

# 19 Municipal Gallery board members resign

By Hunter Drohojowska

In protest over General Manager Fred Croton's controversial "restructuring" of the city's Cultural Affairs Department, 19 out of 27 members of the board of the Municipal Art Gallery Associates have tendered their resignations effective Sept. 30.

A Sept. 6 letter to Mayor Tom Bradley, signed by the 19 associates, charged: "The integrity of the management of the Gallery has been so compromised by Mr. Croton's implementation of the Department's recent restructuring, and by certain newly announced priorities, that the associates believe we can no longer be effectively motivated as members of the gallery's citizen support group." Board president Sandy Smalley explained that the eight associates who did not sign were out of town or could not be reached for the vote.

Neither Bradley nor Croton made themselves available yesterday to comment on the situation.

The restructuring began last May when Croton told Josine Ianco-Starrels, director of the Municipal Art Gallery for 10 years, that she was "working out of her classification." Under her civil service title of Visual Arts Coordinator, he told her she had to take responsibility for the programs of five smaller city arts institutions in addition to the Municipal Art Gallery. Croton called the move a promotion and said he would give Ianco-Starrels a staff. However, he hired a new curator for the Municipal Art Gallery — Maria de Alcuaz — without seeking Ianco-Starrels' advice or approval. Now Ianco-Starrels says that even her orders

requisitioning supplies are sent back requiring the signature of her so-called subordinate, de Alcuaz.

When Croton first told Ianco-Starrels to move to City Hall last May, the associates threatened resignation, and hundreds of letters of protest poured in from artists around the community. On June 20, Bradley sent form letters to all those who had written: "As was the premature report of the demise of Mark Twain, reports of Mrs. Starrels' pending departure from the Municipal Art Gallery were also exaggerated. You will be pleased to learn that Mrs. Starrels will spend the majority of her time at the gallery. She will assume other duties that should result in the upgrading of shows throughout the city art facilities."

However, Croton's June 21 letter to Starrels, outlining the duties of her new job, emphasized exactly the opposite, that as visual arts coordinator she "will be permanently housed at Room 1500, City Hall."

Both the associates who signed the letter and Ianco-Starrels believe that she is being forced out of the Municipal Art Gallery. At Croton's insistence, she has been spending two days a week at City Hall — in the office that used to belong to Ron Sakai, another Cultural Affairs employee protesting his treatment under Croton.

Croton was appointed by Bradley in July 1980 against the recommendations of many in the Cultural Affairs Department. He is now under investigation by the city's Personnel Department for alleged ethnic discrimination against Sakai, who had worked in various cultural programs for the city over eight years.



Fred Croton, general manager of the city Cultural Affairs Department, has been the subject of considerable controversy since he took the post in 1980.

As evidence that Ianco-Starrels' previous authority at the Municipal Art Gallery has been diminished, in the letter to Bradley the associates cited Croton's "by-passing and overruling . . . her actions, often in front of her subordinates."

The associates' chairman of the board, Marc Levin, a securities lawyer who has been active on the board since 1979 and who drafted the letter to Bradley, expressed deep disappointment in the treatment accorded Ianco-Starrels. He said when he joined the associates, they had a budget of \$1,500. This year, they had increased their support to the point where Bullock's had agreed to sponsor their annual Magical Mystery Tour and Ball at Christmastime, which they hoped would raise record funds for the city

institution. Bullock's withdrew its sponsorship upon learning of the board members' resignation. "All of us are frustrated," said Levin. "Just as the board maximizes the fund-raising capacity, changes in the institution make it impossible for us to support it any longer. This is the classic situation of the people on the one hand trying to do good in an honest kind of way vs. the bureaucracy of City Hall. Struggling as unpaid volunteers, we have tried to right what we see as a bad situation and what we are faced with is city administrators citing chapter and verse of rules and regulations. I understand, but I would like to think that if there is one area where things are not completely by the book, it's the arts."

Hunter Drohojowska writes regularly about art for the Herald.