

News



Rosie Lee Hooks. Photo: Brian van der Brug / *Los Angeles Times*.

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Director of Watts Towers Arts Center Campus in Los Angeles Is Suspended

Rosie Lee Hooks, the director of Los Angeles’s Watts Towers Arts Center Campus—the site where Italian craftsman Sabato “Simon” Rodia built a collection of seventeen sculptural towers over a period of thirty-three years—has been suspended by the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, Deborah Vankin of the *Los Angeles Times* reports.

The three-week suspension may have been over a mural depicting jazz musician Charles Mingus by artist Jacori Perry. Sources have told the *Los Angeles Times* that Hooks, who has served as director of the National Historic Landmark since 2010, might have moved forward with the commission without applying for the necessary permits from the city.

Perry began working on the piece in September in advance of several events, including the opening of the Watts Towers Day of the Drum Festival and the Simon Rodia Watts Towers Jazz Festival. Before he was halfway finished with the mural, he was ordered to stop by Leslie

Thomas, the director of the department of Cultural Affairs' Community Arts Division. Hooks was not informed of the suspension until months later.

Watts community member Edward Landler called the move "unjust" and "shortsighted." He also praised Hooks's work for the department of cultural affairs over the last sixteen years. Chioma Agbahiwe, vice president of the Watts Towers Community Action Council, added, "For all she does, with the limited resources given to her by DCA, it's very small-minded for DCA to suspend her for putting up a mural of Charles Mingus on the Charles Mingus building."

The suspension, as well as the fate of the unfinished mural, may be addressed at the monthly meeting of the Watts Towers Arts Center Interdepartmental Task Force, which is overseen by the mayor's office and is scheduled to take place on Tuesday.
