

HOMBRES Y MUJERES MURALISTAS ON A MISSION: PAINTING LATINO IDENTITIES IN 1970s SAN FRANCISCO

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Abstract

This article argues for the importance of murals as cultural texts, consciously formed to entertain, influence, and solidify local and transnational communities. In 1974, two teams of artists painted two legendary murals in San Francisco's Mission District: In "Homage to Siqueiros," the trio of male muralists presented themselves as heirs to famed Mexican muralists in order to solidify their indictment of conditions in the Americas and counter the participatory role of their patron, the Bank of America. In "Latino America," the female muralists rejected the Chicano Movement's emphasis on Mexican masters and declared a new feminist, collaborative iconography. Although the murals were dissimilar in terms of gender, approach, and aesthetics, the muralists were joined in their desire to unite the local Latino community through their depictions of a shared homeland, or an imagined Latin America. This article highlights the aesthetic, cultural, political, gendered, and regional dimensions of Latino identities through the lens of mural creation.

Keywords

community murals; pan-Latino identity; iconography; Mission District

"An explosion of human colors": Murals in ascendance

Since the late 1960s, cultural workers in San Francisco's predominantly Latino Mission District have produced an impressive body of literary and artistic work. Their creative milieu was important in helping to mobilize the Chicano movement and spurring a Latino cultural renaissance of local and



national significance. As a result, reading the iconography and discourses that pervade their work is imperative for interpreting the ideologies that have shaped a pan-Latino identity in the United States.

Two key works of the mid-1970s – the murals “Homage to Siqueiros” and “Latino America” – warrant in-depth attention for their high profile in the community and the variety of cultural juxtapositions they represent in terms of their content, creation, and history. Both “Homage to Siqueiros” (Figure 1) and “Latino America” (Figure 2) were produced in 1974, and while they share many of the same ideas and circumstances, they also reflect creative and philosophical differences that indicate the complexities of defining an iconography, a neighborhood, and a movement. While “Latino America” continues to provoke discussion as one of the key works by the influential *Mujeres Muralistas*, a cooperative of women muralists, “Homage to Siqueiros” is just as noteworthy for the publicly confrontational, flagrantly anti-capitalist voice of its three male artists. In developing a closer reading of these two murals, which are both homages to Latin America and critical responses to circumstances in the United States, I will deconstruct a variety of visual narratives to develop a more complex understanding of the dominant visual and ideological discourses in the mid-1970s Mission District and in the nation as a whole.

The Mission District’s gradual transition into a predominantly Latino barrio following World War II was solidified by the late 1960s. According to the 1970 census, Hispanics comprised 45% of the neighborhood population.¹ With the onset of the Civil Rights Movement, the Mission District emerged as a site of Latino identity.² Writer Alejandro Murguía recalls how the Mission, “teemed with painters, muralists, poets, and musicians, even the occasional politico or community organizer who acted beyond the rhetoric and actually accomplished something... . We had no problem being understood because La Mission was a microcosm of Latin America, and the whole barrio seemed in perfect sync” (Murguía, 2002, 118). Murguía’s words capture that sense of intimate community that pervaded much of the culture, though not everything was in sync.

Residents, activists, city officials, artists, and outsiders sought to define the community’s public identity in various ways. The issues at stake in publicly defining the Mission community emerged most visibly in the neighborhood’s prolific cultural production – literature, theater, film, and the visual arts – which attempted to define or organize the community according to various political ideologies. Artists attempted to lay claim to the neighborhood as Chicano, or Latino, or *la Raza*, or Pan-American, or Third World, or Leftist, or bohemian, or embattled barrio, all of which infiltrated local dialogues about who the Mission belonged to, and who belonged in the Mission. These over-lapping categories give insight into the inclusions and exclusions of community organizing. While some terms established allegiances as specifically of Mexican American or Latin American descent, other terms attempted to build

1 Brian Godfrey offers this statistic from the Census, although, of course, the Census figures obscure the presence of undocumented immigrants who seek not to be noticed or counted (Godfrey, 1988, 150). Raul Villa describes this process as “barrioization” (Villa, 2000, 4–5).

2 Most references to the Mission District describe the place as a site of “Latino” or “Hispanic” identity, as opposed to a site of “Chicano” identity, since so many of the residents have roots in Latin America outside of Mexico.

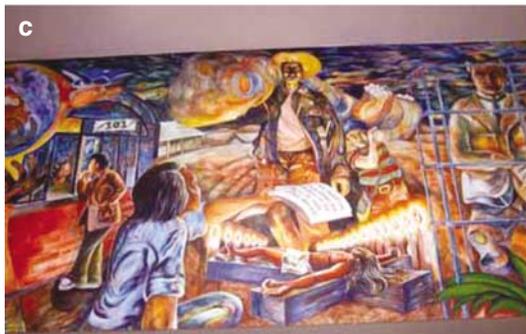


Figure 1 (a) "Homage to Siqueiros," 1974. Jesus "Chuy" Campusano, Michael Rios, and Luis Cortazar. Bank of America building, Mission and 23rd Streets, San Francisco. (b) Detail, David Siqueiros on the left holding Bohr's symbol of atomic energy, "Homage to Siqueiros." (c) Detail, a farm worker points to viewers above a crucifixion scene, "Homage to Siqueiros." (d) Detail, a caged Ruben Darío next to a scene of a doctor and nurse cutting an infant's umbilical cord.



Descriptions also reference the neighborhood as a site of “multicultural” identity to encompass the sizable Asian American, Native American, and African American populations.

Figure 2 “Latino America,” 1974. Las Mujeres Muralistas. Mission Street between 25th and 26th Streets, San Francisco. Approx. 25' × 70'. (b) Detail, Mission District family, “Latino America.” (c) Detail, Bolivian devil figure, “Latino America.” (d) Detail, Venezuelan Yare devils, “Latino America.”

cross-cultural coalitions based on shared racial oppression, politics, or class. The distinctions not only indicate the diverse politics at play in the construction of a community identity, but also the tensions underlying any amorphous national Latino identity.

One of the key politics at play in defining the Mission was gentrification. Like many poor urban neighborhoods during the 1970s, the Mission District was caught in a maelstrom between development and inner city neglect. One study shows that, by 1976, nearly half of 260 American cities with more than 50,000 people were experiencing gentrification (Smith, 1996, 37–38). In other words, members of the working class were being displaced by a middle-class “gentry”

that sought urban development projects to raise property values and produce investment returns. In the Mission in the early 1970s, the project most symbolic of upper middle class redevelopment interests was the construction of two Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) stations on 16th and 24th Streets. Mission residents argued that a transit system with easy access to downtown would displace low-income residents with middle-class commuters: “Because the land around the BART stations will become too valuable for poor people to occupy” (Los Siete, 1970). While residents battled potentially harmful development interests, they also faced the opposite problem: criminal negligence and illegal displacement tactics. Within three years of BART’s opening, 133 fires erupted within a three-block radius of the new 16th Street Station. If averaged, this would work out to be about one fire every 8 days. Authorities declared at least 41 of the fires to be arson, suggesting that many local businesses and landlords sought to collect insurance as a more viable method of earning an income. In addition, since the fires eliminated low-income properties, they also facilitated redevelopment projects with greater economic potential (Cruz and Roginsky, 1977, 1; Claudius and Collins, 2002, 1). The pervasive threat of displacement politically mobilized the Latino and/or working class communities on many fronts.

Local residents turned to murals as a means of invoking a community identity and literally saving the landscape from outsider interests, local speculators, crime, and neglect. As a result, public murals are one of the most visibly powerful and least studied mediums at work in inner city neighborhoods. Over the last 40 years, murals have physically and psychically transformed the Mission District’s landscape and have become part of what defines the neighborhood. As in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Detroit, and other major cities across the country, San Francisco’s community mural movement gained momentum at the tail end of the 1960s. The roots of the movement are often attributed to the impact of William Walker’s “Wall of Respect” mural in Chicago in 1967. Walker and a group of 20 other artists painted the tribute to African-American culture in the middle of the blighted South Side. While the work only survived five years, finally succumbing to the city’s urban renewal efforts, the community rallies that prevented at least two earlier demolition attempts, and the success of other murals across the country to incite community activism and visually challenge any intrusion from community outsiders inspired a movement. By 1971, the year marking the first documented mural in the Mission, the form was widely recognized as a powerful political tool.³ Not only did murals pictorially define the interests, ethnicity, and politics of local residents, but also their quality as a work of art protected old neighborhood buildings that might otherwise topple to development interests outside the community, or fall victim to internalized destruction, such as graffiti. As a result, the process of creating a mural is often just as indicative of community ideologies and tensions as the iconography in the mural.

3 Alan Barnett cited the Horizons Unlimited mural as the first community mural in the Mission. The mural was painted by Spain

By 1975, local poet Roberto Vargas described the Mission as “an implosion/explosion of human colors, of walls being painted by hombres y mujeres muralistas” (Kleyman and Taylor-Sharp, 1976). While a number of artists contributed to this explosion of images, the artists responsible for “Homage to Siqueiros” and “Latino America” stand out for their close ties to the community, for their continuing influence on the local aesthetic, and for the substantial media coverage their work inspired. Various local papers produced short articles to announce the completion of these two murals, thereby allowing the works to attain an uncustomary level of recognition.⁴ The new media attention was partly due to the increasing visibility of murals, the escalating skills of the artists, and the introduction of spectacle-friendly events to celebrate a project’s completion, but these two murals were particularly newsworthy for different reasons. While the artists of “Homage to Siqueiros” created a media spectacle designed to undermine their corporate sponsor, the artists of “Latino America” caught attention as one of the first all-female community mural groups. In exploring the motivation behind the works, the spectacles each work generated, and their impact, I seek to outline the historical context of the works and generate a more substantial understanding of the iconographic content.

A tribute to the Mexican masters: Painting “Homage to Siqueiros”

“Homage to Siqueiros” captured local attention not just for its powerful appearance, but also for its subversiveness. In 1974, the Bank of America commissioned Jesus “Chuy” Campusano, Luis Cortazar, and Michael Rios to create a mural above the bank teller counter of its 23rd and Mission Street branch, seeking to capitalize on the appeal of the mural movement to the local community. According to a bank official, “For us, the mural is a symbol of our desire to offer the best financial services in the Mission District” (Bank of America, 1974). The private commission did not stop the young muralists from attempting to speak out against their sponsor, a company then undergoing considerable public relations difficulties as a prototypical symbol of corporate greed. Only four years earlier, the notorious Isla Vista student riots near UC Santa Barbara had firebombed the local Bank of America. Shortly thereafter, the institution became a favorite target for the Symbionese Liberation Army robberies, and in nearby Berkeley, the bank had to build a brick fortress façade to prevent angry protestors from continuously breaking its formerly all glass walls. César Chávez often had criticized the bank for its anti-union activity. Even just within San Francisco, the new Bank of America downtown highrise had figured in the displacement of many local residents.

Suffice it to say, the muralists sought every opportunity to distance the creation and content of their work from the interests of the bank. To justify painting in such an institution, the three artists likened their situation to the

Rodriguez, Jesus “Chuy” Campusano, and Bob Cuff (Barnett, 1984, 126). Shifra Goldman, in her expansive overview of the California mural movement, also gave the Horizons Unlimited mural the earliest date of creation (Goldman, 1990, 36). However, local artists Jerry Concha and Rolando Castellon both recalled producing the Mission Rebels mural prior to the Horizons Unlimited mural (Califas group interview, 1982, 18). Regardless of which came first, in 1971, the mural movement catapulted into full speed in San Francisco’s Mission District.

⁴ A number of articles appeared to announce the completion of each of these murals. For “Latinoamerica”: Quintero (1974); “Mural Transforms” (1974). For “Homage to Siquieros”: Garcia (1974); “In a Monumental Mural” (1974); “Mission Grads” (1974); “Mission Murals” (1974). For both murals: Albright (1974); Kamin (1974), “Mural Tour” (1975).

experience of Diego Rivera painting a mural in support of labor in San Francisco's Pacific Stock Exchange. Artist Michael Rios remarked, "as Diego Rivera said, if the mural serves the purpose of nourishment and enlightenment, it's OK even if it's hung in the Bank of America" (Campusano *et al.*, 1974). In drawing parallels to Rivera and the tradition of "Los Tres Grandes," or "The Big Three," Mexican muralists of an earlier generation, the young men sought to invoke their artistic lineage and ethnic pride, but also to enable their political voice.

The parallels to "Los Tres Grandes" were built into the mural. By dedicating their work to David Alfaro Siqueiros, the men honored the Mexican master painter in the year of his death and cultivated his political and artistic persona. The trio included a portrait of Siqueiros, notably on the far left of the mural, in the prison garb he wore when arrested for participation in a May Day demonstration, thus capturing a quintessential moment of his life speaking out for his beliefs, regardless of the consequences (Figure 1b). Clearly, the artists drew their work into a larger sphere of cultural relevance by aligning themselves with Siqueiros and the Mexican mural movement's tradition of dissent.

Moreover, the trio's public alignment with the tradition of "Los Tres Grandes" helped them skirt the bank's attempts at censorship. In this regard, they were aided by local resident artist Emmy Lou Packard, who not only gave the group technical and aesthetic advice, based on her experience as a valued assistant to Diego Rivera, but also had the wherewithal to convince the bank of their right to freedom of expression as artists. Emmy Lou Packard had moved her studio to the Mission from Mendocino the year before, seeking a return to city life. Mission artists welcomed Packard as a local conduit to Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo and sought to include her in the community. She, in turn, provided a leadership role. Campusano expressed his gratitude to Emmy Lou Packard publicly, stating, "she argued strongly with the Bank about our civil rights as artists to express what we wanted" (Campusano *et al.*, 1974). The bank expressed its appreciation more privately, in a letter from the bank's Public Information Officer, who thanked Packard for her "calming influence when unnecessary and illogical strife seemed to be brewing" (Wood, 1974). Packard provided a voice of sophisticated experience that ensured the success of the project.

Packard also represented an ideological link to Leftist activism of the preceding generation, as a long-time peace and First Amendment activist. In 1957, Packard was one of 50 Bay Area artists subpoenaed by the House Un-American Activities Committee as a result of her reputation for supporting "radical" causes and producing politically oriented art work (Packard, 1957; Pfeiffer, 1982). When Packard assisted the trio of Campusano, Rios, and Cortazar with "Homage to Siqueiros," she not only parlayed her knowledge of the Mexican muralist tradition, but her experience as an organizer of the Left. The project initiated a long-lasting friendship and intellectual exchange between

Packard and chief mural designer Campusano, until his unexpected death in 1997 at the age of 52 years. Packard died the next year just shy of her 85th birthday. Although a generation apart, the two maintained a close friendship. Packard served as an ardent supporter of Campusano, arranging his introductions to Mexican muralists Juan O’Gorman and Pablo O’Higgins, as well as to César Chávez, whom she knew as a result of her work for the United Farm Workers (Packard, 1974a, b). In turn, Campusano invited Packard to participate in the contemporary Mission District scene, leading to her work with local venues, such as Galería de la Raza and the Mexican Museum.⁵ Their relationship is indicative of the many ideological links that emanated from the pre-1960s Old Left to the formation of the New Left, as argued by scholar Michael Denning (1998). However, their relationship is particularly important for conveying the relevance of the Old Left in shaping Latino civil rights activism, a less studied phenomenon, as is the degree to which Latinos have shaped the Left. The cultural workers of the Mission in the 1970s interwove political ideologies of Latin America and the Old Left into a complex fabric of community organizing, which was not merely formative for local politics, but relevant for understanding the many dimensions of the New Left in the United States as a whole. The work of “Homage to Siqueiros” is only one instance of a larger shift in the national landscape, representing increasing political mobilization among Latinos to alter systemic poverty, racism, and blind capitalism through traditional and innovative community organizing techniques.

For the mural opening, while the bank branch released marketing materials designed to highlight its community involvement, inviting people to the mural’s unveiling to win Giants tickets or a trip to Latin America, the muralists responded with their own media campaign, printing a “Tres Muralistas” pamphlet hostile to the bank, refuting any representation of their work as supportive of the institution, and organizing an opening ceremony that would be sure to undermine the wishes of local bank officials. The artists invited their friend Roberto Vargas to read a poem for the opening reception on June 4, 1974. Vargas had a high profile in the community as the director of the Neighborhood Arts Program and as a strident activist for local needs. More diatribe than verse, Vargas entitled his work, “La BoA,” which conflated the bank’s acronym with the name of a snake and featured bank founder A.P. Giannini as the character “A.P.G.O. Money.” Bank officials stepped in and managed to prevent a public reading of “La BoA.” Instead, as a compromise, Vargas read “They Blamed it on Reds,” an indictment of the San Francisco police for their alleged murder of Vicente Gutierrez, which did not lack in hostility, but at least minimized the evil casting of the bank. Nevertheless, neighborhood residents had an opportunity to read the text of “La BoA” in the local paper, which published the text alongside an article describing the radical antics of the muralists (Vargas, 1974).

5 Campusano’s name appeared regularly in Packard’s later calendars, often in relation to Mission District events (Packard notebooks, 1983, 1984, 1985).

About the bank, artist Chuy Campusano stated, “We all know they support the grape and lettuce growers in California and that they’re involved in Latin America. I didn’t do the mural for them. I did it for all those people in the Mission who stand on the long lines in the bank on Friday afternoon” (Campusano *et al.*, 1974). Indeed, the central figure of the mural depicts an agricultural worker extending his exaggerated fist at the viewer, as another man opens a text to César Chávez’s statement, “Our sweat and our blood have fallen on this land to make other men rich” (Figure 1c). The Bank was not immune to the indictment. Indeed, in the bank’s promotional materials, the text was erased. Despite these minor acts of censorship, the bank used the mural to represent its exceptional tolerance and belief in freedom of expression. One reporter declared that the presence of the mural “is proof in itself that the \$41.8 billion-deposit bank did not attempt to limit the artists’ vision or censor the subject matter” (Brouillette, 1974). The bank’s posturing is part of the reason the statement has survived intact on the mural to this day. Scholar Eva Cockcroft also made the point that the mural has served “as a sort of fire insurance for the branch” (Cockcroft, 1998, 230). Ultimately, the muralists and Emmy Lou Packard successfully protected the work from its patron by placing it in a grand tradition of political art.

Inventing “Latino America”

Simultaneously, just a few blocks down Mission Street, another mural project was underway. The mural “Latino America” drew attention because of the gender of its artists and the large scale of the work. The mural used the talents of eight women, composed of four lead artists – Patricia Rodríguez, Graciela Carrillo, Consuelo Mendez, and Irene Perez – and four assistants – Tuti Rodriguez, Miriam Olivas, Xochitl Nevel-Guerrero, and Estér Hernández – to paint a 70-foot long by 25-foot high wall. While many women artists, including the lead artists of this mural, had contributed to various mural projects in the neighborhood, the group was unusual in using *only* women artists, leading to the adoption of their group name, “Las Mujeres Muralistas” (“The Women Muralists”). According to Estér Hernández, “People were really shocked that a group of women were going to do the whole thing, from setting up scaffolds to doing the drawings to doing cartoons” (Goldman, 1994, 213). The end result was a stunning mural that disproved the long-standing stereotype that mural painting, especially Chicano mural painting, was a practice best performed by men. Indeed, their success opened doors and inspired many other women to pursue the art form, both locally and nationally.

The women artists held an inauguration party for the mural on May 31, 1974, four days prior to the opening of “Homage to Siqueiros.” A poster invited local residents to enjoy music and food in honor of the work’s completion (Mujeres Muralistas poster, 1974). Like the men, the women passed out a

political statement to contextualize their work, though much briefer. Signed by Graciela Carrillo, Consuelo Mendez, Irene Perez, and Patricia Rodríguez, the statement made clear that the mural was not merely a feminist vision in content, but in creation. They declared, “Throughout history there have been very few women who have figured in art. What you see before your eyes is proof that woman, too, can work at this level. That we can put together scaffolding and climb it.” Although this statement was in many ways equally militant to the men’s, all of the articles reporting on the new mural dismissed any radicalism and instead focused on their more harmonious emphasis on collective creation. Much quoted or paraphrased was their statement declaring, “We are four women who are working. All the work that you see before your eyes was done collectively. We feel this work is really important because it takes art beyond the level of individualism” (Mujeres Muralistas statement, 1974). The Mujeres Muralistas gravitated to an approach and a public posture that emphasized women’s superior collaborative skills.

The emphasis on collaboration was partly to reject their experience working with men. As Patricia Rodríguez recalled, “for the record, it wasn’t negative in the sense that the men blocked us or they didn’t let us do anything. It’s just that they didn’t accept us to work with them....” While the men also collaborated on their work, the women felt they did not have a substantial voice, leading the women to seek independent projects and ensure that the artistic visions of *all* participants were integrated equally. For Rodríguez, “There was no leader; there was no director.” Not only was this a dramatically different experience from attempting to work with men, but the collaborative technique also helped kindle a different direction in terms of the content and ideologies of their work (Rodríguez, 2003).

While the men sought to pay homage to the male Mexican muralists of the past, the women argued for an entirely new vision. Rodríguez stated, “We didn’t want to give any more credit to the Mexican painters. We were the new cadres of painters, right after Rivera. We were those people. Therefore, we had to come up with something new. And so, this mural historically is one of the most important in that sense because we break that trend for the first time in history. We say, ‘we live here, we’re two cultures. We’re an American culture and a Latino culture’” (Rodríguez, 2003).

This sentiment was partly embodied in the original title of the work, “Latino America,” a title also lost to the past. While the mural’s inaugural poster and statement refer to the work as “Latino America,” scholars of the work never use this title, instead relying on the names “Latinoamérica” or “Panamerica.”⁶ The various labels are not necessarily symbolic of a mass error, but rather, indicative of how alternative names gained more acceptance than the original. The most pervasive title, “Latinoamérica,” is the official Spanish term for Latin America, and as a result, suggests the painting’s focus is most directed toward depicting the countries comprising Latin America. Alternatively, “Panamerica” suggests

6 Eva Sperling Cockcroft and Holly Barnet-Sánchez titled a reproduction of the work “Latinoamérica,” alongside an essay by

Amalia Mesa-Bains, in their influential text *Signs from the Heart: California Chicano Murals* (Cockcroft and Barnett-Sánchez, 1990, 73). Shifra Goldman referred to the work as the “Panamerica” mural (Goldman, 1994, 213), as did the “Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation” (CARA) Exhibition (Griswold del Castillo *et al.*, 1991). Patricia Rodríguez has used the title “Panamerica” in conversation (Rodríguez, 2003). Tim Drescher used the name “Latinoamerica” without the accent (Drescher, 1994, 22), as did María Ochoa (Ochoa, 2003, 10), while Terezita Romo used “Latinoamérica” (Romo, 2002, 177).
 7 Many sources indicate the works were criticized for being apolitical (i.e., Quintero, 1974). However, little is printed that actually describes the work as apolitical.

more of a hemispheric unity, encompassing North and South America. However, “Latino America” without the accent maximizes the double meaning of the work, suggesting how Latinos in the United States are reinventing America as a nation, as well as articulating a larger kinship to the Américas.

Both “Latino America” and “Homage to Siqueiros” sought to elaborate this bicultural vision, to explore the complexities of multi-ethnic identities, and to elicit some sense of community unity, in the face of larger, crippling socio-economic forces. The forces behind the creation of the murals underscore the struggle of artists to develop both a new and old iconography. For the men crafting “Homage to Siqueiros,” nothing could be more relevant than turning to the Mexican masters of the past. However, for the women painting “Latino America,” nothing was more important than turning away from that past.

Ironically, rejecting patriarchal structures did not register as militancy. While critics recognized the efforts of “Las Mujeres Muralistas” as groundbreaking for women, they also suggested their works did not necessarily serve the political agenda as much as that of their male counterparts.⁷ Undoubtedly, the strident voices of the men, both within the mural and in the public sphere, had set forth a passionate example. However, the Mujeres Muralistas emphasized their capacity to offer a less violent voice. They stated that they “had decided that the men’s murals of the time had too much ‘blood and guts’ and that they wanted a more positive image of their culture” (Goldman, 1990, 40). As a result, readings of their work have frequently revolved around the same themes, typically riffing off the description of their work as expressing “a pan-American aesthetic where highly visible images of women and emphasis on ceremony, celebration, caretaking, harvest and a continental terrain worked toward the creation of a new mythology” (Mesa-Bains, 1990, 76). While this reading is undoubtedly accurate, this is also a somewhat myopic view. The comments track the work of women muralists into traditionally feminine and supposedly apolitical terrain – leaving the political realm to men. In fact, their work was not at all escapist of political content, but grounded in the overriding political discourses that were shaping the community’s identity.

A closer look: “Latino America”

“Latino America” is fascinating for its complex collage of ideas, not simply paying tribute to motherhood or indigenous roots, but also invoking ideas about race, gender, and political power. That it is no longer in existence is both a testament to the transitory nature of murals, but also to the community’s failure to recognize a culturally significant historical text. Today, the former home of “Latino America,” which was the Mission Model Cities office, is now a local laundromat with cream-colored walls that betray nothing of the hot colors that once flashed on its surface. In contrast, the bank now values “Homage to

Siqueiros” at well over a million dollars.⁸ While the different valuations may stem from the failure to take women’s work seriously, the physical location also was an important factor.

Like any outdoor mural, “Latino America” suffered environmental decay and was prone to the preferences of changing property owners. A similar erasure befell Chuy Campusano’s “Lilli Ann” mural (1982), an abstract montage that alluded to the building’s history as the Lilli Ann garment factory. In 1998, new owners of the Seventeenth and Harrison building did not hesitate in their decision to whitewash the mural, likely even unaware of the monetary value attributed to Campusano’s Bank of America mural (Delgado, 1998). Their action is indicative of the widespread presumption that outdoor murals are expendable. However, the destruction of the “Lilli Ann” mural provoked anger in the community and sparked a landmark case for California’s exterior murals: the Campusano family sued the property owners and won \$200,000 in damages under the 1979 California Art Preservation Act (Campusano, *et al.*, 1998). The “Lilli Ann” suit showed how legislation was available to protect exterior murals, but successful cases required extensive community and financial support. The loss of “Latino America” roused no such attention. Rodríguez later remarked, “It must have been in the late ‘80s. It was just gone. And we couldn’t get anybody in the city to support it” (Rodríguez, 2003).

In creating “Latino America,” the artists sought to make the wall visually appeal to various segments of the Mission’s Latin American community. Muralists often seek to include signifiers in their work that evoke special meaning for local residents, but might otherwise go unnoticed among the general public. In the mural from left to right, the viewer’s eyes shift from llamas native to the Andes, Peruvian pipe players, a group of Venezuelan Yare devils, the central holy image of a family in an Indian sun design, a tuiui bird native to the Pantanal of Brazil, a Bolivian diablada figure, and an Aztec sun casting its light on a princess and warrior figure. The bottom of the mural is framed by a host of maguey plants and cornstalks. The emphasis is entirely on the indigenous or mestizo heritage of Latin America, and as a result, not only reminds local residents of their homelands, but also celebrates the survival of various cultures in spite of Spanish colonialism. Ultimately, this emphasis creates a parallel between the peasant or Indian classes in Latin America and the inner city poor in America. The parallel is drawn even more distinctly by one of the most powerful and least considered elements of the work, the area framing local Mission District youth (Figure 2b). The youth appear in color, but the surrounding area is black and white, entirely and purposefully drained of color. The scene is a nod to the stylistics of newsreel footage, as well as an allusion to the popular comics-style of many murals in the Mission at that time.⁹ However, the empty whiteness also suggests the American urban dehumanization Latinos must prevent through the cultivation of their indigenous past. The emphasis on maintaining cultural traditions is part of an overriding dynamic in Mission

8 Campusano estimated that the bank paid the muralists a total of \$15,000–\$18,000 for all related work and supplies (Albright, 1974).

9 San Francisco was a center for underground comix in the 1960s (“comix”

is used to identify an underground or alternative genre of comics). Local artists, such as Manuel “Spain” Rodriguez, Michael Rios, and Robert Crumb, encouraged murals in the comix style with their influential murals for Horizons Unlimited and the Mission Rebels (Drescher, 1994, 19; Ghadishah, 1987).

murals against assimilation. The message is relevant as part of an attempt to form a community identity apart, and even opposed, to the black-and-white “American” life. Moreover, such an image suggests an attempt to break through the traditional black and white binary that has dominated the dialogue of race relations in America. Instead, the multi-ethnic youth depicted in the forefront is more indicative of America’s complexity and more accurately reflective of the Mission’s demographic diversity.

The artists’ attempts to represent a plurality of identities was akin to the actions of community activists, who sought to build solidarity in the Mission by linking diverse groups under the rubric of “Third World” coalitions. The term “Third World” already had an extensive history in San Francisco as the means of generating cross-cultural political action among people of Asian, African, Indigenous, or Latin American descent. From the “Third World Liberation Front,” to the “Third World Student Strikes,” to the “Third World Communications” publishing collective, to the “Other Sources” bicentennial exhibition, the term had become well established in the rhetoric of community organizing (Ferreira, 2003; Sandoval, 2002; Salomon, 1998). That the artists of “Latino America,” sought to pictorially depict the close ties between Latin American and African culture, abroad and at home, is indicative of their participation in ongoing “Third World” community dialogues. For instance, images of various devil figures pay tribute to the indigenous and African cultures of Latin America. In particular, the towering red figure on the right wears a snake-adorned devil’s mask and intricate costume traditional to the “supay” figures of carnival in Oruro, Bolivia (Figure 2c). His appearance is indicative of the diablada, or devil’s dance, which scholars most commonly locate emerging out of the culture of enslaved indigenous and African miners, following the Spanish conquest. The devils on the left, with colorfully painted masks and bright red costumes, embody the image of Venezuelan Yare devils, which are part of the yearly Feast of Corpus Christi (Figure 2d). Although Venezuela’s “dancing devils” celebration bears similarly vague origins to Oruro’s diablada, its indebtedness to African culture, in addition to indigenous and Spanish cultures, is widely acknowledged.¹⁰

Both the Bolivian and Venezuelan devil figures flank the mural’s central family-sun image and serve as representations of a rich, if oppressed, cultural heritage, not just for people of African descent in Latin America, but for all of Latin America and its Diaspora. Similarly, the Aztec figures on the far right and the Peruvian musicians on the far left serve as iconographic references to Latin America’s indigenous roots, as well as lend support to the need for building community organizing exchanges between Latinos and Native Americans in the United States. In the 1970s, the Mission was an important site for American Indian community organizing, not just serving as a common residential address, but offering important meeting places, like the American Indian Center and Warren’s Bar (Mankiller and Wallis, 1993, 100). The muralists sought to invoke their diverse indigenous heritage to align themselves

10 Cynthia Lecount’s article, “Carnival in Bolivia: Devils Dancing for the Virgin,” provides a useful discussion of the history of the diablada in Oruro, Bolivia (Lecount, 1999). Julia Elena Fortun also discusses the devil dance, as well as argues for the importance of the morenada dance as

with the concerns of American Indians and the larger Third World community. The use of the zia, or Navajo sun/star image, in the center of the mural, was indicative of this linkage (Ochoa, 2003, 49). In representing the African and Indian roots of Latin America, the mural visually articulated the need for recognizing the shared concerns of African American, Native American, and Latino residents in the United States.

Ultimately, the iconography of the painting represented far more ideological underpinnings than a feminist domesticity, although this element is still pivotal. The center of the painting is a glorified image of a family with a woman holding her children, who is soon to give birth to the fetus image superimposed on her belly. The superior placement of the family in a saint-like frame accords with traditional readings of the work. Even as a whole, the mural replicates the cycle of life with the sun giving life to the plants, which in turn feed the people, which then gives birth to the next generation (Rodríguez, 2003). These themes are readily apparent.

However, the work is not as strictly maternalistic as most surface readings suggest. While the mother figure bears the central position of power, she is flanked by the male devil figures.¹¹ The red clothing and animal masks distinguish the Venezuelan devils on the left from the ornately costumed Bolivian supay on the right. Along with the prominent placement of male figures, there is a certain heralding of male sexuality, most evocatively suggested by the Bolivian diablada's position next to an exterior red pump that is strikingly phallic (Figure 2c). Patricia Rodríguez has pointed out that she painted the supay figure at the height of the 1970s gas crisis, and in fact, the devil's *trompe l'oeil* emergence out of the gas pump is to convey her criticism of the nation's increasing reliance on oil (Rodríguez, 2003; Romo, 2002, 182). Thus, the mural is just as much an indictment of US consumption, as it is a representation of family and harvest.

The Mujeres Muralistas did not choose to heighten this political aspect of their painting, perhaps in part because street murals often steer away from explicit controversy, so as not to provoke vandals. In fact, painting in the streets forced the women to produce a less obviously political work than the men painting in a private corporate institution. However, viewers perceived this difference more as a product of gender than physical context.

Arguably, the importance both sets of artists placed on audience played the most critical role in determining content. The men sought to undermine the bank's authority to show solidarity with Mission District residents waiting in line. The women also sought to represent solidarity with their viewers. According to the Mujeres, "A lot of people have told us that our work is pretty and colorful, but that it is not political enough. They ask us why we don't represent the starvation and death going on in Latin America or even the oppression of women...our interest as artists is to put art close to where it needs to be. Close to the children, close to the old people who often wander the streets alone, close to

an expression of African culture in Bolivia (Fortun, 1961). For a discussion of the Africanist presence in carnival, the work of Daniel Crowley is helpful (Crowley, 1984). In addition, just prior to his death, Crowley submitted a conference abstract to argue for the importance of African culture in the Bolivian carnival, not just within the Morenada dance, but in the entirety of the event (Crowley, 1999). Luis Arturo Dominguez provides a general overview of the celebration (Dominguez, 1984).

¹¹ Alternatively, María Ochoa has argued for the many unintentionally androgynous figures featured in the work, specifically pointing to the figures in the zia and the masked devil figures (Ochoa, 2003, 50).

everyone who has to walk or ride the buses to get to places” (Quintero, 1974). Such representations laid claim to positive images as a means of reaching out to the community, but also obscured the many implicit political images of the mural.

Patronage also played an important and entirely ignored role in the subject matter of the *Mujeres Muralistas*. In a 1982 interview, Patricia Rodríguez recalled that it was the director of Mission Model Cities who said, “you can do anything on the wall except we don’t want blood or guts or revolutionary guns” (Rodríguez, 1982, 6). The women welcomed the director’s request, since his wishes aligned with their own ideals of expression. However, the decision not to “represent the starvation and death going on in Latin America” was not just based on their choice, but on the command of their patron.

A closer look: “Homage to Siqueiros”

While the women faced criticism for producing apolitical work, the men faced the challenge of being too didactic or strident at the expense of their aesthetic. Throughout the work, the artists balanced images of terror, greed, and technological destruction with representations of indignism, family, and heroic men. The painting is undeniably male-centric in its portrayals, just as charged by the gender of its artists as “Latino America.” However, little exists to convey the more nuanced meaning of their subject matter, or the complexity of their iconography and ideology. A close reading of the mural unveils the many political stances the muralists wished to articulate for the sake of Mission District residents and Third World people everywhere.

In reading the work from left to right, the muralists began with a devilish being, easily suggestive of a capitalist pig, who on one side reaches out his imperialist talons towards a prone, pregnant mother – a likely mother earth. The devil’s left arm wraps around the shoulders of another man – Siqueiros, in a suit jacket of black and white convict stripes, who holds Bohr’s symbol of atomic energy aloft in his left hand. For emphasis, the artists duplicated this scene on the far right corner of the mural, by depicting themselves sketching the devil and Siqueiros, again with the atom in hand. The repetition of the atomic symbol suggests a reference to Siqueiros’ mural, “The Resurrection of Cuauhtemoc,” painted in 1950 in the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City. The work evolved from a series of murals that Siqueiros designed about Cuauhtemoc, the Aztec prince who led the resistance against the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortéz. Of the painting, Siqueiros stated:

... I presented Cuauhtemoc in armour to signify that Mexico, and in general weak peoples, should take up arms in order to bring down their enslavers and executioners. I employed the centaur ... to symbolize the conquistador as the conqueror and destroyer of cultures. The centaur raises in his hand the symbol of the atomic bomb to represent the form of massacre employed today (Rochfort, 1993, 192).

For Campusano, Rios, and Cortazar, the parallel between Cuauhtemoc fighting the conquistadors and themselves fighting American cultural and political imperialism would have proved an easy comparison. The artists inserted Siqueiros as their contemporary hero and spokesperson, dressing him in a business suit, much like Cuauhtemoc appeared in Spanish armor. A touch of humor is implicit in the conflation between the suit's pin stripes or prison stripes, bespeaking the difficulty of differentiating good from evil, or respectability from criminality. Siqueiros holds the atom in his hand as the ultimate power, representing the power to kill, but also the power of restraint. Correspondingly, the devil figure, perhaps an American banker or politico, becomes the contemporary conquistador, sacrificing culture for financial and technological gain.

Though the mural's depictions of technology can be read as celebratory – an effort to please the bank, perhaps – close readers will recognize the mural's ultimately grim view of technology. Moving in from the duplicate scenes of Siqueiros, the artists included an image of schoolchildren boarding a bus on the left-hand side and a BART train on the right-hand side. Seemingly innocuous, the bus represented the controversial integration of local schools at that time by busing students (Barnett, 1984, 144). Similarly, while the image of BART, the area's new subway system, can be represented as technological achievement, the serpent-like representation, about to run over the people of the Mission, is more likely the intent. One of the artists, Michael Rios, shortly thereafter painted another mural representing BART, showing people forced to carry the burden of the train on their shoulders. BART provided one of the most dramatic changes to the landscape in the early 1970s, with two major subway stations within 10 blocks of each other on Mission Street, the area's central thoroughfare. Train routes, limited hours, and expensive ticket prices indicated the new transportation network was more for commuters than local residents, and the emergence of city plans to turn the stations into South-American-styled tourist attractions led Mission District residents to view the new system with considerable distrust (Montes, 1975). Technology, for the Mission District, generally meant an increase in the division between rich and poor, or displacement. While the artists appeared to cater to the tastes of the bank, residents could easily read the more contentious attitudes present in the iconography.

The artists sought not just to be critical, but instructive for their viewers. As part of the counterbalancing in the mural, the artists introduced two larger than life portraits of Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata and Nicaraguan poet Ruben Dario. Through these two portraits, the artists articulated the need for political action and cultural expression to work together in the struggle for human rights. Both men are imprisoned in scaffolding, akin to a 1930s San Francisco mural by Diego Rivera, "The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City." In the Rivera mural, also known as "Workers in Control of Production," the central figure is an immense male laborer with a red star

pinned to his chest. The red star as the symbol of revolution and socialism makes Rivera's political attitudes obvious, and the trio's homage to the famous mural then indicates their political stance without having to fight the bank to include a red star. That the trio did encounter some censorship in the content of their mural is indicated by the panel of microscopic images to the right of the portrait of Ruben Dario (Figure 1d). The cells suggest another homage to Rivera's work, whose Detroit and Rockefeller Center murals contained microscopic images with discrete political symbols, such as a hammer and sickle (Hurlburt, 1989, 163). In "Homage to Siqueiros," local legend says the top cell originally contained the seven-headed serpent symbol of the Symbionese Liberation Army. Today, however, the top cell is painted white.¹²

Between the Zapata and Dario figures is the most powerful image in the mural, of the work in front of César Chávez's statement, "Our sweat and our blood have fallen on this land to make other men rich" (Chávez, 1966) (Figure 1c). The phrase hovers over a Christ figure crucified on the ground, a symbol of the martyrdom of the common people to the wealthy. It is through the image of the crucifixion that the three artists make their most visible homage to David Alfaro Siqueiros, by introducing a blatant allusion to his famously censored mural, "Tropical America." In 1932, Siqueiros was invited to paint a work above Los Angeles's Olvera Street, which his sponsors hoped would echo the paradisaical tropicalization of the landscape they were attempting to create, envisioning a vibrant shopping mecca full of piñatas and maracas. Instead, Siqueiros painted symbols of oppression and colonialism, culminating in his image of a crucified Indian suspended by the talons of an American eagle. While the sponsors attempted to whitewash the work, over the years, the image began to show through, seemingly voicing its resistance to censorship and emerging as a symbol of the continuing struggle (Goldman, 1994, 87–100). In alluding to the famous image, the men were able to make their homage to Siqueiros complete.¹³

In looking at "Latino America" and "Homage to Siqueiros" together, the most obvious juxtaposition is in comparing the role gender has played in the creation and content of the works. While "Latino America" clearly emerged from a collective feminist consciousness, "Homage to Siqueiros" is the work of three men, one of whom later stated, "I'm sorry we didn't put more women characters in the mural. We've received some criticism from our sisters for that. But we are learning" (Campusano *et al.*, 1974). While the work is guilty of placing only men in social positions of power, from the devil banker to the heroic agricultural worker, women also have visible and relevant, if circumscribed, roles. Just as "Latino America" is not purely feminist – indeed, I would argue it is more humanist, creating images of power for women and men – neither is "Homage to Siqueiros" purely masculinist in scope. Particularly striking in this regard is the image of the naked, pregnant woman, prone to various dangers, on one side of the painting, counterbalanced on the right by the image of a nurse snipping a

12 A conversation with a bank manager tipped me to this story in May 2003, stating he believed the cell originally contained a symbol of the Symbionese Liberation Army. In a telephone conversation with Michael Rios on December 3, 2003, Rios suggested the story might be true, even suggesting that the cell might have contained a "seven-headed serpent" image, but he did not wish to confirm or deny the accuracy of the story one way or the other.

13 Conceivably, the muralists also were echoing another painting by Siqueiros, his "Por Una Seguridad Completa Para Todos los Mexicanos" ("For the Complete Security of all Mexicans"), 1952–1954, in the Hospital de la Raza. The mural features a man issuing from a conveyor belt toward the viewer head first,

child's umbilical cord. Not far from the operating table stand three figures waiting to see the newborn (Figure 1d). The woman with her back to the viewer wears a shawl that suggests her elder status, and in this context, suggests the role of the *curandera* or *abuelita* unable to participate in the most basic cultural rite of passage. While one can imagine the muralists representing this scene to their corporate sponsor as symbolic of the technological achievements of medical science, it also represents how medicine has displaced the intimacy of birth from the family and usurped a role of power for women. Ultimately, the traditional critical distinctions of "Homage to Siqueiros" and "Latino America" as emerging out of a specifically male or female sensibility has cultivated gendered readings that do not account for the more complex iconography at work.

or upside down. My appreciation to Holly Barnet-Sánchez for this example, which suggests the muralists may have been alluding to Siqueiros' work in an even broader fashion.

Shared visions

In reading these two murals, one of the most critical elements is recognizing how the artists sought to use Latin American indigenous images to assert strategies for survival in the United States. Most of the images reflect a pre-conquest purity or mestizo heritage that rejects Spanish colonialism as much as United States imperialism. The two works even share certain touchstone images that might appear visually innocuous to some, but certainly would register with local residents. For instance, the maguey or agave plants, native to Mexico, sprout like weeds from the bottom of both murals. The plant not only is the source of tequila and pulque, a traditional beverage, but also a tenacious survivor against powerful American marketing campaigns for beer in Mexico. The propensity of the plant to appear like a weed doggedly rising to the surface bespeaks the ability of inner city residents to maintain traditions and survive American cultural and capitalist imperialism. That the maguey plant already heralded considerable iconographic significance is supported by artist Rupert Garcia's 1972 silkscreen, "Maguey de la Vida." The abstract silhouette of the plant celebrates the physical form and pays homage to its cultural importance. Many artists have continued to replicate the image, recognizing its cultural and now aesthetic history within the Chicano movement.

In a statement about their work, *Las Mujeres* described their intent as "reaching back to what we came from and understanding that what we come from is better than this country and this country is making our countries like what they are like today" (Quintero, 1974). Their comment parallels artist Michael Rios's description of "Homage to Siqueiros" as an effort "to make connections with our past. The primitive consciousness, the way people used to be in harmony with nature." Indeed, Rios points out the parallel himself, remarking that "All the murals that are being done now in the Mission seem to reflect this feeling: our mural, the one we're doing in the 24th Street Mini-Park and the one the women are doing at Model Cities ["Latino America"] – all going

back to this primitive vision” (Campusano *et al.*, 1974). Rios’ remark and later murals reveal the level of influence and cross-pollination that was transpiring in the Mission murals, in spite of some significant differences. This primitivist iconography continued to appear in many later works, including the 1976 Mission Neighborhood Health Center murals by Michael Rios and Graciela Carrillo. In reading the words and images of the *Mujeres Muralistas* and Michael Rios, a “primitive” vision appeared to mean a return to the purity of the Latin American/indigenous past.

Examining these murals provides a lens for understanding how community artists looked to a primitive vision of Latin America as a means of constructing, protecting, and unifying their neighborhood. Upon examination, at least four common themes emerge: first, by generating a visually united image of Latin America, community activists and artists sought to build cultural ties in the United States that otherwise are complicated by diverse geographic, political, historical, and cultural borders. Second, the iconography of Latin America provided a means to visually appropriate the local landscape and subvert urban redevelopment plans likely to displace residents. Third, the use of Latin American imagery countered traditional lines of education and articulated alternatives to mainstream perceptions about history, identity, and culture. And fourth, the synthesis of the local landscape with the problems of Latin America provided a means of criticizing American foreign policy and simultaneously protesting the manifestations of colonialism at home.

Many of the works that emerged out of the Mission District during the 1970s overtly used representations of Latin America to visualize the idealized past, but in this way, also circumvented grappling with contemporary political upheavals and dissension. As a result, the paintings reflected a particular time, since the ability to represent Latin America as a haven from the United States lost its meaning as political strife intensified during the late seventies and eighties. The paintings invoked an iconographic primitivism that was unable to survive the increasingly brutal human rights violations in Latin America that evolved to a crescendo during the Reagan Administration in the United States. Perhaps not coincidentally, the year of the murals, 1974, is the year the Mission’s local paper, *El Tecolote*, began to include a world reports section with frequent coverage of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Increasingly, owing to political upheavals and a dramatic influx of refugees and immigrants from Central America, Mission artists introduced new signifiers, so that in the 1980s, the overall iconography shifted away from the “primitivist vision.” Works such as Juana Alicia’s profoundly powerful “Alto al Fuego/Ceasefire,” (1988) or Miranda Bergman and O’Brien Thiele’s “Culture Contains the Seed of Resistance which Blossoms into the Flower of Liberation,” (1984) (Figure 3) depicted the struggle of Nicaraguans, Guatemalans, and Salvadorans to survive in the face of threats of military violence and kidnap murders, while they still paid tribute to the beauty of the land. The latter mural was one of many painted in San Francisco’s Balmy



Figure 3 Miranda Bergaman and O'Brien Thiele. "Culture Contains the Seeds of Resistance which Blossoms into Liberation." Balmy Alley, San Francisco, 1984.

Alley in the summer of 1984 to protest US involvement in Central America. As a result, almost all of the Balmy Alley murals from 1984 conveyed some aspect of human tragedy in Central America. Ultimately, the transformation of iconography is indicative of a profound transformation in the community's consciousness and concerns. Politics abroad forced a reconceptualization of Latinidad in the United States.

Walls do talk: Valuing Artful Sources

In a recent article, scholar Jorge Mariscal passionately argued against the continuous replication of stereotypes that have portrayed the early Chicano movement as narrowly nationalist, separatist, and riddled with sexism. With his comments in mind, these murals serve as useful lenses for developing a more concrete understanding of the "competing political agendas" and shared ideologies that have characterized the movement and its cultural production (Mariscal, 2002, 59). Although the artists of "Homage to Siqueiros" and "Latino America" were predominantly Chicanos, their iconography was indicative of a far more expansive pan-Latino identity, in keeping with the diversity of Mission District residents. Their work was unquestionably gendered in outlook and content, but also deserving of more considered analysis; specifically, "Homage to Siqueiros" and "Latino America" represented a primitivist idealization of Latin America that characterized Mission District murals of the early 1970s, and perhaps hinted at broader national tendencies. The murals argued against assimilation, against colonialism, and in support of indigenous, pan-Latino, and Third World coalitions. Overwhelmingly, the representations of Latin America were lessons on how to live in the United States.

By visually representing the history, significance, and cultural influence of Latin America in public spaces, artists and community leaders wrestled for pride, social control, political power, and community identity. Over time, the

landscape and cultural production of the Mission District grew to represent, both physically and symbolically, a vast expanse of Latino cultural traditions rooted in the multiple histories of Latin America. Even though the images of Latin America changed over time, the intent stayed the same: muralists hoped to educate, politicize, and build solidarity locally. Ultimately, neighborhood murals conveyed ideologies that the artists consciously and subconsciously presumed central to a pan-Latino identity.

While a number of books and articles on the community mural movement have developed helpful chronological essays, pinpointed appropriate artistic attribution, or cheered the overall accomplishments, the lack of close readings of murals as cultural texts is astonishing. Too often, the low-brow origins of the mural movement as “the people’s art” have rendered their significance only as transparent propaganda or ethnic pride decoration. For instance, scholar Laurance Hurlburt, in his homage to the superiority of the Mexican muralists, declared, “however valid the murals of Third World countries (such as Cuba, the Chile of Allende, Nicaragua) and North American urban ghettos may be as political commentary, they often entirely lack any esthetic concern, and many are painted by ‘artists’ who have no formal artistic training” (Hurlburt, 1989, 11). The people who produced “Latino America” and “Homage to Siqueiros” were unquestionably artists, but whose impact has been continuously dismissed. If nothing else, this paper calls into question any willingness to take these images at face value.

While the mural movement appeared spontaneously local in growth and regional in concerns, it actually reflected an extensive national network of communications and an expansive political consciousness. A variety of national and international publications circulated to announce new murals and exchange information on technological innovations. In addition, San Francisco benefited from established artists, such as Ray Patlán of Chicago and Susan Greene of New York, relocating to the city, just as other locations benefited from visits by San Francisco artists, such as Patricia Rodríguez’s work in Corpus Christi, Texas, Juana Alicia’s work in Nicaragua, and Susan Cervantes’ work in Russia. The movement has had profoundly global implications, with muralists traveling all around the world to exchange art and ideas. Ultimately, art is one of the primary methods for creating culture and enabling people to look at the world differently, as well as propel opposition to the mainstream. The importance of investigating how values are transmitted through the visual arts is typically underrated and understudied. Nowhere is this more evident than in our ability to pass by the voices that shout out from our city walls.

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