



THE SPIRIT OF SOHO MURAL

THE SPIRIT OF SOHO MURAL

Designed and executed by Free Form Arts Trust.

A collaboration with Alternative Arts.

A celebration of the history and working life of Soho.

Dedicated to the local community

in gratitude for its support of this project

from its inception in Spring 1989 to its completion in Autumn 1991.

Sponsored by Wereldhave Property Management Company Limited,

Westminster City Council, London Electricity plc,

the D.O.E. and Free Form Arts Trust,

and a Business Incentive Scheme Award from

the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts.

Introduction

The Spirit of Soho mural presents a tapestry of Soho life in vigorously juxtaposed images and mixed media techniques.

Its ornate decorative style owes as much to Pop Art as it does to the Italian and French street decorations of former centuries which culminated in a richness of style during the Renaissance, when art was closely integrated with architecture and decorative painting and tile techniques were used on a monumental scale.

The triptych form allows for tableaux within the overall image to create a narrative. The mural's form draws on diverse cultural influences to communicate to us in a language we recognise. It wants us to stop, to look, to take part. It performs. It is reminiscent of the retablos of South American art and the murals

in Mexico. In Europe, multi-images were explored in religious painting, the public works of their day. The gable end wall is currently a focus for decorative treatments in the Posa T Guapa projects of Barcelona.

In the manner of the atelier systems, Free Form's artists have each contributed their area of skill to the whole and integrated the work of local Soho people. In turn Alternative Arts has sought to create a climate in which the whole mural project can be appreciated and enjoyed by the community and public at large.

It is an affirming artwork to enhance architecture. Our artists create cities where art meets life. This mural is not a nostalgic piece, but a sympathetic tribute to a sense of place. The process itself was part of Soho life for over two years.



THE SPIRIT OF SOHO MURAL – the whole image from street level.

"The Spirit of Soho gathering her skirts around people of all nations, accommodating them as they appear throughout the ages." Gaston Berlemont, proprietor of The French House (previously known as The Yorkminster), from 1945 to 1990.

It wasn't difficult to find inspiration in Soho. Though this cosmopolitan quartier has no famous monuments nor great open spaces, it has a remarkable history of people. All kinds of people: artists, aristocrats, musicians, novelists, actors, poets, philosophers, revolutionaries, refugees, scientists, silver-smiths, goldsmiths, jewellers, furniture makers, engravers, tailors, weavers, clock and watchmakers, fashion designers and film makers . . . so many of these habitués have become famous or infamous, you can't fail to

be aware of them as you walk round the square mile of streets that is Soho.

In the early 17th century Soho was an area of green fields given over to the aristocracy for hunting by Henry VIII. By the mid-18th century, grand houses had been built in fashionable squares and Theresa Cornelys, the self-styled Queen of Soho – who could count Casanova as one of her lovers – held the most glittering parties attended by high society and the Macaronis – the trendies of the times. The Huguenots (persecuted French protestants) sought refuge in Soho in their thousands, starting up small workshops practising their many crafts. The 19th century saw a new influx of immigrants from Italy and Germany, many of them worked in the restaurants for which Soho is renowned. By the turn of the



"THE PICTURE PARADE"

The Spirit of Soho embodied by Fay Presto as Theresa Cornelys – the self-styled Queen of Soho – lifting her skirts to reveal: (from left to right) Mozart, Blake, Shelley, Fanny Kemble, Jean-Paul Marat, Chevalier D'Eon, Casanova, Logie Baird, Brendan Behan, Canaletto, Mrs. Marx, George Melly (as himself), Karl Marx, Ronnie Scott, Dylan Thomas, A Macaroni, played by some of the performers of The Soho Street Theatre.

20th century the Soho coffee houses and eating establishments had become well known meeting points for numerous writers and artists.

Stroll round Soho and you will discover Canaletto's studio; the site of William Blake's house; Old Compton Street where Rimbaud and Verlaine met to read poetry in a local café; the pub where Dylan Thomas and Brendan Behan held their (separate) farewell parties before leaving for America; the hovel above Quo Vadis restaurant where Karl Marx wrote *Das Kapital*; the house of Jean-Paul Marat – the father of the French Revolution; the attic where John Logie Baird invented television; the place where Mozart and his family stayed and played; the streets where Shelley and Dryden lived; the home of the notorious Chevalier D'Eon and Soho Square, where the actress

Fanny Kemble and her famous family were housed.

Soho is still a vibrant village and The Spirit of Soho Mural, sited on the corner of Carnaby Street and Broadwick Street, provides a living landmark celebrating this history of artistry, and current invention. The whole project is dedicated to this community which, whilst it has lived through many upheavals, now stands more threatened than ever before.

In 1987, the Government removed the planning protection given to workshops, so they can now be turned into high rent offices. The 1988 Housing Act ended the protection of the long-term continuity of the resident community, most of which is in rented accommodation; but Sohoites are a resilient lot and no doubt the flourishing Soho Society will fight to keep up the Spirit of Soho.



TALLY HO - "The Hunt" meets outside Kettner's Restaurant in Romilly Street.



"The Hunt" meets up with Rimbaud and Verlaine in Old Compton Street.

The Making of the Mural

"When we started the Soho Street Theatre, we stared up at this large, empty wall and just knew we needed something there, not just a backdrop to the performances, but a real work of art – all we wanted to do was to show people what Soho is about and why it inspired us." Maggie Pinhorn of Alternative Arts.

"The first thing I thought of was Donatello's Madonna and Child relief plaque in the V&A. The sheer quality of the low relief – carved in such a way as to be completely three dimensional. The whole Renaissance thing of it being a piece of art on the wall – you think, how on earth did that get up there?" Di England of Free Form Arts Trust.

From the outset the mural has been a collaboration between Alternative Arts and Free Form Arts Trust, each using their own particular talents to create a new work of art

and make it live. Having gained the commission from Peter Bourne of Wereldhave Property Management Company and permission to proceed, Free Form set about designing and executing the mural whilst Alternative Arts co-ordinated a programme of public awareness in the mural and its progress.

It was decided that the mural would take the form of an image planted on the wall, having regard for the existing architecture. It was important that the image was not an imposition but rather an enhancement of the environment. The tryptych form was adopted, inspired by Renaissance wall paintings and relief work, with a large central panel containing the main "story" and side panels with windows onto the current life of the area.

A mix of mosaics, ceramics, tiles, concrete



WORKSHOPS in Ganton Street. Bunty and Kathleen make the window boxes in mosaic.

relief and paint was chosen to produce a vibrant and colourful landmark to illustrate the texture of Soho life. This provided the opportunity for flexibility and participation. Whole sections of the mural were pre-fabricated in local workshops and at the studios prior to their being planted upon the wall. Local people were genuinely involved. Mosaics were made in homes and community centres, at the school and in the library. Public workshops and exhibitions were held in the street. An open day was held at the studios.

"We worked on the window boxes, you could say that this was the main contribution from the Soho Society. We enjoyed it immensely but being rather ancient it took me time to get into it. I'm used to doing tapestry, very fine work, and was amazed at the way the school children just slapped it down. I had no idea it was going to be so large."

Kathleen Gibson, ex-warden of the House of St. Barnabas.

"I did the bit with the hare on the dog's back, the Soho Society's symbol. I'm sort of arty myself, I paint and draw, but mosaics were new to me, I found it jolly interesting and I liked it." Bill Jeffries (81), ex-PHG – Postman Higher Grade.

"It took us a lot of time and effort, a lot of hard work and I think when it's finished it will be marvellous." Sam Luxton (11) – Soho Parish School.

An empty house in Canton Street provided a much needed base from which to hold a series of workshops where large sections of the mural could be made with local people. During this time a log book was kept of each day's activities – these are a few excerpts:

20/6/90 – At the Family Centre

Nora and Vanessa worked together on flowers,



WORKSHOPS in Soho Parish School,
The children make the school plaque and the willow pattern plate in mosaic.

looking very nice. Nora is trained in textiles, so had a beautiful eye for placing colours. Children and childminders worked together on flowers for about half an hour. Then children played and minders continued on their own. Garcella was particularly keen and would like to come each week.

22/6/90 – At Ganton Street

Middle left section drawn up completely, material section enlarged on brown paper patterns. Hair not enlarged yet. Neighbour from jewellery shop called in. Clay preparation above their showroom made the walls shake, frightened the alarms might be set off, showed her round, very impressed.

28/6/90

Called in to the Soho Society off Wardour Street. They've made a note of the times and dates of workshops. Bill is coming in tomorrow.

29/6/90 – At Ganton Street

Bill did 3 hours solid mosaicing on the hare and the

dog – very skilled and would like to finish it but has little time. Coming next Friday morning.

3/7/90 – At Ganton Street

More work done on film section in clay. Eight new plaster moulds of vegetables ready for workshop tomorrow.

11/7/90 – At the House of St. Barnabas

Just Wendy today, she's got the hang of how to do the flowers and leaves. Took some photos. Several people came and looked when we laid it out on the floor and thought it beautiful.

12/7/90 – At the Family Centre

About 7/8 adults and 12/13 children. Got lots done and was good fun. Shame the camera conked out!

13/7/90 – At The Studio

More quotations will arrive here next week for front loading kilns but there could be problems on heat distribution and even firings in a larger kiln without more elements.



WORKSHOPS in Charing Cross Library. Making the streets in mosaic.

25/7/90 – At The Studio

Agreed to kiln FC.230 – order sent with a letter requesting price and 10% discount. Need to work out an estimate for the cost of a firing.

Live events were also part of the mural-making process. Staging theatrical encounters between the many famous characters who have inhabited Soho over the centuries created an entertaining way in which people could become aware of the project. Extensive research was done into the history of the area, a "Picture Parade" held to meet these personalities and a "hunt" mounted to discover

their historic habitats in the streets of Soho.

At their studios in Hackney, the team of Free Form artists worked to produce the clay relief sections, cut out and painted the tiles, moulded the plaques and completed the mosaics. Two kilns became operational 24 hours a day. Finally, the scaffold was erected and the wall cleaned and rendered, followed by many months of putting all the pieces in place like a giant jigsaw, and painting the sections in between.

The whole process has been professionally filmed on video for posterity.



Laying out all the mural pieces in the yard to see how they fit.

AT THE STUDIO

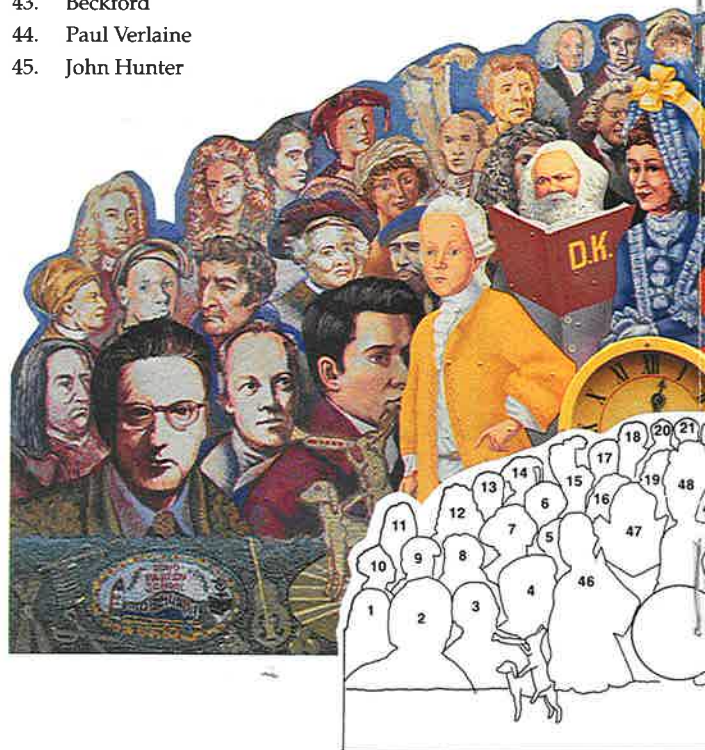


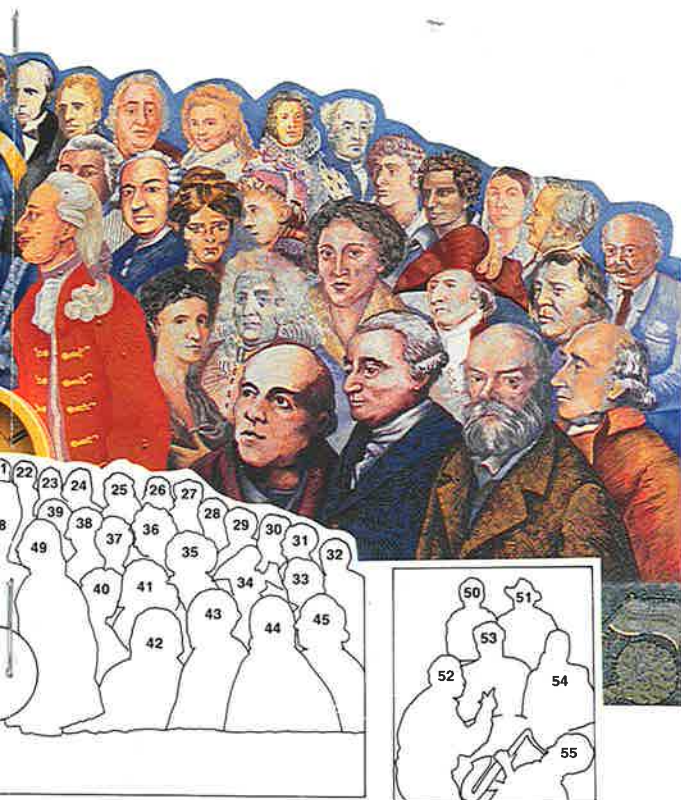
Figures carved in clay relief before firing and glazing.

1. John Christopher Smith
2. John Logie Baird
3. William Blake
4. William Hazlitt
5. Al Purchase
6. Ann Louise de Staël
7. John Pine
8. Joseph Nollekens
9. Crespin
10. William Hogarth
11. Handel
12. Isaac Newton
13. Antonio Canaletto
14. Mrs. Brook
15. Chevalier d'Eon
16. Sir Cloudesly Shovel
17. Jean-Paul Marat
18. Samuel Squire
19. Sir Joshua Reynolds
20. Henry Angelo
21. Mrs. Charles Kemble

22. John Snow
23. John Fawcett
24. David Hume
25. Mrs. Bateman
26. David Garrick
27. John Dryden
28. Charles Kemble
29. Edmund Keene
30. Fanny Kelly
31. Richard Wagner
32. Gaston Berlemont
33. Edmund Burke
34. Sir Ashton Lever
35. Percy Bysshe Shelley
36. Maud Stanley
37. Fanny Kemble
38. James Boswell
39. Josiah Wedgewood
40. Angelica Kaufman
41. Peter Vanderbank
42. Flaxman

43. Beckford
44. Paul Verlaine
45. John Hunter





- 46. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
- 47. Karl Marx
- 48. Theresa Cornelys
- 49. Casanova

- 50. Jessie Matthews
- 51. George Melly
- 52. Dylan Thomas
- 53. Brendan Behan
- 54. Geoffrey Barnard
- 55. Ronnie Scott



Techniques

A variety of techniques were used to create a vitality through the materials. The panels of the mural combine painting, mosaic, tile-work, ceramic relief, moulded render and cement fondue.

The whole mural design was drawn up full size and the ceramic pieces laid out at the studio to see how they fitted. Every clay section was made 10% larger to allow for shrinkage when drying. Each image was carved and moulded and cut into pieces which, once fired and glazed, were reassembled on site.

The mosaic sections were made in community workshops with glass and ceramic tesserae, using the flexible indirect method of first placing all the pieces in reverse onto a drawn up pattern. The tile sections were hand painted and glazed.

Cement fondue was used to form the head

and shoulders of the Spirit of Soho on the centre panel. The figure was first modelled in clay, then a plaster mould made into which the fondue was layered and cast. Thus the whole section was light enough to be in one piece.

Full size detailed cartoons were drawn up for all the painted sections. The German Keim paint system was used for its chemical adhesion to the specially prepared, rendered surface and it is hoped it will offset the effects of acid rain. The wall was cleaned and prepared with three coats of render which took three months to cure. Moulded render was used at the edge of the skirt section and for the flurry of books down the side. Four months were spent fixing all the pieces to the wall and completing the painted sections. The animated clock is enamel painted steel plate. The whole mural is 13.4m high and 6m wide.



IN THE STUDIO

*Making the plaster mould from the clay model of the Spirit of Soho
and layering cement fondue in the cast of her arm.*

Reading the Image

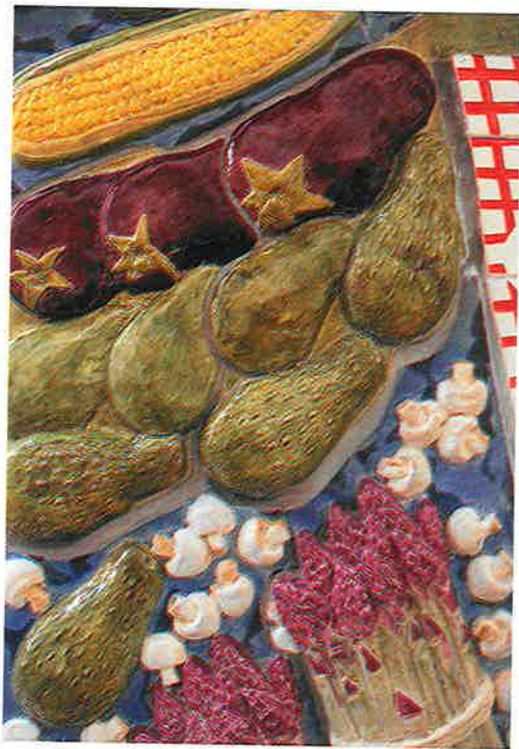
The main centre section of the mural holds the "Spirit of Soho", her ceramic hair flowing with a celebratory dragon and a street parade dancing along her left arm. Her breast displays the Parish of Soho plaque. On her skirt lies a map of Soho with images in relief, tiles and paint relating to the buildings and activities along each mosaic street: the jewellers, the musical instrument makers, Soho Square, Golden Square, the theatres along Shaftesbury Avenue, film-makers on Wardour Street, the Jewish Star on the wall of D'Arbly Street, the textile trade, Marshall Street Swimming Baths, the mock tudor front of Liberty's, the local football team, the pubs, the restaurants, the sound studios, the French Protestant Church, coffee bars, clubs, candlemakers and food shops.

A delicious frieze of fruit and vegetables leads down from Berwick Street and is moulded along the hem of the skirt in clay relief.

Chinatown is depicted on her petticoat, edged with a lace frill reminding us of this ancient local craft. Writing and publishing are recognised by books and magazines carved in concrete relief cascading down the side of the skirt. Framed underneath are the portraits of Soho's many famous historic figures, gathered Sergeant Pepper-style around the clock (see centrefold for key) which features Mozart and the three animated figures of Karl Marx, Casanova and Theresa Cornelys – the Queen of Soho. On the lawn below, four plates depict Soho Parish School, the Soho Society, a Chinese Willow Pattern, and the Soho Street Theatre.



Working on the wall.



Detail of the food section.

The side panels form curtained windows through which we can see current Soho life – the film industry, fashion, food, entertainment, street life, music and pub life with George Melly, Brendan Behan, Dylan Thomas, Geoffrey Barnard and Jessie Mathews gathered round a table while Ronnie Scott plays his sax. Underneath each window lies a beautiful window box of flowers, like the many seen hanging from the fronts of local homes and shops.

The colours are bright and vibrant, matching the life of Soho. The Spirit of Soho stands against a brilliant ultramarine background lighting up her blonde hair. On her

skirts the grey, blue and white of the mosaic streets provide a pattern encompassing the complex and colourful detail of all that you may discover as you walk around Soho. The strong but clear and simple images of the painted and glazed ceramic side panels frame the softer style of the portraits of the famous people from Soho's past.

Along the base of the mural ten plaques commemorate the craft workers of the area and list the project artists and sponsors. The whole mural is surrounded by a mosaic frame with a tiled frieze at the bottom depicting a hunting scene from early So-Ho (or So-Hou).



Details of the map of Soho from the skirt.

Chronology

1989

April: Initial meetings with Peter Bourne of Wereldhave Ltd, Alan Rossiter and Diana England of Free Form Arts Trust and Maggie Pinhorn of Alternative Arts to discuss proposals for mural. Feasibility study commences.

May and June: Walking around Soho. Initial research and sketch designs. Budgets and programme of work drawn up.

July, August, September: Further research into history of area. Photos. Picture research. Designs. Designs. Designs.

October, November: Working in black & white on large design and details. Research assistance from National Portrait Gallery and Westminster Library Archives.

December: Large black and white design completed. Programme of work and events planned and agreed for 1990/91.

1990

January: Period of community consultation. Visits to local groups, individuals and traders. Discuss design proposals. Lots of ideas and input

received.

February: Attended Soho Society AGM.

Enthusiastic response to mural proposals. Meetings to arrange launch. Detailed colour design produced. Budgets agreed.

March: Launch party of mural project and exhibition of design proposals at Phood Restaurant in Fouberts Place. Attended by local people and Westminster Councillors and officers.

April: Community workshop programme begins, this creates opportunities for local children and adults to participate in making the mosaics for the mural. First design workshop at Soho Parish School. Other workshops to be held at Soho Family Centre, Charles Norton Day Centre, House of St. Barnabas, Charing Cross Library and empty house in Ganton Street.

May: "Picture Parade", a major public event to promote the mural with actors and actresses performing the parts of historic characters who lived in Soho. Their photo was taken under the skirts of the Spirit of Soho so that their portraits could be in the mural. Filming of whole project



Some of the ceramic detail.

begins. Exhibition at Chinese Community Centre. Practical workshops at Soho Parish School. Applied to Westminster Council for sponsorship funding.

June: "Tally Ho" – a theatrical hunt round Soho discovering the historic habitats of the famous and infamous characters who once lived in Soho. Another event to promote awareness of the mural project. Exhibition at Soho Parish School of children's designs and examples of work. Empty house in Ganton Street set up as workshop for local groups to work in clay and mosaics. Sponsorship grant received from Westminster City Council. Applied for ABSA award.

July: Exhibition of designs and photos of events during "Art Alfresco", the West Soho Summer Art Exhibition. Workshop programme continues at Ganton Street, street workshops at Soho Street Theatre in Carnaby Street, community workshop at the annual Soho Fair.

August: Set up prefabrication of mural sections at Metropolitan Studios in Hackney.

September: Permission obtained from Goldsmiths

Guild to use emblem. Research continuing, four more portraits found. ABSA BIS Award confirmed. Clay work continues at studios. Visit from the Department of the Environment. Supervision of tendering for rendering and cleaning of wall. Arrangements for workshops to be held at Charing Cross Library.

October: Making of full scale templates. Solving final design problems. Firing of clay work starts. Maquette of 'Lady'. Detailed full scale drawings for glazing of clay. Making of tiled area and chinese lantern tiles.

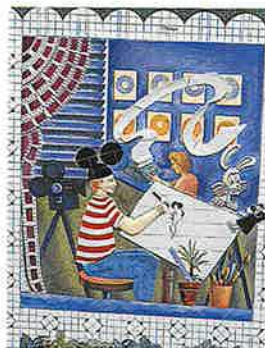
November: Mosaic workshops at Charing Cross Library. Clay work – glazing & firing continues.

December: Making of skirt map section. Modelling of 'Lady' – The Spirit of Soho – for mould. Making of mould for 'Lady'. Continuing with clay sections of skirt. Planning permission granted for whole scheme including clock.

1991

January: *THE BIG FREEZE*. Scaffolding on wall and cleaning. Glazing & firing continues at studio. Edging tile indirect application. Making blue plaques. Checking mosaics. Working on clock

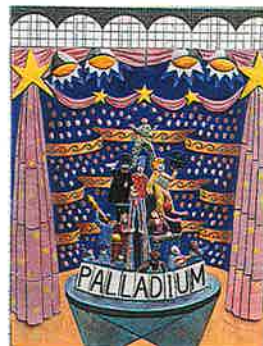
DETAILS FROM SIDE PANELS



Film



Fashion



Entertainment



Food



Street Life



Pub Life

at Kinetic Studios.

February: ICE. Difficult working conditions. Clay in danger of freezing as it is worked on. Rendering of wall delayed because of weather conditions. Preparation of portrait section in studio. Glazing continues. Work to clock continues. Attended Soho Society AGM to report progress of mural & show pictures.

March & April: Weather still bad but gradually improves. First render (three months to cure). Continue work on portrait section. Glazing and firing continues. Commence concrete carving. on wall. Final license negotiations completed by client.

May: "Open Day" held at Metropolitan Studios giving opportunity to preview pieces of mural prior to placing them on wall. Lifesize cardboard pattern laid outside in yard and glazed & unglazed ceramic pieces of relief work assembled so that painted section could be colour-matched to them. Mosaics also laid out and worked on. Tracings made of the black & white cartoon of all the famous faces of Soho in

preparation for the painting work to be done directly on the wall.

June: Final render and casting of 'Lady' in studio. Painting tiles for So-Ho section. Mural pieces transported from studio and stored in an empty office in Kingly Street.

July: Installation on site. Ceramics and mosaics fixed to wall.

August: Continue installation. Painting of skirt section, portrait section, background and all other painted sections. Continue fixing ceramics & mosaics.

September: Completing of painting & installation. Repairing any damaged pieces. Installing bottom tiled section. Grouting and cleaning. Approval of designs and budgets for information boards at base of mural.

October: Cleaning site & base of wall. Scaffolding removed. Installation of clock & temporary notice boards. Mural photographed. Official opening ceremony with all historic characters gathered to celebrate new work of art and landmark for Soho.

ALTERNATIVE ARTS invests in new artists and new ideas. We are a publicly funded arts organisation promoting a wide ranging and highly accessible programme of arts events and activities. We annually present a series of festivals focussing on particular art forms, e.g. dance, poetry, jazz, circus, street theatre and entertainment, and the visual arts. Currently we are pioneering the concept of alternative art galleries run by artists and based on temporarily empty shops in West Soho.

Alternative Arts was founded in 1971. We started the famous Street Theatre in Covent Garden in 1975 and ran it till 1988, when we moved to Soho, starting a new Street Theatre in Carnaby Street and creating a series of special events around the City of Westminster. All our events are highly visual and entertaining. They are mostly free and take place in the open air. Our policy is always to place art clearly in the public eye.

Alternative Arts can be contacted at:
49/51 Carnaby Street, West Soho, London W1V 1PF,
England. (Tel: 071 287 0907).

FREE FORM ARTS TRUST is a pioneering arts organisation formed by artists in 1969. We create large scale works in public spaces which enhance and improve the environment, encourage new opportunities and contexts for artists' work, and bring benefits to an area and its community.

Looking to the future, Free Form hope to expand the role of the artist in society, sharing a desire to create publicly accessible urban spaces to enrich the quality of life. We have produced work in Europe and all over the UK, including the Ocean Liner Hoarding by Trafalgar Square and the landmark cobblestone mosaic at Fish Quay in North Shields. We respond to a commissioned brief, work in close consultation with our client groups, and have initiated innovatory award winning projects for the inner cities, to create a sense of place and a sense of identity.

Free Form Arts Trust can be contacted at:
38 Dalston Lane, Hackney, London E8 3AZ,
England. (Tel: 071 249 3394).



THE SPIRIT OF SOHO – original colour design

Credits

Free Form Artists

Di England – *Project Director*

Alan Rossiter – *Design*

Audrey Mullins } *Production*
Ben Thompson } *Team*
Kim Lodge }

Elza Skobie

Ann Brown

Tim Ward

Bob Brown

Rod Stewart

Matthew Parsons

Ian White

Lucy Rockcliffe

Virginia Wilkinson

Heidi Jukes

Sue Elliot

Mike Windle

Andy Newman

Dan Sutton

Jake Miller

Hazel Goldman

Barbara Wheeler-Early

Martin Goodrich

Alternative Arts

Maggie Pinhorn

Liz Weston

Marlene Dixon

Rachel Levay

Clock

Graham Westfield

Siobhan Hapaska

Consultants

Arduit

Cement Association

John Mills

National Portrait Gallery

Westminster Reference

Library

Keim Mineral Paints Ltd

Tellings of Oxford

Wereldhave PMC Ltd

Peter Bourne

John Dickinson

Westminster Council

Margaret Leask

Helen Moss

ABSA

Christopher Pulleine

London Electricity plc

Dorothy Griffiths

Ray Dean

Photography

Caroline Mardon

Free Form

Graphic Design

Vivien Mullett

Film Crew

Anne Latimer

Lol Gellor

Julie Kuzminska

David Flanson

Local Organisations

The Soho Society

Soho Parish School

Soho Family Centre

Charles Norton Centre

House of St. Barnabas

Charing Cross Library

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