

Warren Woodberry Jr, "Artist Adds Loincloth to Jesus in JFK Mural", The Daily News, April 25, 2001

Artist Deborah Masters said she didn't intend to spark controversy when she painted a mural with a nude figure of a crucified Christ at Kennedy Airport. Masters, 50, whose work is displayed in Terminal 4, said she forgot to paint a loincloth on the Christ figure, which she had originally intended to do. She got her reminder after an offended worker complained to the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights. "When I realized it was missing, I put it on," Masters said yesterday, after she willingly "dressed" Christ at the League's request. "It was my original intent."

The South Williamsburg woman's mural also features sculpted reliefs of a Botanica with candles and Virgin Mary statues beside an African vegetable market. It is part of a 28-mural collection in the airport's new International Arrivals Terminal. The murals, collectively called "Walking New York," span more than 300 feet in an area where arriving passengers will wait to clear immigration, giving them a colorful glimpse of city life.

Catholic League president William Donohue commended Masters for altering the nearly 20-inch long figure last week.

Donohue said he believes Masters meant no harm, but was concerned her work would raise eyebrows like two Brooklyn Museum of Art exhibits, one which featured artist Renee Cox in nude form depicting Jesus and another of the Virgin Mary with an elephant dung breast.

Masters' work was selected by a committee formed by the terminal's developer, JFK IAT, with company executives, architects and art consultant Wendy Feuer. She has headed art programs for the Metropolitan Transit Authority.

"We support the artist's decision to revise her work in this way, and believe that all of the works of art will contribute to Terminal 4 as a passenger-friendly, pleasant travel experience," said David Sigman, general manager for JFK IAT, which was chosen by the Port Authority to operate Terminal 4.

Masters said her murals took three years to finish after a year of sketching scenes from photographs she took around the city. "I would rather have had attention from the overall piece instead of the religious figure," said Masters, a Catholic now working on an MTA art project for a bridge in Brooklyn. "I hope people look at [all of] it, because I really worked hard it."

The art will be unveiled when JFK IAT holds its May 24 opening for the \$1.4 billion terminal.