

by EMORY DOUGLAS  
TALKING BLACK POWER - TALKING REVOLUTIONARY ART

The theme of the Black Panther's art was "survival". It was a reflection of the Black Panther Party's politics. Like the Party's politics, the art focused on the community and its many difficulties and issues. The art gave the community a visual interpretation of the struggle for human rights, whereas our ideology gave the people our political perspective and understanding.

Before a visual interpretation of the struggle for human rights could genuinely and truthfully be expressed artistically, one had to realize that revolutionary art was an art that flowed from the people in their daily lives to survive, and that it was meant to motivate and inspire the community to take a stand for their human rights.

The community itself became the gallery for the art. Plastered on the walls, storefronts, fences, telephone poles and booths, sides of buildings, convenience stores, in the windows of barber shops, beauty parlors, drug stores, and wherever it was possible. By extending the museum concept to the community, the art became a tool for educating the community and cutting through the smokescreen of the oppressor's reactionary images.

In the final analysis, the Black Panther Party's art transcended the African American community and took on a national and international flavor. As the Black Panther Party's politics evolved, so did the art reflect those changes.

#### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Emory Douglas was born on May 24<sup>th</sup>, 1943 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He has been a resident of the Bay Area since 1951. Emory attended City College of San Francisco where he majored in commercial art. He became politically involved as a member of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California in February of 1967 until its dissolution in the early 1980's. His art was always seen on the back pages of the *Black Panther Newspaper* with full page illustrations that reflected the rhetoric and ideals of the Black Panther Party. Emory's art was also widely circulated and published in the United States, Europe, and Third World publications. His skills as a commercial artist were useful to the Black Panther Party's development of its printed materials such as the various publications and display art.

Emory's posters were also posted on the exterior of many buildings, walls windows and telephone poles in Black communities across the United States. The Black community was truly the art gallery for his work - "the people's art," he says. "I like to paint pictures that reflect the social concerns of the African American community." Over the years, Emory continues to practice in his art what he believes.