

Local San Francisco artist, Melinda May, hired me as a grant writer for her application to the Creative Work Fund. The following is the initial letter of inquiry that I wrote for her.

Melinda May, Muralist & Illustrator
834 Moultrie Street
San Francisco CA 94110

November 3, 2006

Frances Phillips, Director
Creative Work Fund
c/o The Walter and Elise Haas Fund
One Lombard Street, Suite 305
San Francisco CA 94111

Dear Ms. Phillips:

I am writing today to inquire about applying for a Creative Work Fund Grant to complete a mural on the Silver Avenue Health Clinic building. I will be the lead artist on this project and work in collaboration with The San Francisco School, an independent, non-profit preK – 8th grade school in the Excelsior District. Let me begin by telling you a bit about how the mural project began.

Evolution of the Mural Project

The Silver Avenue Health Clinic, one of the San Francisco Department of Public Health's clinics, serves low-income residents in the southeastern neighborhoods of San Francisco including Bayview-Hunter's Point, Visitation Valley, Bernal Heights, and the Excelsior where the clinic is located. The clinic provides primary healthcare services for all ages. From immunizations and well-baby check-ups to HIV testing and flu shots – the clinic plays a critical role in protecting and maintaining the health of some of the city's most vulnerable citizens. But the health center is housed in a non-descript, 1960's era institutional building whose exterior wasn't reflecting the spirit of the good work that went on inside. Nothing about the architecture or the condition of the building was welcoming to patients. Tagged with graffiti, it did not look like a building where anyone would go to get well; it looked like a building one would enter only as a last resort. It was an eyesore, and because of its size (it's nearly a full city block in length) it degraded the surrounding neighborhood making it look neglected and even dangerous.

Profile of the Lead Artist

In response to the neglected look of the building, the Medical Director of the clinic, Marie Palazuelos, M.D., hired me to design and paint a mural which would transform the building from an element of urban blight to a welcoming structure that expresses serenity. Dr. Palazuelos, who was already familiar with my work, chose me for the project because she saw the transformative potential of my botanical designs for the building. For the past 30 years I have been working as a professional artist primarily in acrylic and watercolor and focusing on flora and fauna as the subject matter of my paintings. Please see my attached resume for a partial list of my clients and projects. This mural project is especially important to me because it gives me a chance to express my three primary passions – creating botanical designs, contributing to my community and working with children.

Mural Design

Because the neighborhood's streetscape is so hard and geometric (boxy, stucco covered houses; concrete sidewalks; asphalt streets; and very few trees), Dr. Palazuelos wanted the mural to introduce organic forms to the site and incorporate elements from nature. With that in mind, I have designed the mural as trompe l'oeil idyllic urban landscape depicting a peaceful garden of flowers and the natural elements on the horizon that one would see if the building were not present. It is designed so that people passing by will feel as if they have entered an alternate setting – beautiful and relaxing. The full scope of the project includes the front and the west side of the building. While we began working on the front of the building last year, we have not yet secured funds to complete it; no work has begun on the west side. A CWF grant would allow us to complete both stages of the mural project.

The front of the building, which is 80% complete, features an urban garden filled with beautiful flowering plants, a birdbath and garden paths. The background features the skyline – Bernal Hill, Twin Peaks, Holly Park, and the bay. The West side of the building, which has already been designed though no painting has begun, will include tide pools, coral, the underwater environment of the ocean and a path leading over dunes.

The portions of the mural that are almost complete have been very well received. Several neighbors have commented on how the mural has brightened and improved the streetscape. The completed portion has even illustrated how powerful a mural can be in abating graffiti – one of the neighborhood's primary concerns. The painted portion of the mural has not been tagged while the western wall, which has only been under-painted with gesso, has been repeatedly tagged. Once the mural is finished, the building will likely remain graffiti-free. Dr Palazuelos, the Director of the Clinic recently wrote to us reporting what a positive impact the completed portion of the mural is having: "I cannot tell you enough what your work has done to improve our health center. It has received many, many positive and delightful comments from our clients

and staff. . . .It helps us in our goals to deliver quality health care and uplifting moments to those who have not had many good days for whatever reason.”

Collaboration with The San Francisco School

While the painting itself is transforming the clinic building and bringing joy to the clinic staff and patients, the process of painting it has had and hopefully will continue to have a positive impact on a group of neighborhood school children. Students from The San Francisco School, a non-profit independent school in the Excelsior, helped paint the first phase of mural. This work satisfied two of the school’s curricular goals – training in art techniques and community service. With a CWF grant, I can continue my collaboration with The San Francisco School. In this second phase, the curricular goals of the mural project would include not only art and community service, but also science instruction. Teachers from the school will instruct the students in mural painting techniques and incorporate the subject matter of the mural into their classroom activities while I will continue to act as the designer and lead artist. The mural will be an interdisciplinary nexus providing these students with a rare opportunity to study urban flora, fauna and local sea-life while practicing painting techniques and serving their neighborhood at the same time.

Budget Summary:

Materials (paint, varnish, brushes etc.):	\$1,000
Artist and Artist Assistant Fees (includes design and execution):	\$33,500
<u>Additional Labor (for varnishing):</u>	<u>\$500</u>
Total:	\$35,000

The Mural in Progress

The support of the Creative Work Fund would allow us to continue this important work which has only just begun to meet its goal of improving the lives of the patients, staff and neighbors of the Silver Avenue Health Clinic; abating graffiti on the building; and giving the students of The San Francisco School a meaningful way to study art and science while contributing to the beautification and improvement of their community. Thank you for considering our project.

Sincerely,

Melinda May, Muralist & Illustrator

Nina Wang, Admissions Director & Community Service Coordinator
The San Francisco School