

For Immediate Release

April Branco Mural

Hamilton – 17 September 2018

In June of this year Ms. April Branco was approached to submit proposed artwork as part of the City Art Festival's public art installation initiative. After consultation with Ms. Branco on what the City's vision was, she provided a selection of artwork for the team to review. From that selection she was provided guidelines for what the City was looking for, and she then submitted a sketch that was not approved as it did not meet our vision. The team explained the City's position and Ms. Branco subsequently presented another sketch that was approved by the City. The written description, verbal conversations, nor the sketch made any mention of any specific troupe alliance. She was contracted to paint a mural depicting Gombey's dancing, an unmasked child and adult and child drummers in full costume. Ms. Branco then realized that the space allotted was a few inches shorter than what was quoted in an email and it would not accommodate her original vision. She mentioned this to the Art Festival coordinator when she came in to sign the contract on July 2nd, and she was told to use her 'artistic judgement' to make the scale of the mural work in the given space or take additional space as needed. She commented to the project coordinator that she would amend the design "by building on elements in the original layout" to include more faces and feathers. The approved sketch was drawn on the wall at Church Street which was posted on the City's Instagram on July 17th. Ms. Branco then proceeded with painting over the approved sketch and with something entirely different from the artwork that was approved - a mural of portraits to depict senior members of the H&H Gombey troupe. No children, no dancers, no drummers. Simply stated, the completely new artwork was not conveyed to the City for consideration until after it was painted and this product was not approved.

In a meeting with the Mayor on July 31st, Ms. Branco told her story. The Mayor then met with City Art Festival officials and heard their story. The Mayor expressed to Ms. Branco in a follow up email later that day that she needed to have a meeting with members of the Events team as they "have some valid concerns regarding the portraits, if they portray any individuals etc." Upon meeting with the coordinating team Ms. Branco verbally expressed that she completely understood why the current artwork was not approved and apologized for not adhering to her contract. She stated that she felt the need to make a strong statement based on other situations that were occurring and no longer felt that her original submission spoke to her convictions as an artist. In this meeting the team agreed to move forward together to find a compromising solution. Several options were discussed and agreed to and subsequently Ms. Branco provided an electronic image of the new mural to the City only on August 7th.



Hoping for compromise, the Mayor took the matter to the Board on August 8th which then offered up two possible resolutions – to paint Gombey captains from all local troupes (Ms. Branco’s suggestion), to revert back to the original approved artwork, or last and least favoured, to repaint the wall. Failing a resolution, the artwork would be painted over. It must be noted that Ms. Branco gave notice to the City that she would be relocating to London and needed the second installment of the payment in order to fly back to Bermuda to continue painting the mural. She was advised in an email on August 9th that no further payments would be made to her until the City received written confirmation from her stating which option she would choose.

On August 22nd in an email to the City, Ms. Branco thanked the City for the opportunity and stated that if the City would not approve the amended mural design, ‘this email stands as written notice of termination in accord with section 8 of the signed contract’. In that same email, Ms. Branco claimed that the mural was $\frac{3}{4}$ complete. Not only was Ms. Branco’s amended mural never approved by the City, she terminated the contract before the painting was completed and the mural was painted over. The August 22nd email also sees her making mention of reimbursement of the “\$1900 deposit” to the City and the terms under which she would pay it. The City never approached Ms. Branco about repaying the deposit until it was mentioned by her.

The City of Hamilton, through the City Art Festival, has installed 15 pieces of public art throughout the City without incident, and looks forward to continuing to work with artists on the beautification initiative.

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