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Published August 17th, 2011

Moraga Art Gallery Loses its Space

By Sophie Braccini

The cooperative Moraga Art Gallery will lose its home in the Rheem Shopping Center at the end of October. The space has been sublet to the organization at no cost by the primary occupant, Comcast, for ten years. Comcast is now asking the Gallery to either pay a \$2,000 monthly rent or go. In the back of the building, the communication giant operates technical equipment and has crews coming around from time to time. Now that the agreement has been rescinded the artists are looking for a new place to display and sell their creations.

The Gallery's Nancy Slack says that her organization is appealing to Comcast to change its mind. "They need to access the building frequently, I do not see how they would be able to rent such a space anyway," says Slack. Andrew Johnson, Regional VP of Communications for Comcast, explains that the driving force behind the new demand is the substantial increase in its own rent that occurred when Comcast negotiated a new lease with the property owner, Kimco Realty, earlier this year. "We supported the Gallery for 10 years with an in-kind donation and are now asking them to pay for a small portion of the rent," says Johnson, "we hope that they can find the funds to continue to be our tenant." He notes that Comcast operates telecommunication equipment for the Lamorinda area in this location and that it does not have any other plan for the long term use of the space at this time.

In the meantime, Moraga Art Gallery volunteers are meeting with everyone in town who might have an idea of where they could operate their store. "This is very unfortunate," says Slack, "we had just finalized discussions with the Campolindo High School A.P. Art teacher and were planning on displaying the advanced students' work in the gallery. We also were planning to start our new monthly art and music nights."

The Gallery is an all-volunteer organization run by the artists themselves. Their funding comes from the 10% that artists give back to the organization when they sell a piece. According to Slack, the rent asked by Comcast is beyond their means.

"We are gathering information about art-loving corporate sponsors and lower lease options and hope to have something settled by our deadline," adds Slack.

The Gallery opened its new show, "Navigating with Color," on August 16. Gallery Member Nancy Robinson and Guest Artist Ellen Heathcote will be featured until October 29. The public is invited to view their art, along with the work of other gallery members, at the show's opening reception on Saturday, August 20, from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

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[back](#)

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