Dear Palo Alto Public Art Commission,

I am writing to applaud you in your decision to not censor the Black Lives Matter temporary mural featuring Assata Shakur’s image and to urge you to stand firm on this decision, especially in the face of the pressure you are currently facing by the National Police Association and their censorship campaign.

We are in a historical moment that is trying to reckon with centuries of systematic violence and repression of Black communities and activists to maintain white supremacy. Now is the time to stand firmly on the side of history that brings justice, humanity and visibility to Black lives.

Assata Shakur is a beloved movement leader, whose story is emblematic of this systematic violence and repression. Even the slightest digging will reveal that she has always maintained her innocence against charges of murdering a New Jersey State Trooper, that she was shot during that incident while her hands were up, she was given an unfair trial, convicted by an all-white jury and suffered incredible torture during her six years in prison that followed.

It is well documented that the FBI’s COINTELPRO targeted and persecuted the Black Panther Party in order to neutralize it; Assata Shakur is one of many of Black Panther Party members who were persecuted, jailed, framed, murdered, by this program.

The police continue to murder and terrorize Black and brown people with impunity, but Assata Shakur’s life, writing and activism has politicized a generation of young people who are now demanding justice and accountability from law enforcement. It is not a surprise that the campaign to capture and dehumanize her is still active almost 50 years later, but it is not acceptable.

It is not acceptable that the police officers who murdered Breonna Taylor in her home are still walking around without any arrest or charges, which is why Breonna Taylor is also represented in this mural. The National Police Association will never circulate a petition to bring justice for Breonna Taylor and hold those officers accountable, which speaks plainly of what side of history they represent and uphold.

Hands off Assata!

Thank you,
Tina Bartolome
Dear Public Art Commission,

I have been informed that there is an immediate censorship issue regarding a temporary mural that depicts a painted image of a black liberation movement leader, Assata Shakur, currently on the street in front of the Police Station. There is no reason to censor this mural simply because Assata's likeness is involved. First, regardless of what differing opinions people may have on Assata, to the black community and many others, she represents a voice of freedom, equality, survival and leadership, and artists should be able to express her heroism and the injustice placed upon her in peaceful protest such as this mural by Cece Carpio.

Second, artists like Cece should be able to express and engage in art as free speech without being censored or silenced by the state. The National Police Association's actions attempt to do just that. If the local government assents to the NPA's demands to remove the mural, it is engaging in content-based discrimination, and likely viewpoint discrimination, in violation of the First Amendment. Violating Cece's constitutional rights in this way will expose the City of Palo Alto to liability and potential suit. This is a political art intervention and deserves no censorship. Doing so here is not in the City's best interests.

As the Public Art Commission, please support Cece's artwork and right to expression in her symbolic images of Assata Shakur. The mural is an important piece of work to those in our local community supporting the Black Lives Matter movement, as well as those fighting for Black Americans' human rights in the United States and globally. It is not the government's place, nor do they have the power, to erase works in this manner. The PAC needs to support Cece in this matter and do everything it can to ensure City Council understands that the community expects it to support Cece as well.

Best,

Kelly Ding

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Kelly Ding
JD | Harvard Law School
BA in International Relations | Stanford University
Dear City Council of Palo Alto and the PA Public Arts Commission,

It came to my attention that there is an immediate censorship issue regarding a temporary mural that depicts a painted image of a black liberation movement leader, Assata Shakur, currently on the street in front of the Police Station. As a reminder, Assata was acquitted for the crimes she was charged for 50 years ago and her innocence was proven in a court of law. SHE WAS PROVEN NOT GUILTY IN A COURT OF LAW even with a blatantly racist jury and judge, they could not prove that she killed officer Foerster. In fact, Assata was shot 2 times during her arrest and brutally beaten by the police who questioned her because they themselves didn’t know who shot the cop. In 1973, Assata was falsely accused by the media propaganda for murdering a cop and she suffered the consequences unjustly by torture, abuse, trauma, solitary confinement and 6 years in prison. The only crime she committed was her escape from prison where she shouldn’t have been to begin with and where her life was in grave danger.

Placing her on the FBI’s most wanted list 40 years after she fled the US, was a bargaining chip that the racist political right pressed for when Obama lifted sanctions off of Cuba in 2013. The political right media continues to misrepresent her as a “Cop killer” in order to perpetuate fear among people in the Black Lives Matter movement and to justify the abuses committed by police to this day.

Assata Shakur represents a voice of freedom, equality, survival and leadership in the black community and artists should be able to express her heroism and the injustice placed upon her in peaceful protest such as this mural by Cece Carpio. This is a political art intervention and deserves no censorship.

Given the evil injustice Assata endured, at the very least, we demand that you keep your hands off of symbolic images of Assata Shakur, the artists who believe her, and work to support the Black Lives Matter movement.

Let's be on the right side of history and keep this mural up.

Thanks,
Mariko Drew
Dear City Council of Palo Alto,

I was born and raised in the South Bay, going to high school at Castilleja. Palo Alto is located in Ramaytush Ohlone land. I have a great deal of love for that place and hope to see a society of justice and goodness evolve there and throughout our Bay Area.

I now practice medicine on faculty at UCSF and am an artist highly engaged in the arts scene in the Bay Area and beyond. I want to ask you to not censor the beautiful art piece by Cece Carpio that was painted in Palo Alto. I have seen the news articles about the police feeling upset that Assanta Shakur is depicted in the mural. They are calling her a cop killer. This couldn't be further from the truth.

In the same way that SF police said Mario Woods was a threat before they killed him or the Vallejo police said Sean Monterrossa was a threat and video footage showed how they executed him, while he was on his knees and his hands were above his waist, we have every reason to be suspect of police narratives around the culpability of Black and Brown people.

Assanta was never found guilty of killing a police officer. She was a victim of a racist legal system that tried and failed to convict her. The medical reports and testimony from physicians at that time countered the narrative the police were trying to advance. It was anatomically impossible for her to shoot a weapon, as she was injured from the police shooting her.

It is of utmost importance that we uphold narratives that expose the depth of violence white supremacy in our country if we are ever going to move beyond them, into a more balanced society where all may thrive. We must not cave in to requests to silence or rewrite our histories. They must be told, and the beauty and grace with which Cece Carpio depicts them is powerful.

Please do not change or alter this important work of art you have commissioned. It is powerful and inspiring. I am excited to come home with my own children to see it.

Thank you,
Rupa Marya
Rupa Marya, MD
Associate Professor
Do No Harm Coalition, Co-Founder
Co-Investigator The Justice Study
Physician Advocate, The Mni Wiconi Health Clinic and Farm
Commissioner, Healthy California for All Commission
Division of Hospital Medicine
Department of Medicine
UCSF
Dear City Council of Palo Alto,

It came to my attention that there is an immediate censorship issue regarding a mural that depicts a painted image of a black liberation movement leader, Assata Shakur, currently on the street in front of the Police Station. As a reminder, she was acquitted for the crimes she was charged for 50 years ago and her innocence was proven in a court of law. SHE WAS PROVEN NOT GUILTY IN A COURT OF LAW even with a blatantly racist jury and judge, they could not prove that she killed officer Foerster. In fact, Assata was shot 2 times during her arrest and brutally beaten by the police who questioned her because they themselves didn’t know who shot the cop. In 1973, Assata was falsely accused by the media propaganda for murdering a cop and she suffered the consequences unjustly by torture, abuse, trauma, solitary confinement and 6 years in prison. The only crime she committed was her escape from prison where she shouldn’t have been to begin with and where her life was in grave danger.

Placing her on the FBI’s most wanted list 40 years after she fled the US, was a bargaining chip that the racist political right pressed for when Obama lifted sanctions off of Cuba in 2013. The political right media continues to misrepresent her as a “Cop killer” in order to perpetuate fear among people in the Black Lives Matter movement and to justify the abuses committed by police to this day.

Assata Shakur represents a voice of freedom, equality, survival and leadership in the black community and artists should be able to express her heroism and the injustice placed upon her in peaceful protest such as this mural by Cece Carpio. This is a political art intervention and deserves no censorship.

Given the evil injustice this woman endured, at the very least, we demand that you keep your hands off of symbolic images of Assata Shakur, the artists who believe her, and the Black Lives Matter movement.

In solidarity,

Elizabeth Boubion

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Liz Duran Boubion, MFA, RSMT
www.lizboubion.org
www.flaccdanza.org
Director, Piñata Dance Collective
Co-Founder, Festival of Latin American Contemporary Choreographers !FLACC!
Dear City Council of Palo Alto,

It came to my attention that there is an immediate censorship issue regarding a temporary mural that depicts a painted image of a black liberation movement leader, Assata Shakur, currently on the street in front of the Police Station. As a reminder, Assata was acquitted for the crimes she was charged for 50 years ago and her innocence was proven in a court of law. SHE WAS PROVEN NOT GUILTY IN A COURT OF LAW even with a blatantly racist jury and judge, they could not prove that she killed officer Foerster. In fact, Assata was shot 2 times during her arrest and brutally beaten by the police who questioned her because they themselves didn’t know who shot the cop. In 1973, Assata was falsely accused by the media propaganda for murdering a cop and she suffered the consequences unjustly by torture, abuse, trauma, solitary confinement and 6 years in prison. The only crime she committed was her escape from prison where she shouldn’t have been to begin with and where her life was in grave danger.

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Given the evil injustice Assata endured, at the very least, we demand that you keep your hands off of symbolic images of Assata Shakur, the artists who believe her, and work to support the Black Lives Matter movement.

I would also add that since you gave Miss Carpio permission to paint this component of the mural, censoring her after the fact and destroying her work may be a violation of her VARA and CAPA rights. It is illegal to destroy an artist’s work without their consent, regardless of who owns the property that it is painted on.

CRP stands with Cece Carpio and Assata Shakur. We will do everything within our power to support this artwork.

In solidarity,

Desi Mundo
Founder and Director,
Community Rejuvenation Project
To whom it may concern,

My name is Robert Liu-Trujillo. I'm a Bay Area resident from Oakland California. I'm a fellow artist and I'm writing to voice my support for keeping the mural of Assata Shakur on the "Black Lives Matter" mural painted in Palo Alto by my sister Cece Carpio. I commend the city for allowing such a strong message to be painted on your streets. It sends a strong message of solidarity and support to Black folks in the US who have continuously and historically been terrorized by police nationally, and whose struggle for human and civil rights have either gotten more rights for all people of color or inspired movements for freedom worldwide.

Seeing that a national police association is asking you to remove the portion of the mural that features Assata or mentions The Black Panther Party I wanted to again voice my support for keeping the image intact. The association's racist and ridiculous logic is not only factually wrong, but insulting.

Murals are a democratic art form that you can see without paying tuition or buying a streaming subscription. Assata's name and face will give people information that would otherwise be silenced. This is especially true for Black stories, which is why the Police association want to silence any mention of her. When they brand her a cop killer they are hoping you will not do your research to find out forensic evidence proves Assata's innocence. They hope you will not be intelligent enough to make the connection between today's violence against black children, women, men, and people and the COINTELPRO program which targeted her and countless other Black activists who sought not to murder cops or kill white folks, but to defend Black people from being murdered, jailed, poisoned, exploited, and to have self determination for their Black people in their respective hoods across the US, etc.

Assata was not added to the FBI wanted list because people died, she's on that list because she and the Panther Party believed in protecting Black people's lives, and that is why she was granted political asylum by Cuba.

I ask you, do your research and listen to your community. See beyond the headlines to make white racist officers angry. Understand how pivotal a position you now can play in advancing the current historic reckoning and discussion on racism and police brutality. And if the police officers truly care about all the people in Palo Alto, let them also do some research and learn. Then take some of their salaries which are going to suburban communities outside of the city and use it to benefit the health and well being of people who actually live in the city. I hope to see you on the right side of history.

Sincerely,

Robert Liu-Trujillo
Trust Your Struggle Collective

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**Robert Liu-Trujillo**
Sign up for my newsletter!
Buy artwork here:
I’m writing to express my gratitude for Cece Carpio. Her beautiful portrayal of my friend Assata Shakur is heartwarming. I’m fortunate enough to have spent time with Assata and know first hand what an amazing, warm and loving woman she is.

For historical context, Assata was a target of the Counter Intelligence Program (CoIntelPro) of J Edgar Hoover’s FBI. She wasn’t found guilty in any of the six trials she endured prior finally being convicted in a sham trial. The government recognized her power and was determined to neutralize the threat she posed to the existing power structure.

Assata was doing her part to liberate Black people from the oppressive conditions that plague(d) Black communities in the US. She is a freedom fighter motivated by her deep love for justice and liberation.

The mural of her should serve as a motivation for folks to inquire about her life’s story and learn the truth about the modern day hero that Assata Shakur truly is.

Sincerely,

Liam Flynn-Jambeck
To Whom It May Concern:

I'm writing to express my support and appreciation for the street mural depicting the image of Assata Shakur in Palo Alto. As a supporter of the BLM movement, I believe it is important to shed light and give honor to those who have taken action against injustice and police brutality. This mural promotes resistance to what is wrong, and to speak against it would only prove that our community is still under the foot of the oppressors and its supporters.

Sincerely,
Giselle Nobleza
Dear City Council of Palo Alto,

I believe there is an immediate censorship issue regarding a temporary mural that depicts a painted image of a black liberation movement leader, Assata Shakur, currently on the street in front of the Police Station. Assata Shakur was **acquitted for the crimes she was charged for 50 years ago and her innocence was proven in a court of law.** SHE WAS PROVEN NOT GUILTY IN A COURT OF LAW even with a blatantly racist jury and judge. There was no evidence to convict her of the trumped up charges of killing officer Foerster.

Assata was shot 2 times during her arrest and brutally beaten by the police who questioned her because they themselves didn’t know who shot the cop. In 1973, Assata was falsely accused by the media propaganda for murdering a cop and she suffered the consequences unjustly by torture, abuse, trauma, solitary confinement and 6 years in prison.

**The only crime she committed was her escape from prison where she shouldn’t have been to begin with and where her life was in grave danger.**

She was placed on the FBI’s most wanted list 40 years after she fled the US as a bargaining chip that the racist political right pressed for when Obama lifted sanctions off of Cuba in 2013. The political right media continues to misrepresent her as a “Cop killer” (even though she was acquitted of that charge) in order to perpetuate fear among people in the Black Lives Matter movement and to justify the abuses committed by police to this day.

Assata Shakur represents a voice of freedom, equality, survival and leadership in the black community and artists should be able to express her heroism and the injustice placed upon her in peaceful protest such as this mural by Cece Carpio. This is a political art intervention and deserves no censorship.

Given the horrible injustice Assata endured, at the very *least*, we demand that you keep your hands off of symbolic images of Assata Shakur, the artists who believe her, and work to support the Black Lives Matter movement.

In solidarity,
Michelle Mascarenhas-Swan
To the Palo Alto Arts Commission and Palo Alto City Council:

I am writing to support the creation, celebration and preservation of the new Black Lives Matter Mural in your city, which graces Hamilton Avenue in front of City Hall. In particular, I want to voice my unwavering and ardent support for Cece Carpio’s contribution of the second letter “E”. Her portrait of such an important Black leader in the struggle for racial justice is key to the message of the mural, and an educational image for young people who may not be aware of Assata Shakur’s legacy. And the message of the text could not be more timely or necessary for healing the wounds of our urban centers: “We must love each other and...
support each other”. This also summarizes my plea to you, as public servants.

Shakur’s groundbreaking book, Assata, An Autobiography, should be part of American history reading in Palo Alto public schools. It is time, as Elizabeth Boubion’s letter eloquently states, to set the record straight on Assata’s innocence and persecution under the now-discredited COINTELPRO program of the mid-twentieth century. (COINTELPRO (syllabic abbreviation derived from COunter INTElligence PROgram) (1956–1979, and beyond) is a series of covert and illegal projects conducted by the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) aimed at surveilling, infiltrating, discrediting, and disrupting American political organizations. Wikipedia) As you are probably aware, this program explicitly targeted Black people struggling for racial justice, such as Fred Hampton Jr. and the Black Panthers.

Furthermore, it is the responsibility of public officials to investigate the source of the attack on Palo Alto’s new flagship work of public art: the murkily identified and ethically questionable “National Police Association”. In their online literature, the National Police Association supports the Broken Windows Policy that racial and social justice organizations have fought hard to abolish, and the NPA is opposed to Sanctuary Cities, like Palo Alto. The city council and the arts commission should be the first to defend the preservation of such a piece as Cece’s and her colleagues', and take pride that your city has had the moral backbone and ethical consciousness to support such a work of art.

As a muralist who fights for racial justice with my own work, I stand in solidarity with Cece Carpio and the other muralists of the Black Lives Matter Mural. It is my suggestion to the city that the Black Lives Matter mural be recreated in a more permanent location in downtown Palo Alto, not as a “temporary” or ephemeral work, but as an ongoing commitment from the City of Palo Alto to live up to its commitments to equity, sanctuary and justice for all of its citizens.

Thank you for your consideration,

Juana Alicia, Muralist
Justice for All Political Prisoners, Juana Alicia 2004. Mural for Mumia Abu Jamal and Assata Shakur

Juana Alicia
https://www.juanaalicia.com
Hello Public Arts Commission,

I saw news about the National Police Association pressuring the City Council to take down the BLM mural outside of City Hall. I'm a resident of Palo Alto and it gave me great joy knowing that the city took part in something so beautiful and bold right in the heart of downtown. Please do not let the NPA pressure you into taking down the mural that says to its Black citizens they matter. If the NPA wants to cite "freedom of speech" then the mural should stay on the street as a reminder to them that they should revisit their job requirements.

Please do not take down the mural. It's beautiful. The NPA cannot influence a public service council that represents the people of the city, not the NPA.

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Nilofer Chollampat, MPH

Phone | (650) 468-1306
Email | nchollampat@gmail.com
Dear City of Palo Alto,

I am writing this email to address your concern with the Assata Shakur mural painted by the artist Cece Carpio. Currently you are being pressured by the National Police Association to remove it, because they believe she is a 'killer.' The case against Assata Shakur is based on false evidence, by one witness, who later admits to lying in all three of his testimonies. Today George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain and many more black bodies are dead due to false evidence rooted in anti-Black racism.

First off I want you to understand that painting 'BLACK LIVES MATTER,' is a great artistic gesture that takes up space in public spaces. But it is just that, a gesture. It does NOT erase the work laid out in front of you in terms of black reparations. It does not bring back these black bodies that have been murdered by 'policing.' And we still have more work to do if we truly want black folks to be able to walk freely without having to feel like they have a target on their back. For you to remove Assata Shakur, a black woman, wrongfully convicted, from the BLACK LIVES MATTER mural, means taking back your 'gesture.' It means a step back for the fight for black lives.

Second, the reason we are yelling BLACK LIVES MATTER on the streets, and painting BLACK LIVES MATTER in public spaces, is to take up space where black lives have not been given space. It is in response to cops who claimed they were 'policing' but at times had the wrong person, the wrong evidence, or just escalated and ended up costing a black life. George Floyd was WRONGFULLY arrested and later was subjected to brute force. However, I want to remind you even if a human is guilty, being guilty does not give a cop the right to kill someone. Today we are painting and protesting against the way this country has policed and harmed black bodies. Today you want to remove Assata Shakur, because history has false accusations against her, when in fact she was wrongfully accused. Again this is an example of history repeating itself, where a black body/black mind is dismissed and not given space. If you look closely at her case you will see that one of the only surviving witnesses of her case, Trooper Harper, has ADMITTED to lying 3 times under oath for all his reports, which is the only evidence against Assata Shakur.

Again, this is history repeating itself, where a black body is denied it's liberation, rights, and freedom dude to false accusations, racism, and white supremacy. Assata Shakur is an example of the cost of police violence and FALSE accusations. George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain, and many many more black bodies are TODAY's examples of the continued violence by the police department on black bodies.

I hope this time around, while you have the opportunity to make a choice and stand with black lives, that you choose to stand with black lives, and ALL Black Lives, after all the mural does say, "BLACK LIVES MATTER."

Sincerely,