

# Artist's work directed to social change

By Stephanie L. Michael

For all professionals in the area of fine arts, their backgrounds, people and everyday surroundings come to play in the end result of their work. These impressions of joy, defeat, life and death are displayed through traditional as well as unique art forms.

In Portland, the artist Jay Harris describes himself as a cultural worker. Harris believes in a return to the renaissance idea of the artist as master of many skills and all of these tasks should be maintained at a consistent focus and impact.

Harris says, "Most of my art is a reflection of social change. I use my work to inspire and educate people to make changes. I believe that revolution is nothing but change and change is bound to come. I'm not really interested in creating art. I like to portray a real awareness of energy in my work. It is so much more alive and realistic to portray life as it really is in this society."

On September 3rd Harris, in support of the scheduled boycott by the Black United Front and Black community, designed a viewer participation exhibit at the Northwest Artist Workshop, located at 117 NW 5th.

The type of art work displayed by Harris, known as a "Rubout", is similar to rubbing a pencil over paper with a nickel placed underneath the sheet. This method produces a replica of the image underneath the paper. Artist Harris placed wooden letters underneath the white canvas. The phrase "Stomp Out Segregation," became more visible to the eye as exhibit viewers walked through the maze stepping on the letters forcing the dirt from their shoes onto the canvas.

"I placed a box of dirt at the entrance of the exhibit. Inside of the exhibit, I placed historical documents of racist memorabilia portraying slavery, segregation and racism in general. These pieces inside the gallery pulled people around the room which dirtied the canvas and brought the phrase through."

Harris says his work not only showed past moves of prejudice and discrimination, but also dealt with racism prevalent in hiring practices in Portland and in the Northwest.

"I feel the installation of my gallery got shut off by the media. Publicity was put out early and well placed out and around the city. There was hardly any response, even the critiques didn't say anything. I suppose it must have been too much trouble. I guess it brought out some real politics."

Harris has been recognized as a very successful writer and film editor. He claims his fame can be attributed to trying to learn everything in California at an ABC affiliate station in San Francisco, before moving to Portland. He says the ambition and success after several years had him screaming from the city. His fears of becoming a money monger, were forcing him to look at some of

his moral principles.

"Before I left California, I got an opportunity to do something on my own and I was paid a lot of money for the job. I heard myself claiming success because of the money I received. That really scared me. I knew at this rate, I would be solidified right out of my feelings. I decided then I was going to use my feelings and perceptions to create some kind of change for people. I got to Portland by accident. But I like it here. I'm needed. It's a pretty good market, it makes me want to fight for appreciation of the arts and social change. But, I'm going to have to find a balance. I have been doing a lot of volunteer work, which doesn't pay. So I figure for every nine non-profit projects I will do one for pay."

Harris goes on to say, "I want to change the status quo. I want to shake it up. I'm willing to give up security and other ego changes for what I feel is right. I finally have come to the point where I don't feel embarrassed about how I feel about this society or the many professions I've studied and still practice. I want as much self determination and pre-determination over my life as possible. I think many people get married; have children and get hung up on the security bit for all the wrong reasons. For most people, working everyday is sort of like a version of religion. They feel if you suffer so long and wait so long, you'll get what you want. I'm afraid they'll learn too late, things don't work out that way. It's a sad way to look at life in general."

Cultural worker Harris is happy

helping the voiceless in the city. He says there are a lot of old people and minority on fixed incomes that need someone to speak out for them, in the old town area. The artist says documentation of some of the lifestyles and cultures need to be portrayed and preserved in the city. "There is a lot of token lip service from city officials who encourage new businesses in Portland, but they don't consider who will be inconvenience or put out of their homes."

In the near future, Harris will be painting a mural in the downtown area. He hopes this is just the beginning of things to come for himself and other fine arts artists in Portland. The artist wants to set up a network for jazz musicians and dancers in the city. He also would like to set up a retreat-art camp.

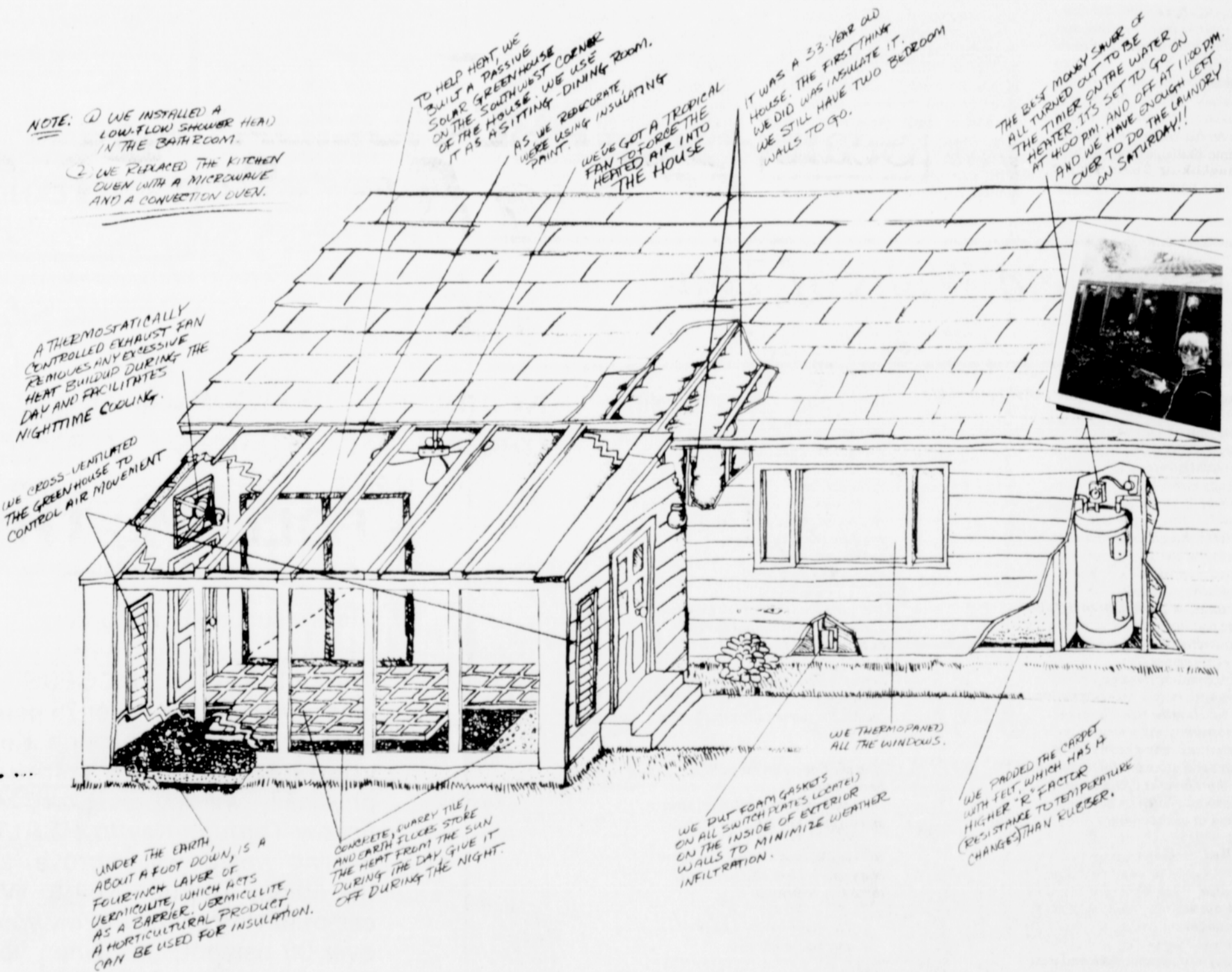


Richard Arrington, newly elected Mayor of Birmingham, Alabama, is greeted in Washington by President Jimmy Carter.

# WE COULD ALL LEARN A THING OR TWO FROM SYLVIA MALAGAMBA.

Take a good, long look at Sylvia and Don Malagamba's house. They bought it about a year ago. Then Sylvia set about installing every energy-saving idea she could think of (she'd been keeping a list). Now the Malagambas are

saving money — and energy — in everything from cooking to washing up to keeping warm. Or cool. Sylvia's ideas are all outlined below in the diagram she sent us.



## Commission surveys minority artists

Artists from all disciplines are encouraged to participate in an ethnic minority artists' needs assessment survey being conducted by the Oregon Arts Commission. Artists who register with the survey will be given information about grants and services provided by the Commission and will be listed in a special directory for Oregon ethnic minority artists. Survey forms and other information is available from Malinke Elliott, 1212 W. 12th Ave., Eugene, OR 97402; telephone: (toll free) 1-800-452-7813. The deadline is January 1, 1980.

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"Friends have all things in common." Plato

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The ideas above are those of the writer and are not necessarily endorsed by PP&L. But we hope the exchange of ideas, like these, will help solve the energy crisis.