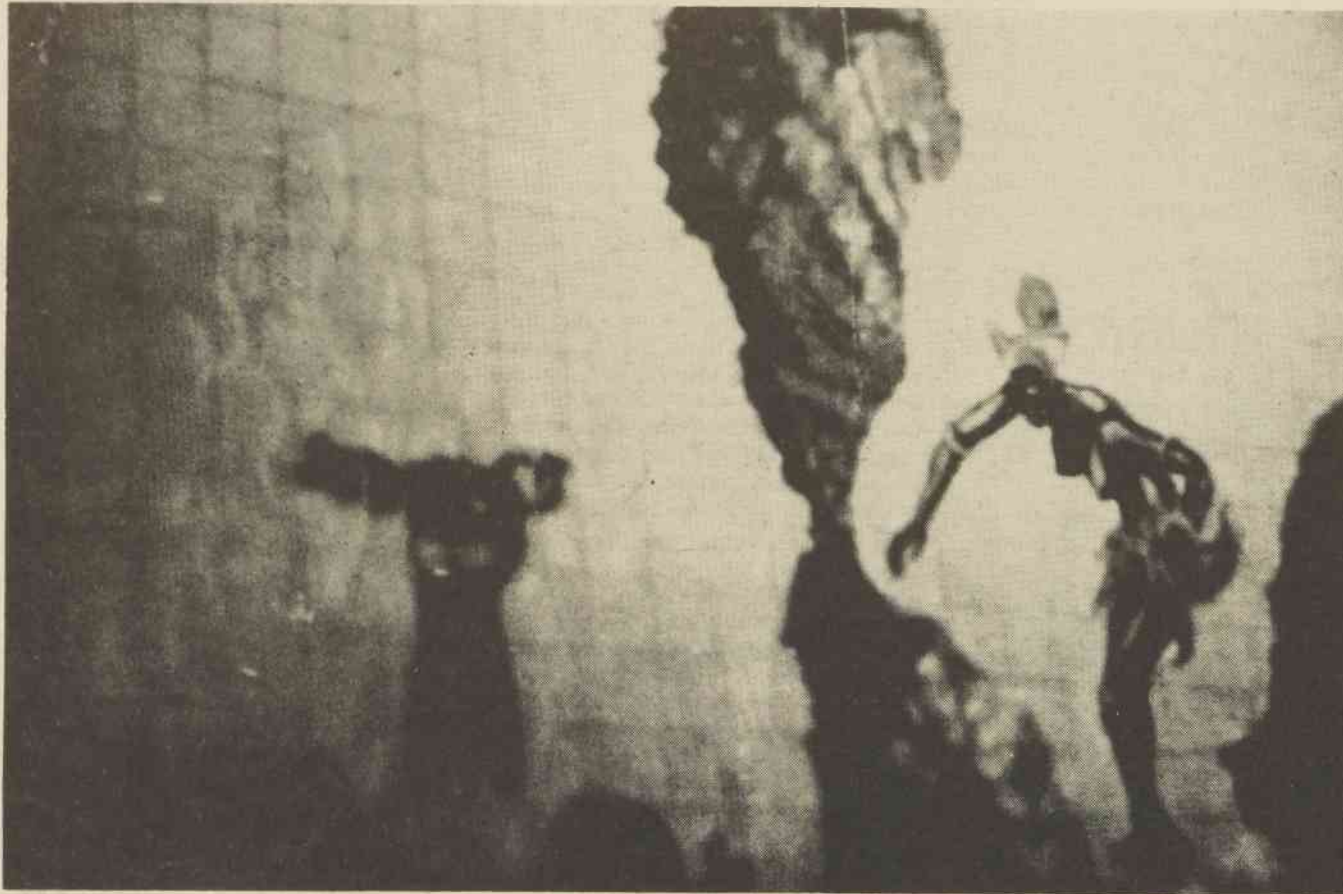


Murals may be destroyed

by Sheri Parks
Arts Editor



Durham citizens unite to save murals

There are few widely known manifestations of Black art in Piedmont North Carolina. One of these few, a three-piece set of murals by William O'Farrow, is in danger of being demolished along with the Do Your Own Thing Theatre in Durham in which it is housed.

An auction and benefit dance were held Saturday, October 16 at the YWCA in Durham in an effort to raise funds to save at least two of the murals. Both functions were sponsored by the People's Alliance and the Advisory Committee to Save the Murals, organizations of concerned citizens and artists.

The murals, completed in 1970, were the culmination of a two year planning and painting process. Due to lack of materials and money, O'Farrow used one extension ladder, one palette and latex and acrylic paints.

"He would fill his palette, climb to the top of the fully extended ladder, balance himself against the wall, paint for ten minutes and back down the ladder. He would look at what he had done, refill his palette and begin the process again," said Shirley McConahay, vice president of the Durham Arts Guild.

The murals include depictions of Black workers stretching between Africa and America, a

medley of Black nationalist leaders and a dancer. If all three murals cannot be saved, the painting of the dancer will be left behind when the others are moved to the new site.

"We feel it has the least political merit. We are hoping to move them to a community center. A Muslim center in New York is interested, but we would like to keep them in the Durham area. We will consider a public school last," said Sam Green, a member of the Advisory Committee to Save the Murals and a UNC student.

Estimates for the dismantling, moving, and restoration of the 30-foot high murals range from four to eight thousand dollars, depending on the amount of technical consultation needed. But a committee of art consultants, including a UNC professor, agree that the murals are artistically and historically important enough to be saved.

Artists interested in aiding in the restoration process may contact Shirley McConahay at 286-1364 or William O'Farrow at 682-2665 in Durham or Barbara Tyroler at 942-1233 or Larry Bostian at 942-7376 in Chapel Hill.

Others are urged to send donations, care of *Black Ink*, Suite B Carolina Union.



Evolution of an artist

Durham has nurtured only two Black muralists, William O'Farrow and Ernest Barns. When Barns left his mother city to explore the opportunities of the North, O'Farrow was slipped into the ominous position of being Durham's only Black muralist.

His interest in painting the three murals, presently located at the Do Your Own Thing Theatre, began in 1969, during the closing years of the Black nationalist movement.

"O'Farrow, caught up with the issues and concerns of his day, tried to portray what the young Blacks were feeling . . . protest, awakening of consciousness, black history and identity," said Shirley McConahay, vice president of the Durham Arts Council.

After finishing the murals, O'Farrow found the income from his work too inadequate to support a wife and expected child. He became a 7th grade arts teacher at Brogden Jr. High School. The paintings came more slowly.

In June, the People's Alliance, a concerned citizens' group, sponsored a potluck dinner so that local artists could meet, display, and discuss their work. O'Farrow went, and it was there that the mural demolition plans were publicly discussed.

William O'Farrow has evolved as an artist and a pictorial historian of the Black American evolution. In 50 years, our grandchildren may be searching to unearth the same history of emotions that are depicted in his murals.

The People's Alliance and the Advisory Committee to Save the Murals have organized to save William O'Farrow's murals in Durham. The mural of the dancer (center) will probably not be among those salvaged.