

VCP Censorship SC Sent 12/4/91

Santa Cruz artists say paintings 'censored'

By WALLACE BAINE
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SANTA CRUZ — At an art show celebrating the 200th anniversary of the Bill of Rights, local artists are protesting that their own rights have been violated.

Seventeen of the 25 art pieces submitted for the show at the Loudon Nelson Center in Santa Cruz were taken down by center officials Monday, eliciting cries of censorship from the artists in-

volved.

"I am amazed that this could happen in a city that's supposed to be so open-minded," said artist Joyce Slim who voluntarily took down her collage titled "Truth" after hearing of the center's decision. "Art is freedom of expression and that's what the Bill of Rights is all about. Now I'm questioning whether people really want freedom."

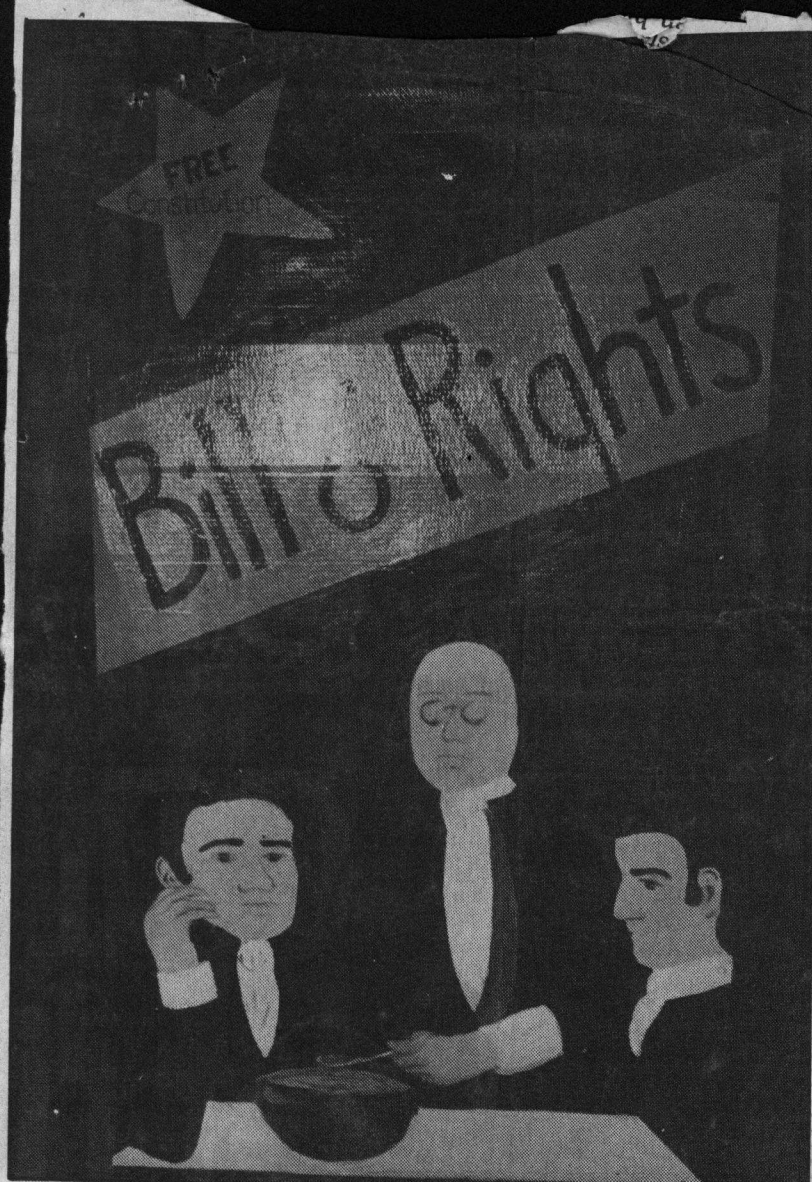
"I went home after hanging the

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Tarmo Hannula

This painting showing Sen. Jesse Helms with a machine gun was removed from Loudon Nelson Center.



Tarmo Hannula

Seventeen Bill of Rights art pieces were removed from Loudon Nelson Center.

Artists

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pieces thinking we had a good artistic show," said Lucia Grossberger, one of the principal coordinators of the Bill of Rights show. "I was shocked. I just kept wondering how there could be such a difference between community standards as we saw them and community standards as they saw them."

Loudon Nelson Center Director Raymond Evans, the man who made the decision to take down the artworks, would not comment on the matter Tuesday. But Jim Lang, director of the city's Parks and Recreation Department, said the center is not a commercial gallery and must operate under different standards of decency.

"We are not in the business of being an art gallery," said Lang. "We have children, seniors, support groups from all sorts of ethnic backgrounds using the Loudon Nelson Center every day and it is our responsibility to see that they have the right not to see anything excessively violent."

The art in question was designed to address the importance of the Bill of Rights in American public life. Many of the paintings, collages, lithographs and photographs addressed the subject of free speech, illegal search and seizure and other legal subjects involving the Bill of Rights.

The center requires art show coordinators to adhere to standards of decency, prohibiting material that is deemed overtly violent or sexual. Even the art show participants admitted that a few of the pieces could be considered offensive. Among the submissions were a color photo of male genitals and a black-and-white photo of a nun in a sexually suggestive pose.

But other works that were removed, say the artists, could not be classified as offensive on sexual or violent grounds.

"Some of those paintings (that were removed) were pretty milque-

'We are not in the business of being an art gallery.'

— *Jim Lang,
parks and recreation
director*

toast," said artist Don Dolan whose painting "The Real Jesse Helms" was taken down. "I don't see what they were thinking."

Dolan's painting showed Sen. Jesse Helms, D-N.C., standing on a copy of the Bill of Rights with a machine gun in his hand standing in front of a partially nude woman.

Other artworks taken down include a painting portraying President Bush with several sets of teeth emerging from his cheek and a political cartoon showing Oliver North shooting holes in the Constitution.

"I don't quite know their rationale," said artist Sarah Ringler, whose work was among the pieces removed. "It appears to be political. It just goes to show you how subjective censorship really is."

The art show's coordinators plan to hold a forum on the Bill of Rights at the center Dec. 15. At the forum — which includes panel discussions with members of the the American Civil Liberties Union and the Santa Cruz County Bar Association — the artists plan to petition the center for a dialogue on the art show controversy.

Lang said the artists are entitled to an appeal to the center's Advisory Board.

"They have a right to an appeal," he said. "I would hope they would take advantage of it."

The works taken down from the Loudon Nelson Center will be displayed at the Abbatoir on Soquel Ave. through Dec. 15.

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