



CultureWork

A Periodic Broadside *
for Arts and Culture Workers

April, 1999. Vol. 3, No. 2.

Institute for Community Arts Studies
Arts & Administration Program, University of Oregon

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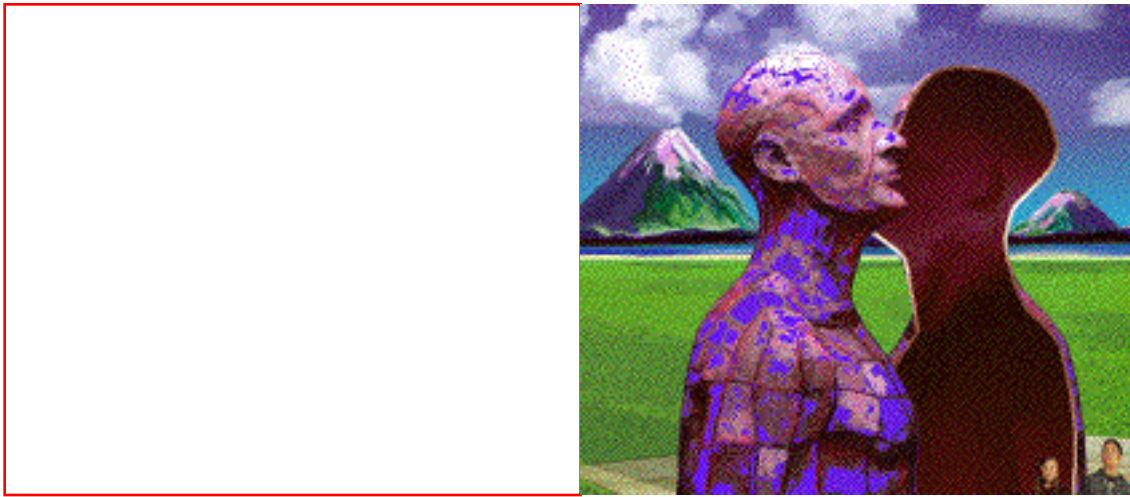
Paul Olum Mobile Hemi-Bust

Michael Randles

Outlaw Murals

Laura Feldman

Paul Olum Mobile Hemi-Bust



Olum Hemi-Bust 10 AM westward / Olum Hemi-Bust 3 PM Eastward

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A heroic dimension of the tragic

The Paul Olum Mobile Hemi-Bust is designed to draw attention to an iconic figure who allowed the belief in an Ideal to override the pragmatic. Paul Olum, president of the University of Oregon from 1981 to 1989, made difficult choices throughout his life.

In the 1940s he worked on the Manhattan Project and later saw the error of science gone Teller.

Olum believed that education is a calling rather than a commodity. He gave his all to the University and was rewarded with faculty support and admiration. His candid, forthright and partisan style of management did not, however, endear him to his supervisors. In an interview with the *Oregon Daily Emerald*, April 28, 1989, he admitted that he was being forced into retirement, though he had never been told why.

Paul Olum received designation as President Emeritus and Math Professor Emeritus in 1989.



[Olum on tour, Chicago](#)
[Click to enlarge.](#)



[Olum Mobile Hemi-Bust on tour](#)
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Olum, as a figure of 20th Century, local yet global, principled and intelligent, should remain in human memory. The Paul Olum Mobile Hemi-Bust is a celebration of the heroic and the tragic. In my opinion a fate which too few share.

As a visual artist my interests are in the paradoxes of our existence; a driving force in a secular world propelled by "The Meritocracy." The Paul Olum Mobile Hemi-Bust is an idea that satisfies my need to confer an intelligent outlook on the complex ambiguities of our brief time on this Earth.

[Michael Randles](#), designer/fabricator.

Outlaw Murals

[Laura Feldman](#)

One of my favorite murals in Portland is the 1,725 sq.ft.

"Rediscovering Belmont" mural on the Futon Factory at SE 30th and Belmont Streets. I'm always engaged by it every time I walk or drive by. It took five months to organize, two weeks to paint, and involved over 100 neighborhood volunteers, including schools, neighbors, and local businesses. If you read the attached plaque you'll see that it was sponsored and supported by the Sunnyside Neighborhood Association, AmeriCorps Members for Neighborhood Safety, Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Program, the Regional Arts and Culture Council, and supported by the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office, Bitar Brothers, Corp. and the city's Graffiti Abatement Project.

Helping to organize and paint this mural was for me one of the most enjoyable and empowering experiences. Next time you walk past your favorite mural, take time to appreciate it, as it is probably one of the last murals you'll see in Portland for some time. On November 18th, City Council in an effort to censor large painted wall advertisements, outlawed community murals as well. Portlanders sustained a strong blow to their First Amendment right to free speech, and it seemed to be noted by only the small group of weary community activists, who understood what the city had just lost.

Due to Oregon's liberal constitution which prohibits city governments from distinguishing between signs based on their content, City Council accepted the city attorney's warning that it could not easily, impose legal restrictions on advertisements while exempting murals as it had done in the past. At a previous Planning Commission work session, I learned that a middle ground such as imposing a height restriction could legally prevent large painted wall advertisements blaring down from the tops of buildings, while at the same time protecting the mural space at street level. However, the Planning Bureau seemed unwilling to invest the effort needed to draft and establish a new sign code, recommending instead that council endorse the proposed amended version of the current code which turns murals into signs, thereby subjecting them to a 200 sq. ft. size restriction. Though this makes administering the sign code easier, it functionally annihilates community murals.

It is a bitter irony that because of the city's interpretation of Oregon's liberal constitution, one could open up a pornography shop, but be prohibited from painting a mural on one's own building!

As a community organizer, I have to remind myself that I can no longer advocate murals as a community organizing tool. When business owners or residents call asking for assistance on how to paint a mural, I will have to tell them that the permit process is a very involved one, and that for a permit costing \$70 (no small sum given the fact that most mural projects have no cash budget), they would only be allowed to paint something less than a 200 sq.ft. mural (you must subtract existing signage on the building). For most community purposes or graffiti abatement purposes, this wouldn't be worth the effort. Most outdoor murals are greater than 200 sq. ft. which is part of their charm and power. Murals are, by definition, architectural. A mural becomes part of the building's scope and design, and is as unique as the volunteers who paint it, the building which they paint it on, the street on which the building stands, the neighborhood in which the street lies, in the city thus created.

Sadly, many murals already planned will most likely, never appear. This includes the last three of seven murals that were to be painted as part of the Division/Clinton Business Association anti-graffiti project with grant money from the Alliance of Portland Neighborhood Business Associations. The lead education community mural that Multnomah County was planning to paint will be another casualty.

It's important to note that council members seemed unaware of all the discussion and testimony that had transpired in the community's debate with the Planning Commission this past year and a half. Were they aware of the descriptions of the strong community building process out of which murals come, testimonies to murals being one of the best community projects for bringing people together to creatively enhance, and physically envision their neighborhoods? Anyone who recently attended the unveiling of the indoor mural painted by Out Front House youth at The Rebuilding Center knows how healing and empowering the mural process is for youth, and its capacity for including youth in the larger community dialogue.

I was told by one sign painter not to worry. In a few years, she said, after putting a stop to the large wall ad frenzy, murals would again be allowed. But I don't find that particularly comforting or very believable, having just watched the word "mural" disappear from the city's planning lingo. I recently read a "Mural Fury" article in a San Francisco neighborhood newspaper in which a developer painted over an historic, beloved mural in the Mission District on a building

he'd just bought, without letting the community know. He was completely overwhelmed by the neighborhood's response--a great illustration of how attached to a mural a community can become. It also raises the issue of murals remaining long after their creators have moved on. With the grandfather clause of Portland's sign amendment, there may be no one to continue to claim the space a mural has occupied for a new mural, thereby eroding over time the finite mural sites existing in the city.

I really do admire the pluck and innocence of a city council that dares to take on advertising in a free market system. It's just the "by any means necessary" that disturbs me. And the desired end may not be the one anticipated. Our cityscape might look much different. Ads, though smaller, could proliferate along with graffiti, and Portland, like Prohibition, may have just ushered in a virulent renaissance of outlaw murals, the kind that blitzed inner cities in the 60's and 70's at the beginning of the mural movement in this country. As government observed how effective murals were in creating neighborhood pride and identity, it gradually supported and co-opted the movement. The urge to paint on walls is as old as time and will not be stopped by City Council. It could be directed and nurtured as it is in other cities.

Murals are autobiographies of communities. They represent the collective unconscious of a neighborhood. They help create a community that is more beautiful and functionally--even psychically--more responsive to individuals. Murals fill what we have discovered to be a primal need to leave a trace, to find meaning, to give voice to all our hopes, fears and concerns, to envision the kind of community we want to live in, and to put it on a wall. (Jane Golden Heriza, Muralist of the Philadelphia Mural Arts Project).

For all of you who weren't at November's hearing, your testimony was sorely missed, and still needed. If you care about having murals in Portland, and/or care about maintaining your first amendment rights, you should contact City Council as soon as possible.

City Council Members:

Mayor Katz 1221 SW 4th, #340, 97204; Phone: 823-4129

Commissioner Francesconi, same address, #220,
Phone: 823-3008

Commissioner Hales, same address, #210, Phone: 823-4682

Commissioner Kafoury, same address, #230, Phone: 823-4151

Commissioner Sten, same address, #240, Phone: 823-3589

RE: Ordinance No. 172882.



Michael Randles is a Systems Analyst for S.C.A.R.I., a cultural research think tank located in Eugene, Oregon. A recipient of a N.E.A. fellowship and contributor to many design and art exhibitions, Mr. Randles' work is presently touring in the International Shoebox Sculpture Exhibition where his work is characterized as, "an artist whose work remains on the testy edge of art and ideas." This is the third consecutive tour of his work. A native to the Northwest, Michael Randles has retained his regional roots while looking to the curvature of this Earth w/some pain and chagrin.

Laura Feldman is a project organizer for Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Program, a non-profit coalition of twenty-two neighborhood associations in southeast Portland. As a past AmeriCorps Member for Neighborhood Safety, she helped organize and paint a community mural, and has believed in murals as rich community resources ever since. She currently serves as a community liaison on the board of Metro Murals, a resource for the creation and maintenance of community-based murals in the Portland metropolitan area.

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CultureWork is an electronic publication of the University of Oregon Institute for Community Arts Studies. Its mission is to provide timely workplace-oriented information on culture, the arts, education, and community.

CultureWork seeks submissions of concise (500-1500 words) critiques and advisories on community arts and the preparation of community arts workers. Graphics that express the spirit of community arts are welcome, to be published with attribution. Manuscripts should be sent in plain text format (i.e., not MS Word .doc format), via email, on Macintosh or Intel high-density 3.5 inch floppies or zip disks. Use American Psychological Association guidelines for style and citations. Send submissions to Maria Finison

at <mfinison@darkwing.uoregon.edu> or via snailmail: care of Arts & Administration Program, School of Architecture and Allied Arts, University of Oregon, Eugene Oregon 97403. If accepted for publication, authors may be asked to make revisions.

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