often tried to transform members of their community by encouraging more proactive, self-celebratory, or politically assertive attitudes and behaviors.”

Also during this time, mural artists took a less political angle and began painting about personal experiences. Walker’s “Childhood is without Prejudice” was painted as a thank you to the school where his daughter was a student for setting a positive example and promoting racial harmony. The mural depicted three interlocking faces of different color to represent racial brotherhood. This was a symbolic style he used often, as with “All of Mankind” 1973. During the 1980’s, William Walker came back to his political roots with the “Reaganomics” mural that depicted President Reagan as a jack-in-the-box. He was commenting on the conservative economic policies of the administration that Walker felt was reverting the wealth of the black population that had been achieved since the civil rights movement. Although it was political, it was a clear comment on racial divide and
his dedication to eradicate it from mainstream American attitudes. Although Walker retreats from the spotlight, he is a watchful shadow over the mural community, aware of art and artists working in the communities and further gratified that his own work is respected and appreciated.

Olivia Gude is a community artist, painter, advocate, and educator in Chicago. She has been instrumental in the development of numerous public art projects not only in Chicago but across the country as well. She is the recipient of many art grants and funding awards to produce public art. Her career as an educator began in St. Louis, Missouri. For two years she was inspired by the idea of nourishing young minds with fresh ideas. It was after moving to Chicago that she said, “the students began to change her perceptions.” As an artist primarily working with fiber, at this time she also began working with paint. After experimenting with mural projects with her students and completion of her MFA, Gude "really recognized that art, far from being this preserve that was separate from life, was intrinsically part of all of these issues about culture, about human possibility, about justice."

Soon after she joined the Chicago Mural Group (CPAG) and dove head first into the world of community based art, truly inspired by the idea of involving the community in the dialogue, inspiration, and implementation of creating artworks. As Gude states in her mission statement, she clearly see the relevance of connecting the community in intricate parts as “…not to create a seamless whole, but rather to develop an aesthetic medium in which multiple points of view represent, not fractured traditionalism, but rather the postmodern valuing of difference and multiplicity.” Evolving from this mission is the mural “Where we come from...Where we’re going” (1992) in which Gude interviewed people passing by with the questions, “Where are you going?” and “Where are you coming from?” With the responses, she weaved the portraits of those interviewed with their responses creating this eclectic group of community members. It is painted in a realistic style as to enhance the gravity of the bond the people have to each other and their community. Beautifully mastered, she

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5 Gude, Artist Statement.
Olivia Gude credits her relationship to community art to the tradition that was initiated by the “Wall of Respect” and artists like William Walker. In fact, after completing “Where we come from...Where we’re going” in 1992, Gude received a grant to restore Walker’s “Childhood is without Prejudice” with Walker’s blessing. The restoration was started and completed in spring of 1993. Gude recalled Walker visiting a few times and a couple of times he even picked up the paintbrush “to get just the look he wanted.”

Through the vision and dedication of the Chicago artists of the generations from the past to today, public art projects are passionately defended and produced with strong emphasis on preserving the murals of the past and their relevance to the future.

**Community Art Murals**

William Walker’s “Childhood is without prejudice” (1977) and Olivia Gude’s “Where We Come from…Where We’re going” (1992) murals were born under the community art conception. What exactly does a community project mean and how much does it affect and influence the community in everyday life?

Murals in Chicago before the First World War tended to represent mythological scenes in the European inspired manner, after that, an interest in the modern world and the local scene was born, therefore murals started to be seen as a collective enterprise in contrast to the strictly individualist artistic conception. Extending this idea of reflecting the society needs and including it in the public art proposals, in 1967 William Walker among other artists, created the outdoor mural “Wall of Respect,” considered to be the first mural made specifically for a community, “while the mural was being painted, the powerful Blackstone Rangers gang sanctioned the effort and protected the wall. People from the community gathered to watch the artists work, often bringing them food and drink. Sometimes a call-and-response developed as people offered critiques and

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6 Olivia Gude, Personal Interview (10 November 2005).
7 Olivia Gude, “Restoration of the Mural by Bill Walker at 56th and Stony Island” Chicago Public Art Group Archive files, (Spring 1993).
8 Lackritz, XXIV.
commentary to the artists.” This mural was a milestone in community murals and after it a whole movement was developed based in the idea of representing multicultural societies. “Childhood Is without Prejudice” for instance was a tribute to Bret Harte School, the elementary school that Walker’s daughter used to attend. The message of the mural is that “interracial friendships are difficult but that he [Walker] hoped people would take the challenge. Its design is a pattern of overlapping children faces that represent different races.” Walker’s representation is simple and clear and it’s considered to be a community project in the sense that the overlapping children faces represent the kids that attend the school and the way they interact there.

There is no doubt in the community’s participation in Gude’s mural, where the people itself are the main characters and parts of their lives are included as an oral history. Mary Lackritz Gray details that, “Gude observed that most people in the community didn’t really listen or talk to each other. In painting the mural, she hoped that stories she incorporated into it would represent the beginning of a conversation that would encourage a community of discourse.” Gude’s mural is a multiple portrait of men and women with quotations of their every day lives. The way it represents the community is direct; it’s enough to pose the two title questions again “Where are you coming from?” “Where are you going?” and answers will not be far from those that Gude incorporated.

As Olivia Gude explains, the community participation in the creation and restoration of a mural is never direct. The artist or a really specialized person is the one that paints over the wall, so community work is more symbolic than effective.

After reviewing the article “The Rise, Fall and Legacy of the Wall of Respect Movement”, listening to Olivia Gude in an interview done the 10th of November, and questioning the people that live around the area of the Metra Viaduct, it’s possible to affirm that a community based project tends to involve the people during the process of it’s creation, but after this process is concluded the community gets so used to the work that it starts to loose the first meaning under which it was conceived.

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10 Harris, 198.
11 Lackritz, 206.
12 Gude, Personal Interview.
The main issue concerning community projects is the moment when the work is finished and when it remains as part of the city and as everyday urban furniture. The paradox of public art is that its pervasiveness makes it invisible. In fact, there seems little reason to believe that community involvement increases aesthetic quality, even if it might enhance a work's local relevance. Community art is also public art, but goes beyond it because it includes the people directly into the process. The main difference may be seen in the location where artists display their work. Public art is usually located in strategic points and is seen as an open work that affects a large amount of people, even if they are from another place. Community art works are closed and its meaning is only directed to a specific group of people. This also makes a big difference in the way both are preserved or the time they last. Even if community murals, in this case “Childhood is Without Prejudice” or “Where we Come from…Where We’re going,” were created during a specific moment, one day its historical value may be lost. As Gude quoted Chicago muralist Michael Katan “when they [murals] fade, new murals can come and cover them.”

In this sense the main example of a community mural may be seen in the Wall of Berlin, where the community was the one that created it and was destroyed in response of sociopolitical causes.

**Politics and Policy**

One of the community members included in Olivia Gude’s “Where We Come from…Where We’re Going” mural chose to include the remark “I hope the proposed mural is not depressing like it is now. I think this integration idea in the mural across the street is a bit hitting people over the head” in the mural. Honest but perhaps construed as somewhat derogatory, this idea of “hitting people over the head” with an ideal raises the issue of the voice of public murals. Murals can convey a community’s sense of pride in its cultural heritage. Many historical murals were a result of a community’s response to the politics of the time, especially in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Murals can also take an active role in promoting new social possibilities for the community. Both are complex issues to depict in a public space. For instance, should diverse communities be

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13 Harris.

14 Gude, Personal Interview.

15 Text in the “Where We Come From…Where We’re Going” mural at 56th/Stony Island Avenue, Chicago.
represented as harmonious in murals because that is the social ideal? Or, should murals depict reality no matter what consequence the visual has in a public space?

Artist Olivia Gude speaks to this paradox and questions how she can investigate issues of multiplicity in her mural work when images of reality may not produce the uplifting message people want to be confronted with daily.\textsuperscript{16} She believes she has a responsibility “not only to critique, but to create proactive future visions.”\textsuperscript{17} William Walker believes he has a moral obligation as an artist. The political climate of the time and the issues important to him influenced how his moral obligation translated through the mural’s voice—from a more controversial depiction in the “Wall of Respect” to a more mediated one in “Childhood is Without Prejudice.” Taking a closer look at William Walker’s “Childhood is Without Prejudice” and Olivia Gude’s “Where We Come from…Where We’re Going” provides a framework to discuss the voice of the mural in context of the community politic and the effects of policy on mural making, restoration, and the overall future of the mural.

\textit{William Walker’s “Wall of Respect” and the Origins of the Political Voice}

Considered the “spiritual father” of the Chicago mural movement, it is important to know the origins of William Walker’s work as a mural artist to fully understand how he arrived at the 56\textsuperscript{th} Street Viaduct in 1977 to paint “Childhood is Without Prejudice.” After witnessing the conditions of the cotton field workers and their struggle to survive during a visit to West Memphis in 1954, he decided that as a black artist, he wanted to dedicate his work to his people. William Walker turned to his neighborhood in Chicago and with the Organization of Black American Culture and the 43\textsuperscript{rd} Street Community Organization, they painted the “Wall of Respect” in 1967. The team of people working on the mural formed in a guerrilla fashion.\textsuperscript{18} The mural became more of an active political force than a passive act of community beautification. The wall depicted prominent and in some cases politically-charged figures such as Malcolm X, Elijah

\textsuperscript{16} Gude, Personal interview.
\textsuperscript{18} One important factor in convincing OBAC to adopt the project was that it would be a “guerrilla mural” meaning that as the production of the mural continued and people discovered it in passing, they were compelled to join the cause and a place was made for them to help.
Muhammad, Muhammad Ali, and W.E.B. DuBois as well as important musicians, artists, writers. Influenced by the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and the black power movement of the 1960s, the mural was an exercise of black activism that highlighted black achievement and heroes. The wall became a place for the celebration of a cultural heritage of that community. It was a gathering place for music and dance performances and also embodied a voice of social criticism for the community where civil rights rallies occurred. The “Wall of Respect” is considered the beginning of the contemporary mural movement in Chicago. If the mural movement arose out of grassroots politics with the members of the community compelled to respond and act on the voice of the mural, where did it go from there?

A Tempered Voice at William Walker’s “Childhood is Without Prejudice”

Ten years after Walker finished the “Wall of Respect,” he painted “Childhood is Without Prejudice” near his daughter’s elementary school. Walker recognized that interracial friendships were difficult, but he hoped people would be inspired by his mural to take the challenge. The content of the mural conveys more of a visionary outlook for new social possibilities as a result of these interracial friendships than the “Wall of Respect” did with its celebration of cultural heritage and key historical figures. If expressed in socio-political terms, at the time of painting “Childhood is Without Prejudice,” Dr. King and multicultural themes were more prevalent than Malcolm X and Pan-Africanism. Certainly a result of the changing political climate from the time the “Wall of Respect” was painted, the voice of “Childhood is Without Prejudice” can also be explained by Walker’s strong family values. Walker raised concern that people had conceptions about public art and that there was political thinking and political attitudes about public artists. He may have considered that “Childhood is Without Prejudice” could dispel these thoughts and his mural could represent a social ideal, not a political agenda. For example, he painted it independently with more of a personal message unlike

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20 Gray, 198.
21 Walker viewed family as one of the most important aspects of humankind probably a result of his upbringing by his grandmother in Alley B, Birmingham, AL.
the guerilla mural collaboration of the “Wall of Respect” where consensus-building energized the voice. Also, by shifting the content from a historical celebration of heroes to the racial harmony of children, his work became more socially optimistic and decorative than a work representing a strong community politic.²³

Olivia Gude’s Voices of Social Responsibility at “Where We Come from...Where We’re Going”

The content and very process of creating the “Where We Come from...Where We’re Going” mural demonstrates Olivia Gude’s commitment to spark the consciousness of the community. She sees the mural making process as “a metaphor for a functional society.”²⁴ In other words, by engaging the community in her production of the mural, by asking them questions, and by making their answers public, this collaborative effort could be a type of social reform to create neighborhood solidarity. The work promotes a definite aim of new social possibilities more than it preaches a political message. It is significant to note that early in her artistic career, Gude was dedicated to decommodifying the art object and questioned how she could sell work that embodied the politics she wanted to explore and develop. Her focus on mural art demonstrates that she wanted her work to exist in an environment without restrictions that an institution could indirectly impose. Gude recognizes that muralists must constantly question the effectiveness of the mural and the politics as they interact with the communities. She explains, “one of the issues muralists face is being called upon to represent ‘the people.’ Despite the dangers of abuse and misrepresentation, of false images of a happy multiracial society, I think we must sometimes risk making those utopian images.”²⁵ This is a definite departure from the voice of William Walker’s “Wall of Respect.” From the time of the dedication of the “Wall of Respect” in 1967, a shift occurred in murals from content of a militant political nature to works with multiracial themes that represented the hybridity of contemporary culture.²⁶ Perhaps the de-politicization of the mural was necessary and Gude’s dedication to forging new social paradigms as well as William

²³ Dunitz, 37.
²⁴ Gude, Akinlan, Munoz, 32.
²⁵ Gude, Akinlan, Munoz, 27.
Walker’s representations of the ideals of interracial harmony among children were the most effective ways to speak with the community.

The Policy of Funding, Preservation, and Evolution of Murals

The policy involved in mural making, restoration, and funding is also important to consider. The Visual Arts Workshop of the Organization of Black American Culture worked with William Walker to paint the “Wall of Respect.” With no funding available from the City of Chicago or from the Illinois Arts Council, the mural was painted with spiritual and emotional support of the community. The project participants donated their time and materials expecting no political favors—a testament to their will and devotion to the voice of the mural. Over thirty-five years later in 2005, both community mural production and restoration remain similarly unsupported by the city. There is no public policy in Chicago for community murals or their restoration.27 The life of the mural still rests on the will of the artist or local organization to do something for their community. In fact, Jon Pounds, Executive Director of the Chicago Public Art Group (CPAG) brings attention to the fact that the cultural bureaucracy only sporadically recognizes community muralists as artists and community murals as art.28

Since the time of the “Wall of Respect,” channels for public art funding have become more available but it is still dependent on the artist to secure them. The CPAG, an independent artists’ group originally founded in 1971 by William Walker as the Chicago Mural Group, has also been instrumental in the advancement of the mural. The CPAG provides the administrative infrastructure to create partnerships between communities and artists and helps artists secure funding through grants and other sources as well as providing some funding of its own for projects. This organizational support is crucial when there is no direct or indirect support from the city.

Funding for the mural is still the responsibility of the artist. For the development of “Where We Come from…Where We’re Going” the CPAG committed to supporting

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27 The City of Chicago does fund public art on city-owned walls through the Public Art Program. However, this does not include community murals.
the project with approximately 24% of the total project cost of $8,468. 29% came from private donors solicited by Olivia Gude. She also secured an NEA New Forms grant for 47% of the cost, a time when the NEA was still giving individual artist’s grants. When the NEA ceased funding to individual artists soon after, securing monetary support for these projects became more difficult.

Restoration became an issue of concern as William Walker’s 1977 mural weathered over time. In August 1992 Olivia Gude and the CPAG took the initiative to correspond with the Illinois Central Railroad to begin the process. The Illinois Central Railroad issued a contract to the CPAG for the restoration that included stipulations of approval of the plans and design, material requirements, and security measures to following during implementation. The restoration cost $2,500, a budget that included a $500 consultation fee for William Walker, $1600 in artist fees, and $400 in materials. The Hyde Park Kenwood Community Conference donated $700 to the project recognizing its importance to the history of the community. Artists frequently benefit from in-kind support as a source of funding for their materials.

What is the future of the mural when no policy for its evolution or preservation exists? Should the historical murals be preserved as historical record? If buildings change ownership, what is the fate of the attached mural? With changes in funding, especially the increase in privatization of funding, mural artists must be more diligent and resourceful to make both new projects and the restoration of existing ones happen. If they can combat the challenges of funding, can they combat the changing urban landscape? Olivia Gude cites a disappearance of public space as a major hurdle for mural artists. With digital advertising, the destruction of dilapidated buildings in the process of urban renewal, the space for murals is diminishing. CPAG Executive Director is optimistic and believes that the lack of municipal policy in community politics has resulted in an opportunistic practice where “the creation of culture and the expression of knowledge are done in the neighborhoods where people live, not through cultural bureaucracy.” The CPAG uses this absence of policy to their advantage and facilitates collaborations between artists and

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29 As noted in the budget in the Chicago Public Art Group project file.
30 As noted in a letter dated 21 June 1993 from the Hyde Park Kenwood Community Conference to the Chicago Public Art Group in the project files.
31 Gude, Personal Interview.
32 Pounds, 8.
community organizations that they determine can actively revitalize the mural in a particular community.

There is no right or wrong answer to the question of what voice is better for the mural: a political one or a symbolic one. Olivia Gude and the other CPAG artists continue to consciously investigate the role of the mural in the community today through their work. In their practice they can’t help but turn to the legacy of William Walker for inspiration.

The Evolution of Education

Traditionally murals have always played a central role in educating. They put forth a strong message and point out particular issues to be addressed by the community in which they were painted. Murals painted on walls are intended to be seen by everyone in the community. They taught, inspired, affirmed, critiqued, and documented. The education and development of the audience was a primary concern of the artists and murals remain today their medium to convey a specific message. However, today the role of the mural artist as an educator in the community and the mural as bearer of a specific and strong message is brought into question. How does a mural artist adapt to changes in a postmodern society? Perhaps we can shed light on this question if we compare “Childhood is Without Prejudice” by William Walker and “Where We Come from…Where We’re Going” by Olivia Gude. In particular, we will take into consideration the history of their mural characteristics and the evolution of their educational strategies.

Walker believed that he had a moral obligation as an artist and “a teaching obligation to society.” In his mural entitled, “Childhood is Without Prejudice” or “Children are our Future,” he makes a strong statement about his belief that children are harbingers of a better future. They set an example for us by playing together despite racial differences among them. The mural, painted in front of the Bret Harte Elementary School, was meant to express the appreciation for the school where his daughter attended in promoting racial harmony in the class. In this sense, Walker shows great respect and

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33 As fellow Chicago muralist John Weber reports in: Gude and Huebner.
34 Sorell.
reposes hope in the school as an institution that can give youth knowledge and a sense of empowerment to improve society.35

On the other hand, Olivia Gude’s involvement in education is direct. She is a professor at the University of Illinois- Chicago and reaffirms her belief of the artist as an educator: “I think a good community artist is also a good educator.”36 In her mural entitled, “Where We Come from…Where We’re Going,” the artist’s role as a facilitator of community discourse is evident. The statements painted on the wall are the pluralistic voices of the community, what she calls “heteroglossia.” She is the facilitator of an oral history that possibly will help people living in the area to begin a community of discourse, where various voices are heard. This practice in her work shows a shift from the role of the artist as holder of a universal truth, a concept evident in the work of the earlier muralists, who conveyed messages about pride and self-esteem in depictions of political and religious leaders.

In Walker’s mural, we see a depiction of hope for a multi-ethnic community in peace. His mural is complemented by Gude’s more figurative representation of the pluralistic views in the community.

Both murals convey an implicit sense of activism. However, on one hand Walker is an educator who, without strong skills in pedagogy, hoped to underline the community’s problems.37 He persisted knowing full well that could raise adverse reactions from his audience. On the other hand, Gude is a contemporary educator whose interventions are carefully planned within the community and supported by the work of the Chicago Public Art Group (CPAG). The role of the CPAG was central in the educational purposes of Gude’s mural. According to Jessie Thymes, Program Manager of the CPAG, the group “introduces creative skills to children and adults, trains and educates professional artists in the process of creating community responsive art projects,

35 Sorell, 105, “A chance for these students who go to the University.” He put a lot of hope in the academic institutions.
37 Sorell, 42 and 87. His interventions sometimes were aggressive for the community and he was run out of the community where he painted the wall. “Well, the point I’m trying to make is that people react in all kinds of ways to visual expression.” He was looking for reactions, more than only collaboration or appreciation. While he was painting the St. Martin Luther King mural 1977, he had an accident: “I had a lot of resistance in the community.”
and educates communities about the social and aesthetic possibilities of collaborative public art.”

38 Olivia Gude places hope in art education, which can play a vital role in developing democratic life and the urban environment. Gude’s willingness to emphasize the role of the art educator is evident in her article, “Psycho-aesthetic geographic in art education,” in which she suggests new goals for art education: “I see emerging a grassroots movement of art teachers inspired by grassroots community artists and arts organizations...Many art teachers have occasionally incorporated making collaborative public art into their art curriculum.”

39 An example of this is the experience of Tracy Van Duinen, an art teacher who describes the successful outcomes of creating murals as a class project and sees it as a learning experience.

40 The difference in the educational message of the two murals becomes then evident. The caption of the “Wall of respect,” painted in 1967 by William Walker and other artists read: “This wall was created to honor our black heroes and to beautify our community.”

41 This is contrasted with what Olivia Gude has to say about her mural: “the goal is not the superficial decoration of space...in meaningful public art, the importance of the work lies in unique fit between the situation, the process of making, and the final artwork.”

42 Walker focuses on the end result of the work: a strong visual statement to the entire community. While on the other hand, Gude draws the attention of the audience to the process of making the mural together with the community.

Another aspect to analyze is the attitude of institutions that support education in the Hyde Park neighborhood. According to the Hyde Park Kenwood Community, great efforts are being done to improve the standards of educational institutions in the area. While Hyde Park is known because it hosts the University of Chicago, it also accommodates a multi-ethnic community with wide disparities of income and educational

38 Jessy Thymes, Interview over phone, (9 November 2005).
39 Olivia Gude, “Psycho-aesthetic geographic in art education.” Journal of Cultural research in art education. (Bloomington, Indiana: USSEA, 2003). In her opinion the most important goal of art education is “teaching students to investigate and transform the spaces in which they learn, work, live, and play.”
42 Gude, and Pounds, “Community public art process.”
43 www.hydepark.org.
opportunities. Public schools in Hyde Park are characterized by a high percentage of Afro-Americans and low-income students compared to the city and state average. According to statistics, also the Bret Harte School, which maintains a particular relationship with Walker’s mural, 91% of the students are Afro-Americans and 56% are low-income students. According to the Schools Committee of the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference, the mission of the school is “fostering an environment of excellence, responsibility, and diversity regardless of culture, ability or learning styles.”

When interviewed, an art teacher at the Bret Hart School said she was not aware of any activity of the school with regard to the mural, but she hoped that it would be preserved as a historical landmark. She remembered the discussion about the possibility to replace the mural after it had been defaced. While the Hyde Park Committee stresses the attention and the activities around the mural, individual schools let teachers decide if they want to include community mural projects or the study of the murals in their class work.

Reactions to the educational purposes of two murals vary widely. Adults tend to react to Walker’s completed mural either positively or negatively while in Gude’s mural they search for themes. Gude makes central the “generative themes” coming out of discussions with the members of the community. She borrows Paulo Friere’s concept to emphasize the “ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values, and challenges” of an epoch. According to Gude, “the term ‘generative themes’ highlights that these thematic complexes are full of hope and possibility. They are the issues that either consciously or unconsciously are important in people’s understanding of self and society.”

The Core cultural committee of the Roseland-Pullman Mural project decided that “a mural should

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44 Olivia Gude presentation of her project for “Where we come from…where we’re going” mural, CPAG archive (17 October 2005). Connected to this argument is the answer of one man interviewed in front of Olivia Gude’s mural: “Murals are important to remind people that Hyde Park is not only the University of Chicago but a traditionally very politicized, integrated and progressive community.”

45 http://www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/il/other/1128

46 www.hydepark.org Section: schools, (22 October 2005). Mission of the school: “to provide an academic program that challenges each student. We are committed to fostering an environment of excellence, responsibility and diversity regardless of culture, ability or learning styles; accomplished through professional development, structured learning experiences and parental support.”


48 Gude and Pounds “Community public art process.”
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...speak to the community, it should hold attention and interest for years.”

Gude’s strategy to make this vision reality is to involve the community in the generation of ideas for the mural through dialogue. She believes intergenerational dialogue is one of the educational benefits of murals. According to Gude, “the goal of a community dialogue for a public art project is not to come up with a single simple narrative statement. Through the dialogue, participants identify images and concepts that make up the complex, crisscrossing ideas that are in play at a give time and place.” This theoretical frame is central in interpreting the educational meaning of pluralistic voices in Gude’s mural, compared to the univocal message of Walker’s mural.

The response of a young Afro-American lady interviewed after coming out of the Metra station, is emblematic of the relationship between the murals’ educational purposes for adults and children. She was there to pick up her daughter who goes to school nearby. She liked the fact that murals represent different people in the community and she felt murals are important because they teach a lot to people who would not know about Afro-American history otherwise. She felt they are also important for children and they should be preserved for future generations. It is in Walker’s mural that the focus on education and children is more evident. Walker loves children, but his interest comes more from a detached perspective, as he states in an interview: “I just love children and I try to show that in my work whenever I paint little kids. I don’t necessarily come into contact with little children. But I like to observe them because they are interesting and they are so underrated as far as people are concerned...I like to observe them from a distance and see how they interact with each other.”

On the other hand, Olivia Gude works directly with students and involves them in the actual work around the mural. The particular care and ideas on how to communicate with children through murals is a relevant concern for Gude. During her interview, Gude underlined that she wanted to tell a story in a significant way, but without creating a monument of horror (similar to what sometimes happened in the earlier murals by William Walker). She wanted to create happy and

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49 Healing walls: Murals and community: A Chicago History.
50 Gude, Personal Interview. She mentioned a mosaic created in a community workshop for a blue line station and pointed out the intergenerational dialogue as an educational benefit of the associations made through the workshop.
51 Sorell.
52 Sorell, 100 and 104. Some images in his work are particularly violent and Sorell describe them as “apocalyptic warnings.” William Walker in the interview explains: “It’s a cruel world, my friend, and I just
beautiful images for children that involved an investigation for example on the question “why you take a beautiful child and you call it “other.”” Again, the approach directed at children confirms the evolution of the role that education plays in these two artists’ murals.

In conclusion, Walker and Gude both were highly concerned about the education of adults and children. However, they reached this through different styles and choices of subject themes. Here we note a slow evolution of educational methods from the Seventies to a Postmodern society.

The Mural and the Community

Community: n. 1. Body of people living in the same place 2. A sharing in common

During our interview with Olivia Gude, she raised the question “are you just a community because you share a space?” Hyde Park is a community that currently consists of approximately 30,000 people of different ages, religions, ethnicities, and levels of education. So I wonder if each person is different, then is there any need to or is it even possible for them to have anything else in common; and if sharing a space makes a community then can community murals correctly depict/represent everyone in the community.

It is apparent that both Walker and Gude’s murals on the 56th Street underpass (though very different stylistically and in concept and motive) were painted as representations of the diverse community that resides in Hyde Park and it is my opinion that “Where We Come from…Where We’re Going” is a very strong and accurate representation of a community. In the mural there is no false representation of happiness, no bright colors, no hopes and dreams, just real people with real answers and different perceptions of a question in its simplest form. It is in that mural that one can see all of the differences that make Hyde Park such a strong community and sets it apart from the others. But once that question is answered we are left to wonder what a mural represents wanted to make some statement about it, visual statement. I even had some people resent my focusing on that.”

54 Gude, Personal Interview.
to the community. How does a random Hyde Parker feel about the murals in his/her neighborhood?

Our second trip to the underpass was on a dark weekday afternoon and the aim was to interview as many people as possible to find out how they felt about the murals. We were first greeted by a local police officer who was handing out flyers and advising those coming out of or entering the Metra station on how to be safe and avoid being attacked or robbed as there had been a few robberies days before, some stopped to listen and others took the flyers and walked ahead. After interviewing a few people on the street it was clear to me that although many of them confessed to never having the time to spend looking at a mural most people did value murals and regarded them as important aspect of Hyde Park.

However, there were also people whom we didn’t interview, either because we were busy or because they refused to talk to us. Many of them were preoccupied, some with their children, some with themselves and others were just in a hurry but again no one stopped to look at the murals that were not even properly lit in case anyone wanted to. This brought to mind many questions as to why people were not looking at them. Could it have been because they were scared to stand at night for too long or because they had already seen them once and did not feel the need to look at them again. Are lack of lighting and the slight disintegration of the murals to blame? And is it even possible to make such a judge whether they are being appreciated from only one trip? If I am correct, and the murals are mostly left to themselves, with no admirers and no affect what so ever on the passersby then what is their point? Is the Mural for the community or is it merely a point of artistic expression

As a group we wonder what the future holds for Chicago murals and what the city’s public art will be like in years to come. Will new murals replace older ones or will the city’s many disintegrating murals be restored. Will the untouched murals still be representative of the future as much they represent our current lives? There is now way to know yet. However, as long as there are artists that are willing to take their time to add some life and color to empty walls and there will always be murals in the city.
Interviews

Informal interviews recorded on 31 October 2005 by Maissa Alsuwaidi, Chiara Bernasconi, Andrea Paasch, Caroline West, and Heidi Wirth at the site of the 56th Street Viaduct murals.

QUESTION LIST

Margaret Johnson
Margaret has lived in the neighborhood for a long time and watched the mural being painted.

Does this mural make a powerful statement? (Gude mural)
She believes this is powerful because during the interviews, it wasn’t known what people would say to the questions and it represents everyday life. However, she likes the idea of murals being temporary. After a while to wipe the slate clean and give the opportunity for a new generation of artists to express themselves.

Would you want to be involved in a community activity similar to this?
Margaret was the instigator in planting the herbal garden that is in front of the Gude mural. She organized the activity with the Boy Scouts of America. She said the boys were excited and actively participated in the planting process. The project is not finished yet. There is a patch of soil still empty that needs to be planted. She talked at length about her thoughts on what should be put there…..she thinks day lilies will be nice.

Have you ever discussed this mural with your family, friends, or neighbors?
She is an educator at Harold Washington and uses these murals as well as the idea of community art with her students.

Judy Jakush w/ her 16-year-old son
Judy is a long time Hyde Park resident and not only watched Olivia paint the mural but was also interviewed.

What were your answers to the questions?
“I’m going home” and “I’m going to work”

Would you answer the questions differently today, 13 years later?
She would answer exactly the same as she has a son in high school and she will soon have to send him to college.

Do you believe it reflects this neighborhood accurately?
Yes, it is reflective of the neighborhood. She strongly believes that if you paint the mural out in the community then it needs to be kept up. “Natural order is disorder” so there needs to be a constant effort to keep the art looking respectful.

Nick Hutac and Nicole Buroyne
Nick and Nicole do not live in the neighborhood but is familiar with they are and the murals. Do not know the titles of the murals or who painted them.

Do you believe it reflects this neighborhood accurately?
It was a snapshot at one point in time but it is not really reflective of today.

Should murals be temporary?
No, the continuity is good.
Have you ever discussed this mural with your family, friends, or neighbors? Believes the murals on 47th street are more impressive and have discussed those with others.

**Craig Joseph**
Craig lives in the neighborhood. He passes the Gude mural all the time but not really the Walker mural. He was impressed with the story behind the Walker mural.

*Does this mural make a powerful statement?*
He likes the Gude mural because it is not explicitly preaching to the viewer. The words are there but it isn’t like a big billboard with exactly what you should think about it written across it.

*Should murals be temporary?*
He is a preservationist. They should remain but be kept clean.

*Would you want to be involved in a community activity similar to this?*
He would but he “can’t draw.” Being a part of a project like this in his community would be an opportunity to meet a diverse group of people.

**Woman #1**
Does this mural make a powerful statement?
I’m just passing through to catch a train so didn’t even notice these murals.

*Are there other murals throughout the city that you like?*
“I look at murals sometime but I can’t name a specific one”

**Woman #2, nurse practitioner**
Do you believe the murals reflect the neighborhood accurately?
She loves the community and thinks it’s diverse and will stay that way. She likes the fact her children are in a diverse school environment and thinks the Walker mural reflects that.

*Would you want to be involved in a community activity similar to this?*
She would become involved to keep the “community spirit” alive. She wants to buy a house in Hyde Park and stay there because of the spirit of the community.

**Man #1, resident of Hyde Park since 1974**
Do you believe this mural reflects the neighborhood accurately?
“This one [Olivia Gude mural] especially–it’s a ‘no brainer’–I really believe in public art throughout the city. I look at this one all the time. It tells me things.”

*Do you think murals should be restored and permanent?*
He definitely thinks murals should be permanent and that money should be put into restoring them.

**Man #2**
Do you believe the murals reflect the neighborhood accurately?
“I think they’re nice to have. Better to have them than not.” He said he looked at the one on 55th Street, which he passed more often.

*Should this be a permanent mural?*
He said that the Walker mural had been painted over throughout the years and believed it should be kept up to keep people interested in the mural.

Woman #3
Do you believe it reflects the neighborhood accurately?
She absolutely thought it reflected the community appropriately.
Should this be a permanent mural?
She cited that the themes are universal enough that yes, it should be adequately restored over the years.

Man #4
Policeman
It was the first time he saw the murals. He thought they are nice to have because they beautify the community.

Women #5
Young black woman
She did not live in the neighborhood. She was there to pick up her daughter that goes to school nearby. She stopped a few times in front of both the murals. She remembered the figure of a guy that was looking for a job. She thought that reflected the different people that live in the community. She thought having murals in the community is very important because they can teach things to people that would not know important things otherwise (she remembers seeing a mural about Afro American history that taught her something). In her opinion murals should be preserved, it’s a pity that they are falling apart.

Man #6
Young white man. He lived here. He liked the murals. He thought they reflected the community. He remembered people from different races talking about empowerment. They are useful to remind people that Hyde Park is not only the University but also a politicized, integrated, and progressive community. He hoped this would help keeping them for future generations but since they are falling apart he would like to have them restored. He could not help restoring them since he is not an artist but he thought students could help repainting them.

Man #7
Man in his 40’s. He lived here, he glanced at the murals but he doesn’t know if they reflect the community. He hadn’t thought about it.

Man and woman #8
Young couple with child. They didn’t live there. It was their first time in Hyde Park. They were looking at Gude’s mural but they were happy to know there was another mural to look at. They didn’t have time to read all at the moment but they enjoyed the artistic aspect of the murals.
**Woman #9**
Older lady. She was living there. She loves both the murals. She passed by every day. She liked more Gude’s mural. In her opinion the other one is too abstract. She said they reflect the community and they actually give the community an identity. More murals should be done by people living in the community, at least listening to their ideas and inputs since not all of them are artists. In this way they would reflect more the community. She was worried that they were going to get rid of them when they were remodeling the station. They should be kept.

**Woman #10**
Black women with many kids. They lived there, they knew the murals. She said they are ok.

**Woman #11**
Indian woman. She lived there, knew the murals but since they were fading, they needed to be repainted.

**Man #9**
He is white and looks like he is in his late 20s
Where are you coming from?
Downtown.
What can you tell me about these murals, do you know who painted them and what they are about?
Not really. I haven’t looked at them too closely I more familiar with the mural on 55th St.
Would you ever be interested in helping restore or paint a mural?
Sure, if I had the time.

**Man #10**
Black Male, Mid 30s
What do you think of these murals? Have you ever stopped and looked at them before?
Why, are you going to get rid of them?
No, we are pro murals, we just want to hear your opinion, do you think they are important to your community?
Yes, definitely they are so important. People need something to look at.
And how long have you been in Hyde Park?
14 years.

**Woman #12**
White, late 30s or early 40s
Have you ever stopped and looked at the murals?
No I never noticed them.
Do you think Murals are Important?
I don’t know.

**Woman # 13**
Asian, 40s or 50s  
Do you live in Hyde Park?  
Yes.  
Do you pass by here often?  
Yes.  
What do you think of this mural (Olivia’s)?  
It’s not very attractive.  
Do you think murals are important to this community?  
Well, not really, the spaces could be better used for advertising.

**Woman #14**  
Do you know something about the authors that made these murals?  
I have no idea who made them.  
What does it mean to you to have murals in your community area?  
The murals just dress up the area.  
Do you think these murals represent you in someway?  
Not really… I don't have any other preferences, everything can be represented but it has to be positive so I like it.

**Man #11**  
Where you come from…where are you going?  
I come from the loop, I'm just going home.  
What do you think about the way the murals are preserved?  
The city should maintain them clean and good, but I guess there is nothing we can do about weather.  
Do you think these murals reflect part of your community or mean something to it?  
I care that they are ordinary people just like me…murals prevent people from spraying. They are a weapon against graffiti

**Woman #15**  
What do you think about these murals?  
I live here but I don't know anything about them actually is the first time I see them. They just are there but they are useful so I don't get missed. Good for orientation… you know.
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