

www.sanluisobispo.com



David Middlecamp/Telegram-Tribune

OFF DISPLAY: 'Yin + Yang Peppers' is a still-life in the Georgia O'Keeffe style. The painting hung in the Planning Department for three days before complaints led to its removal.

Artist's peppers too spicy for courthouse

Painting pulled after complaints about its sexuality

SAN LUIS OBISPO

By Jamie Hurlly
Telegram-Tribune

Twenty-five years and a day after Bobby Riggs helped ignite women's tennis by losing the "Battle of the Sexes," his daughter hung a painting in the county courthouse that some found too, well, sexual.

"Yin + Yang Peppers" went up on a Planning Department staircase wall Monday and was taken down three days later after complaints from employees.

"It's an ordinary red pepper and a yellow sliced open so you can see the seeds inside," Dorothy Riggs said Thursday.

"The seeds inside the opening represent the seeds of life," said Riggs, who has lived in rural San Luis Obispo for about two years.

Patrick Brun, administrative services officer for the Planning Department, said he took the four-by-three-foot painting down Thursday morning.

"This was a little more modern than we usually have here," Brun



Robert Dyer/Telegram-Tribune

THE PAINTER ON HER ART:

'It's not fair that some people interpret the work and call it dirty when some people see it as nature,' said Dorothy Riggs.

said.

Three employees had complained about the painting, which was placed in a stairwell that serves both employees and the public, he said.

"Once it was down, lots of people came in and said, 'I'm glad you took that down,'" he said. All the comments were from women, he said.

"We need to be respectful of our employees," he said.

Another of Riggs' vibrant paintings, "Ocean's Secret" has drawn

Please see RIGGS, B-2

Hot stuff?

A painting of peppers was pulled from the courthouse amid complaints it was sexual in nature.

SLO COUNTY, B-1

San Luis Obispo County Telegram-Tribune

RIGGS from B-1

positive comments, said Brun, who called the artist Thursday morning to ask if she would like to hang a different painting.

"I don't know what to do — I'd rather put it back up," Riggs said Thursday afternoon.

She said she received positive comments about the painting when she was hanging it up at the top of the stairwell Monday.

"It's not fair that some people interpret the work and call it dirty when some people see it as nature," she said.

The painting is among a series of fruit and vegetable still-life paintings.

"There have been comments before that this series is in the style of Georgia O'Keeffe," she said. "If that's the case, there is a whole museum in Santa Fe, N.M., devoted to her work. I take that as a compliment."

O'Keeffe is perhaps best known for the sexual imagery in her paintings of flowers.

"Yin + Yang Peppers" was hung through a SLO Art Center program that rotates paintings among participating businesses and organizations several times a year.

"One other time, one person made a comment about a painting from a different artist, but we talked about it and felt you could live with it," Brun said.

Brun said the department originally asked for landscapes when it joined the Art Center's program because they relate to the department's work. He was discomfited by the controversy.

"We were concerned that this would get blown out of proportion," he said. "The staff really enjoys it. We want to continue being able to have a rotating gallery."

'We were concerned that this would get blown out of proportion. The staff really enjoys it. We want to continue being able to have a rotating gallery.'

— Patrick Brun,

administrative services officer for the county Planning Department

Art Center Executive Director Karen Kile, who has not seen the painting, said she is not aware of any similar problems in the past.

"I think it's between the artist and the place it's hanging," she said. "They certainly have the right to have up whatever they like."

Kile, however, strongly encouraged participants to open themselves to new works and appreciate the efforts of the artists who display their paintings.

Riggs has displayed several paintings including "Yin + Yang Peppers" in other venues through the Art Center program.

"This is a small community, and we don't have a lot of places to exhibit our work," Riggs said.

About that other exhibition, 55-year-old Bobby Riggs lost to 29-year-old Billie Jean King 6-4, 6-3, 6-3 in that famous tennis match. The Sept. 20, 1973, event drew 30,472 spectators to the Houston Astrodome and was seen on television by an estimated 50 million people.