Impressive New Mural

By Thomas Albright

The Berkeley City Council Chamber, frequently the scene of acrimonious controversy, is now the setting for an impressive new mural dedicated to the theme of co-existence and harmony.

The 12 by 18 foot mural, which was unveiled publicly for the first time when the council met last Tuesday evening, is the work of the noted New York black artist, Homare Bearden.

It combines elements of photo-intrusion and abstract motifs in vivid colors to create a dynamic, tightly-knit composition that depicts the various facets of Berkeley's rich history and culture.

The project is the result of a remarkable collaborative effort among various Berkeley organizations and individuals, spearheaded by the city council and coordinated by Carl W. Johnson, director of the Berkeley Art Center.

The plan for the mural originated some years ago, part of a general renovation program for the venerable council chambers.

The choice of Bearden grew out of a one-man show of his work organized by the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1971 and later brought to the University Art Museum in Berkeley through the impetus of Raymond Saunders and Robert T. Gordon, artist-teachers at California State University in Hayward and members of the museum committee for the acquisition of Afro-American art.

Following a formal presentation of the plan of the art commission by Worth Saunders and Neil Strother, former director of the University Museum, an $8000 matching grant was received from the National Endowment for the Arts. The Berkeley Civic Arts Foundation, a fund-raising citizen group, raised another $3000 toward the project by public subscription. The remaining $7500 was contributed by the city.

Bearden was then brought to Cal State, Hayward to do a brief visit as a seminar instructor and, during his stay, was taken on an intensive one-day tour of Berkeley.

The scenes he observed that inspired his work appear on Telegraph Avenue to Berkeley's worship services and a new complex on old homes; the hills were shown as the basis for a pattern of canvas panels — which he later sent back from New York for the art commission to assemble.

The final version of the mural — occupying eight canvas panels — was completed last month and shipped to Berkeley for installation on the wall above the city council rostrum.

Bearden's characteristic style, which combines a documentative and figurative idioms with a formal simplification and a composition derived from cubism and a compositional scheme with roots in collage, lends itself well to expansion into mural scale.

From an expansive point of view, the Berkeley mural is a vivid and original expression of Bearden's familiar themes based on scenes of Afro-American life and other personal black themes. In part because of the neutrality of the screenprint medium which dominates the composition.

Baron has, however, done a masterful job of gathering a multiplicity of diverse, fragmentary images and abstract shapes into a coherent visual statement within the more or less traditional conventions of public art.

The mural is topped by a vivid view of San Francisco Bay on which an old sailing ship and a contemporary vessel symbolize the transition of past to present. The rest of the composition is a montage which interweaves images of people and buildings, historic and contemporary, into a structure of horizontal strata crossed by dynamic diagonal lines and further held together by flowing, looping curves.

The council chamber was further enhanced with a display of recent paintings by such U.C. art faculty members as Boyd Allen, Felix Ruvolo, Kiki Sauty and Karl Kasten.

This is an idea that might profitably be emulated elsewhere, perhaps with a rotating show of purchase awards from the annual San Francisco Art Festival, wherever these works may be.

ROMARE BEARDEN
A masterful job

Cantata Honors Dr. King

Merritt College presents Greg Dykes' rock cantata, "The Prince of Peace," as performed by the Contra Costa River Jazz Ensemble and Chamber Singers at 2 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 13 at St. Louis Bertrand Church, 1400 10th Avenue in Oakland.

This program is in observance of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday.

Organ Recital

Organist Stephen Lohr from New Haven, Connecticut, will present works of Mendelssohn, Dupre and others in recital at 5 p.m. Sunday at Grace Cathedral.

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On Sunday

David Abel will replace Jeanie Ray as the vocalist on the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra programs, 8 p.m. Sunday at the War Memorial Opera House, 1130 Market St., Berkeley. Show is 8 p.m. Monday at the California Theatre.

Arrau Cancels Performance In Oakland

Pianist Jerome Rose, originally of San Francisco, will replace Claudio Arrau for the next subscription series of the Oakland Symphony, which opens at 8:30 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 15 in the Paramount Theatre. Arrau has cancelled his current tour to undergo surgery.

"It's Let's Get It On"

MARVIN GAYE
"Let's Get It On"

10:30 to dusk. One price includes all shows.

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