

Missing Agnew Portrait Tied To Alleged Halo, Artist Says

By Edward Walsh

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Spiro T. Agnew had his official state portrait whisked away from the Maryland State House in Annapolis last February after someone on Gov. Marvin Mandel's staff sent word that Agnew appeared to have a halo around his head in the portrait.

That is the explanation of

the man who painted the portrait, British artist Robert Tollast, who says the "halo" someone complained about was merely "a slight variation in the background" around Agnew's head.

Tollast's explanation is the first to shed light on the mysterious wanderings of the portrait, which has become something of an embarrassment to Maryland officialdom.

It was last Feb. 20, just a few days before the Agnew portrait was to be unveiled at a public ceremony and hung beside those of other former Maryland governors, that two aides to the then Vice President appeared in Annapolis, inspected the portrait, and spirited it back to Washington.

About two weeks ago, just as mysteriously, the portrait was returned to Annapolis. It is now being kept in a locked storeroom in the basement of the State House while officials decide what to do with it.

At the time the portrait disappeared, there was much disagreement about the reasons. The official explanation of Mandel's office was that it was taken back to Washington for security reasons. Agnew's office said nonsense, that the artist requested the portrait back for some final touches. Tollast said then he didn't know anything about it.

"Somebody in Annapolis, just before the unveiling was scheduled, thought they noticed a halo in the background," Tollast said yesterday. "No one, least of all Agnew himself, had noticed anything of the sort. But the Vice President naturally panicked at the thought that it would be unveiled showing him with a halo."

The somebody who spotted a halo, according to a State House source, was Gov. Mandel's personal secretary, Grace Donald. Moreover, the source said, Agnew's aides agreed

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