

Another Look SCULPTURE OF THE WILLERT PARK COURTS

(Now called A.D. Price Courts) 406 Jefferson Ave., Buffalo.

Text and Photos by Susan J. Eck



Abstract representations of "Slaves Fleeing" and "Slaves Returning" (as Civil War soldiers) flank the entrance.

Willert Park Courts was a "New Deal" 1938 Works Project Administration (WPA) federal housing project funded by the U.S. Housing Authority. It was specifically intended for African-Americans living in the Ellicott District which was overcrowded because of residential segregation in the city. The Federal Arts Project (FAP) was assigned to provide sculpture for the project. They chose New York City sculptor Robert Cronbach to create the artwork. To prepare for the task, Cronbach traveled to Buffalo and met with a wide range of leaders in the black community. He found that they did not want sculpture

that would accentuate their ethnicity but preferred everyday, domestic and pleasant scenes. Cronbach recalled, "I planned the sculpture with an architect, found a suitable vacant city-owned building and arranged for its use as a studio, worked out the casting and installation procedures for the tamped concrete sculpture with concrete contractors who were working on the housing project, and brought fellow Project sculptor, Harold Ambellan, from New York to join me in carrying out the work."

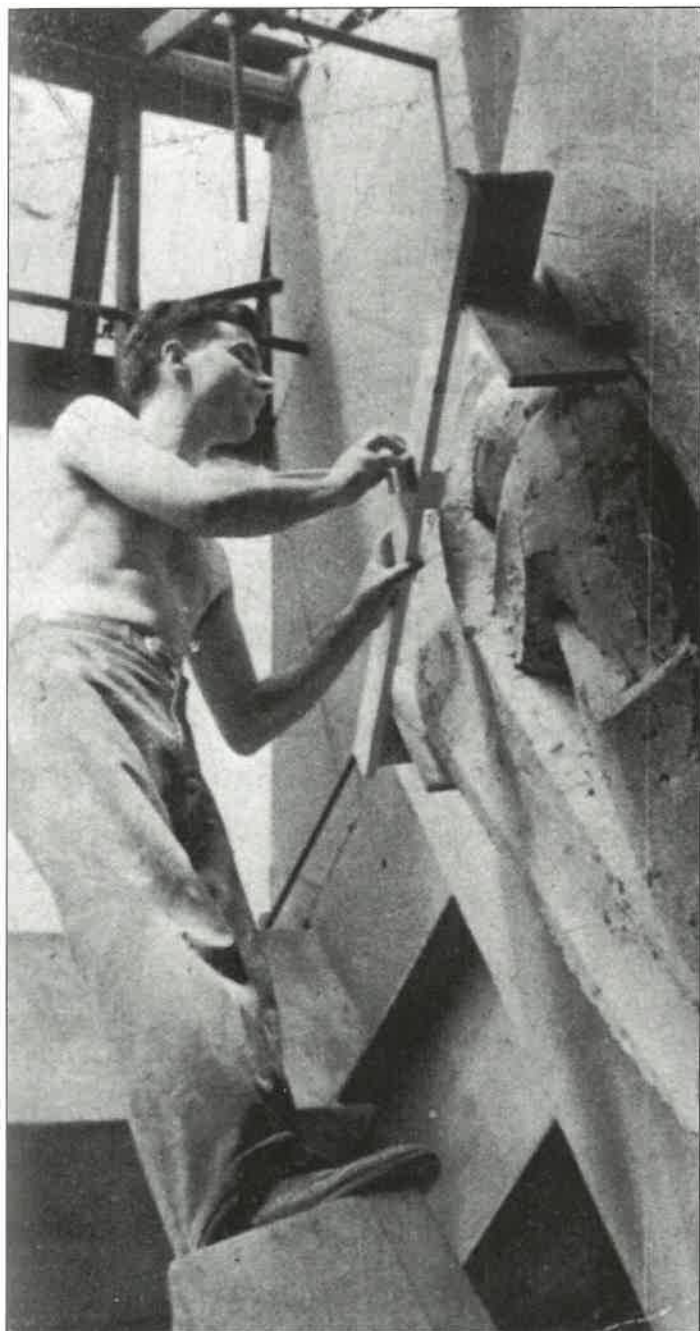
Near the corners of the buildings on the main axis are large, vertical, six-foot eight-inch sculptures.



"Flour Milling," by Cronbach.

Project sculptor Robert Cronbach (1908-2001) was born in St. Louis. His focus was on large scale public commissions throughout his career. His work can be found at the United Nations Building, NYC, the Federal Office Building, St. Louis and the Social Security Building, Washington, D.C.

Harold Ambellan (1912-2008), a musician and artist working with Cronbach on the project, was born in Buffalo. Cronbach spoke of the style of his work and that of Ambellan, "A number of sculptors fascinated by cubism and abstract sculptural qualities and at the same time wishing to project a clear, obvious, dramatic image, tried to evolve a synthesis based on the 1930s style of sculptor Lippy (Jacques) Lipchiz."



Cronbach working on "Flour Milling" in studio
COURTESY MARIA ESPINOSA, THE ARTIST'S DAUGHTER

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The WPA/FAP was the largest and most creative of the federal art programs that existed between 1933 and 1943. Robert Cronbach was one of a few hundred participating professional sculptors. He felt he was part of an important art movement and considered his Willert Park sculptures to be

among the best architectural sculptures to come out of the WPA/FAP. The housing project is scheduled for demolition. It is hoped that the public sculptures, which have weathered so many Buffalo winters without deterioration, will be saved and successfully reinstalled elsewhere. ❧



"Learning" by Ambellan



"Children" by Cronbach

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