

# THE WALL

## Oakland fencing in art

### Lightening up the heavy construction scene

By **Jose Rodriguez**  
Tribune Staff Writer

"I like it. It's a worthwhile investment."

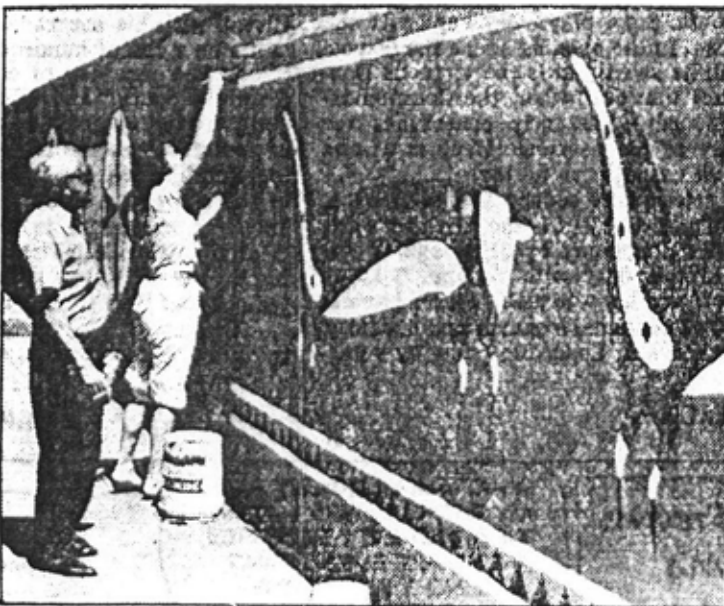
"I think it's neat. It's really ethnic."

"It's very attractive."

Passersby on Broadway near 12th Street in Oakland are responding to a fence which is being converted into a mural around the construction site of the Oakland City Center.

Called the Fence Project, the 27,000-square foot mural is being painted to improve the environment of the five-block area for the next three years until the center is completed, according to its designers.

The idea for the project originated with the Oakland Arts Council when a new fence was needed around the long-delayed construction of the City Center.



An onlooker watches Sarah Carlson's work on an American Indian design.

"We're going to live with fences for quite some time," said Patrick Cashman, City Center project manager. "This mural is a symbol of a new outlook or a fresh start."

Among the cultures represented in the fence's bright motifs are American Indian, Mexican, African, and Scandinavian.

Under the supervision of Bay Area artist Jack Greene, the various designs are being connected by graded blue, yellow and green stripes applied with air guns.

Gary Graham, who has enlisted the aid of his Vista College art students, is coordinating the painting of the motifs.

The student artists get a chance to do large-scale projects not possible in a classroom, Graham said, and to have their work exposed to potential employers. An additional reward comes, he said, when downtown workers, who may not be in the best of moods on a foggy morning notice the mural and compliment the artists.

"I feel that the public arts are one of the things that make life worth living in a big city," Graham said.

The dense population in large cities combined with "the confusion of cars and commercial art telling you to 'buy this, but that,'" Graham said, has created dramatic pressures on urban residents.

He said he hopes the mural will help alleviate some of those pressures: "Beauty should be accessible to all urban dwellers."

The \$30,000 Fence Project reflects a partnership between the public and private sectors. Costs are being shared by Oakland's Office of Economic Development and Employment and Grubb and Ellis Development Company, which is developing the City Center.

It took more than a year to organize the effort, said Gary Sinick of the Arts Council. "It's a major undertaking to get all these factions (business, government and artists) together."

Once construction of the Oakland City Center is completed, he said, plans call for the fence to be disassembled and transported to different sites in the city such as schools and walkways.

The Fence Project is scheduled for completion early this fall.

**Tribune photos by Howard Erker**