

D.C. School of Realism Influences a Work of Art

Damage to Painting Traced to Stray Bullet

By Ruben Castaneda
Washington Post Staff Writer

To the toll from gunfire in the District this year, add one rather unusual victim: a painting.

The artwork was one of three by D.C. artist Joey P. Manlapaz that were chosen for display at the Mayor's Juried Bicentennial Art Exhibition in the fall.

On Aug. 31, the day paintings were being hung for the exhibit, officials discovered a flaw in Manlapaz's "Around the Corner," a rendition of a street scene on New York Avenue NW between Third and Fourth streets.

Near a corner, in the part of the painting that depicts the sign of a carryout restaurant, there was a neat, tack-sized hole. The linen canvas around the hole appeared to be singed.

Manlapaz and exhibit officials were mystified about the cause of the damage to the 16-by-14-inch painting. But it killed the painting's chances of making the exhibit, which ran from Sept. 3 to Oct. 18 in the District Building.

At first, an angry Manlapaz thought the people who had transported the painting or those who had hung it caused the damage. But in her third-floor studio in the 100 block of Quincy Place NE, Manlapaz noticed a hole in the wall where the painting had been hung.

"I poked around the hole with a knife to see what was inside, and out came this piece of metal," she said. "I had goose bumps."

Manlapaz's landlord told her that a stray bullet had crashed through a window on the other side of the stu-

dio sometime during the summer. In checking the window, Manlapaz said, it appeared that the hole in the window and the hole in her painting were in the same path.

The realization that her painting had been damaged not by a careless worker but by a stray bullet made Manlapaz realize her anger had been misplaced. It also gave her an idea: Why not display the painting with the bullet hole?

"This is how it is living in the city," she said.

Manlapaz pitched her idea to Alec Simpson, assistant director of the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities, the agency that organized the exhibit. Manlapaz said she suggested adding a note explaining how the painting was damaged.

But Simpson told Manlapaz the space where her painting was to hang had been filled; the artwork for the exhibit, 93 pieces in all, already had been hung.

Manlapaz contended that Simpson was concerned the bullet-pierced artwork would not reflect well on the city. But Simpson noted that other works of art chosen for the exhibit were rejected because they were damaged. He also said that at the time Manlapaz's painting was rejected, neither the artist nor the commission knew the work had been damaged by a stray bullet.

Simpson said he would have allowed Manlapaz to try to find space for the painting, but she didn't take him up on his offer. "I never said no to her," he said. "We respect Joey. She's an excellent artist. It was an unfortunate situation all around."

In the art world, it is accepted practice not to display damaged



BY JAMES M. THRESHER—THE WASHINGTON POST

D.C. artist Joey P. Manlapaz with a detail of her painting showing bullet hole.

work, said Marilyn Zeitlin, executive director of the Washington Project for the Arts.

"Generally speaking, you don't show damaged art," Zeitlin said, adding that organizers of exhibits also must take into account whether the artwork fits the theme of their show.

Manlapaz, who has sold several paintings and who teaches art classes at the Smithsonian Institu-

tion and Howard University, said some of her friends have suggested that she cut out the damaged section of her painting.

Manlapaz will have none of that.

Art, she said, "is a depiction of your own time. This is what is occurring in the place I work today."

The bullet hole, she said, "is very much a part of [the painting]. I will leave it as it is."

