THE GREAT WALL OF LOS ANGELES: VOCALIZING THE MARGINALIZED AND CREATING A COMMUNITY THROUGH PUBLIC ART

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Chapter I: Introduction

Judith F. Baca is best known for spearheading the creation of the tremendous mural *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* (1974-present) (fig. 1). This 2,754-foot mural provides a visual history of and for people of color in California. Previously titled *The History of California*, the mural stretches just under fourteen feet in height and was created on the west wall of the Tujunga Flood Control Channel, or the Tujunga Wash, in the Van Nuys neighborhood of Los Angeles, California. The now widely used name, *The Great Wall of Los Angeles,* came from the mural makers who worked on the project. They often referred to the location as simply "The Great Wall." The name was officially changed after the summer of 1980.[1] Boasting the title of the longest mural in the United States and one of the longest in the world,[2] this public art project was started in 1974. Other sources have quoted the project as beginning in 1976 or even 1978. I am using the year 1974, as that is the year that SPARC and Baca provide on their website and in their archives. The first section of the mural was completed in the summer of 1976, but the Army Corps of Engineers reached out to Baca regarding the project in 1974.

What is for now, the last panel of the mural was created in 1984, one whole decade after its initial beginnings. The design for the completed mural, which will span nearly a mile, will take history to the present and beyond. Panels of the extension will be designed and created by a planning commission composed of veteran Mural Makers, artists, and representatives for sponsors.[3] Using significant figures and historical events, the mural provides details regarding a history that had long been erased from the overarching histories of California. She highlights the contributions from marginalized and underrepresented communities to bring them the

[1] "Social and Public Art Resource Center," SPARCinLA (SPARC, April 2023), https://sparcinla.org/.
[2] Carrie Rickey. "The Writing on the Wall". In Quirarte, Jacinto (ed.). Chicano Art History: A Book of Selected Readings. San Antonio, Texas: Research Center for the Arts and Humanities, 1984.
[3] "Social and Public Art Resource Center," SPARCinLA (SPARC, April 2023), https://sparcinla.org/.

recognition they deserve. In this thesis, I explore how Judy Baca navigates the complicated waters of creating art for a public that is not often represented and uses her capabilities as an artist and educator to break down barriers and establish a community. Utilizing public art to access an understanding of the public and the more significant role it plays, I determine who Baca inherently creates for.

Working with the newly founded Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), Baca was responsible for the artistic vision and subject matter depicted in the mural. SPARC is a non-profit community arts center founded by Judy Baca, Donna Deitch, and Christine Schlesinger. Their first public art project as an organization was *The Great Wall.* The individuals who contributed to the project looked to Baca for the final say regarding content and design.

Scenes of the mural emphasize the involvement of Native Americans, Latinxs/Mexicans/Chicanxs, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Jewish Americans in the formations of California. The mural highlights the often-forgotten role of these groups in establishing a distinct Californian culture. Rather than isolating the figures in the mural, segments often situate individuals in scenes of uprising and protest, surrounding them with their established community. For example, Dr. Charles Drew, the inventor of large-scale blood banks, is placed just next to peaceful protestors during the mid-twentieth century (fig. 2). Themes of immigration, exploitation of people and land, gentrification, class struggles, women's rights, the fight for racial equality, LGBTQ+ battles, and more are shown using the distinct style of Chicano Muralists, which included Baca, Frank Romero, Mario Torero, Salvador Torres, and many others.

Chicano Muralism draws heavy inspiration from the Mexican Muralist movement around the turn of the twentieth century. Baca participates in this stylistic movement by utilizing bright,

bold colors and a heavy sense of setting. Stark black figural outlines create drama in each scene. Steep rescinding perspective and heavy symbolism appear in every panel. Iconography is significant to the construction; several symbols are featured throughout the half-mile-long depictions. Several animals, flags, and plants are scattered throughout the compositions. In *Division of the Barrios & Chavez Ravine*, a rooster with wings outstretched stomps on the houses Dodger Stadium looms over (fig. 3). Roosters have long been used as icons of masculinity, control, and dissent in art history, dating back to the apostle Peter and his denial of Christ.[4]

The Great Wall consisted of eighty-six titled panels with compositions that blend into each other. The only time that there is a harsh cut between scenes appears when, at the end of each summer, a panel was added to detail the project's progress and provide recognition to those who worked on it (fig. 4). Most segments depicted a significant historical event or figure that had been largely erased from the white-washed version of history being taught across the United States. Earlier sections' compositions were supervised by multiple artists, all vetted and trusted by Baca. However, as time passed, Baca desired a more precise image and cohesive message. Therefore, all of the later sections were designed by Baca herself. Each segment is titled and shown in a continuous panel just below the scenes of the mural, leaving no confusion or interpretation on behalf of the viewer.

Baca's art was crucial to the histories of Chicano Muralism, the larger Chicano Movement, and the Feminist movement during the twentieth century in the United States. She was a pioneer for other artists to follow and create without fear of critical or public reception. She is now renowned as a leading educator and visual artist who taught at the University of

[4] James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 75.

California, Los Angeles, in various departments, including Studio Arts, Visual and Public Arts, Chicano Studies, and World Arts and Cultures, until her 2018 retirement.

"And it seemed to us that we were in the middle of a time, that had a kind of, that was a Renaissance. That… that art was coming back to very sort of basics, that it was becoming a populace kind of activity, that it was no longer an activity only for rich people."[5] Judy Baca describes her time working on *the Great Wall of Los Angeles* as a Renaissance, calling back to one of the most crucial times in the entire art historical canon. She uses Renaissance specifically to refer to the understanding within the community at the time of its formation and the creation of its distinct elements. She and many of her contemporaries, whether educators or artists, were creating a distinctly unique style different from what had come before them and would have a tremendous influence on what would come after them.

Public art has a rich, complicated history. The term is not quite as old as mural but is just as nuanced and complex. Public art refers to art within the public realm, regardless of whether it is situated on public or private property and has been purchased with public or private money. Public art often resists traditional art forms, working instead to be a bridge between the viewer and the public that the art is meant to represent. The Association for Public Art says,

> What distinguishes public art is the unique association of how it is made, where it is, and what it means. Public art can express community values, enhance our environment, transform a landscape, heighten our awareness, or question our assumptions. Placed in public sites, this art is there for everyone, a form of collective community expression. Public art is a reflection of how we see the world – the artist's response to our time and place combined with our own sense of who we are.[6]

[5] Oral history interview with Judith Baca, 1986, August 5-6. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
[6] "What Is Public Art?," Association for Public Art, 2024, https://www.associationforpublicart.org/what-is-public-art/.

Public art is art in any media created for the general public. It has established its art genre with professional and critical discourse. The most significant characteristic of public art is that it is accessible to the public. It seeks to embody universal public concepts. Public art is a product of a public process, whether directly or indirectly.

Chapter II: The Origins of the Mural

Murals are some of the earliest known examples of art. Documented cave paintings date back to the Upper Paleolithic period, roughly 38,000 – 8,000 BCE, and fall into a definition of muralism developed millennia later. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a mural as "a painting or other work of art executed directly on a wall." [7] Murals have a loose definition; the only real stipulation is that they are applied directly to the surface where they are intended to be displayed. The word mural stems from the Latin word *murus*, meaning wall, and its first use, in this context, dates back to the sixteenth century. However, murals were being utilized as a means of public art, communication, and decoration long before that. Cave paintings of the Upper Paleolithic period and beyond utilized natural earth pigments. This technique of wall painting spread across Europe and made its way to Egypt and the Ancient East. Egyptians and Mesopotamians used a secco technique that derived materials from clay and lime. Wall paintings were later seen in Ancient Greece and Rome, specifically in Crete and Mycenae. Their technique was similar to the Egyptians' but even more similar to the fresco method used a millennium later in Italy. Italian Renaissance fresco methods heavily informed what we understand now to be modern mural painting techniques. Modern inventions of acrylic and tube paints sped up the process and allowed more recent artists to work more efficiently.[8] An understanding of murals in the United States in the twenty-first century comes mainly from the Mexican Muralist movement and the works created by *Los Tres Grandes*. The Mexican Muralist movement was spearheaded

[7] "Mural," mural_1 adjective - Definition, pictures, pronunciation, and usage notes | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com (Oxford English Dictionary), accessed April 17, 2023, https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/mural_1.
[8] Jean Robertson and Deborah S. Hutton, *The History of Art: A Global View* (New York, NY: Thames & Hudson Inc., 2021).

by *Los Tres Grandes*, or *the Big Three*, consisting of Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros.

The Mexican Revolution

The Revolución Mexicana was the driving force behind the Mexican Muralist movement. The Mexican Revolution was an extended sequence of armed regional conflicts in Mexico from 1910 through 1920. It destroyed the now weakened Federal Army, which was the military of Mexico before the revolution, and replaced it with a revolutionary army. The Federal Army consisted of senior officers who had previously served in conflicts. Before disbanding this system, most senior officers in power could not lead soldiers on the harsh battlefield. The Mexican Revolution also saw the transformation of Mexican culture and government. The conflict was primarily a civil war, but foreign powers, namely the United States, having significant economic and strategic interests in Mexico, were instrumental in the outcome. The Revolution led to the death of around one million people, mostly non-combatants.[9]

The Revolution was triggered by widespread discontent with the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. Rural grievances, extreme economic inequality, and social injustice were significant contributing factors to the anger of the average citizen. The country failed to find a successful solution to presidential succession, thus causing a power struggle among the classes. This problem and intense labor unrest spiraled into a Revolution that saw intense, brutal fighting over control and resources. It also saw significant social and political changes, including the drafting

[9] Barbara Haskell and Mark A. Castro, *Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925-1945* (New York, NY: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2020), 14.

of a new constitution in 1917, which enshrined many revolutionary ideals, including land reform, labor rights, and the separation of church and state.[10]

This decade-long civil war saw new political leadership that gained power and legitimacy through participation in revolutionary conflicts. From 1920 to 1940, revolutionary generals were in positions of power. This period saw state power becoming more centralized. Major reform brought the military under the control of the civilian government. The political party they founded, the Institutional Revolutionary Party, ruled Mexico until the presidential election 2000. Ultimately, the revolution led to the overthrow of Porfirio Díaz's regime and the establishment of a more democratic political system in Mexico. However, it also resulted in years of instability and violence as various factions battled for power in the aftermath. This revolution fundamentally changed the trajectory of muralism and is one of the reasons that it has grown so popular in North America.[11]

At the end of the Revolution, the government commissioned artists to educate the masses of citizens about Mexican history. Celebrating and recognizing the potential of the Mexican people, these murals became increasingly popular. Between the 1920s and 1950s, *Los Tres Grandes* and several other muralists cultivated a specific style that captured the unique Mexican identity post-revolution. Using scale, political messaging, and new narratives, Mexican Muralists remained a compliment to the core elements of the Revolution. These artists visualized the transformation of Mexican culture and government during this time. These projects have continued to inspire audiences and other artists. The longevity of these compositions speaks to their relevance and power.

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[10] Barbara Haskell and Mark A. Castro, *Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925-1945* (New York, NY: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2020), 15.
[11] Barbara Haskell and Mark A. Castro, *Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925-1945* (New York, NY: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2020), 15.

Los Tres Grandes in the United States

Los Tres Grandes arrived in the United States during the late 1920s mainly to execute mural commissions. Much of their time was spent in major metropolitan centers: New York City, Detroit, and Los Angeles. Some traveled throughout the country, mostly Rivera, depending on the locations of commissions. Generally, they were greeted warmly and formed great reputations in artist circles in the city. Rivera received a monographic exhibition from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1931. Orozco exhibited watercolor paintings at the Whitney Studio Club, which would later become the Whitney Museum, in 1926. Siqueiros bounced around galleries in Los Angeles and taught classes on the history of mural painting at the Chouinard Art Institute.[12]

Los Tres Grandes' initial introduction of muralism in the United States was brief, and the muralism movement did not truly gain popularity and notoriety for a few decades to follow. Chicanx artists began working extensively within this style in the United States around the 1960s. However, their artistic style still had ties to pre-Colombian Mexican muralism. Muralism has developed in its appearance over time, shifting themes and styles. Chicano muralism began to materialize following the *La Raza* militancy of the 1960s. *La Raza* means "the race," and it became a term associated with Chicanx activists around the rise of the Chicano Movement in the 1960s; it is now often used interchangeably with the term Chicanx. The Chicano Movement was inspired by other social and political movements that had come before it, namely the Feminist Movement. It embraced a distinct identity that combated institutionalized racism by refuting assimilation and striving to enhance community empowerment.

[12] Barbara Haskell and Mark A. Castro, *Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925-1945* (New York, NY: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2020), 18-25 .

Aurora Reyes

While we can credit Rivera, Orozco, and Alfaro Siqueiros for their work bringing muralism to the United States, the impact of women muralists cannot be discredited. Many women were active during this time in Mexico, often receiving large commissions for projects just like Baca later would. Mexican artist Aurora Reyes Flores is widely considered to be the first female muralist in Mexico.

Born in Chihuahua in 1908, Reyes lived through the height of the Mexican Revolution and saw firsthand how it affected her family. Her most recognized piece, *Atentado a Las Maestras Rurales* (fig. 5), touched on the vast majority of things she fought for throughout her life. She was an active advocate for women's right to vote and their right to hold elected civil posts, an extension on maternity leave, and recognition of breastfeeding time for mothers of young children. Created in 1936, *Atentado a Las Maestras Rurales* was located on the wall of the Centro Escolar Revolución, an elementary school in Mexico City. It is considered the first mural created by a woman during the height of the muralist movement in Mexico.[13]

Post-revolutionary art in Mexico emphasized creating national art and reaching a wider public. This was backed by government and artist-led programs to make art more accessible to the average citizen. Reyes' fresco is joined by four others created by three other muralists. Located on the wall directly across from the main entrance to the school, there are a total of five panels.[14] Reyes' portion shows two men violently attacking a female teacher. One man is beating her with the butt of a rifle while the other is dragging her by the hair across the ground as she clutches onto papers ripped from a book. On the right side of the composition, you can see the

[13] Dina Comisarenco Mirkin. "Aurora Reyes's 'Ataque a La Maestra Rural': The First Mural Created by a Mexican Female Artist." *Woman's Art Journal* 26, no. 2 (2005): 19-20.
[14] Dina Comisarenco Mirkin. "Aurora Reyes's 'Ataque a La Maestra Rural': The First Mural Created by a Mexican Female Artist." *Woman's Art Journal* 26, no. 2 (2005): 21.

students hiding in fear of what they see happening to their beloved teacher. Anguish apparent on their faces, these three students are helpless; they must simply watch their source of care and knowledge be destroyed in the name of fascism. The five panels work together to tell the tale of the history of Mexico, highlighting what it was like before the Revolution and the country's switch to socialism.

Contemporary Mexico used the urban center as a place for social commentary at the height of the muralist movement. Making art more accessible for everyone meant putting it where everyone went, including on walls of government buildings, schools, and even businesses. This allowed anyone to walk by and see the message the artist wanted to convey. Jamie Ratliff, Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Minnesota-Duluth, wrote, "The narratives of poverty and struggle, crime and death, respectively told in their works speak to the cruel urban conditions in contemporary Mexico."[15] In her mural, Reyes showcased a gruesome scene about the conditions teachers experienced trying to educate in the outskirts of Mexico City. Baca draws from these same principles in the *Great Wall*. Similar cruel urban conditions persisted in Los Angeles during the 1970s, and Baca was actively working to break down these spaces and create for the public within them.

Early Muralism in the United States

Murals were famous not only on the West Coast but also in major metropolitan centers like Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia, which hosted a vast mural movement during the late twentieth century. The Chicanx muralism and primarily East Coast muralism movements coincided, a juxtaposition that tells the tale of cultures. The murals on the East Coast are

[15] Jamie L Ratliff. "Visualizing Female Agency: Space and Gender in Contemporary Women's Art in Mexico." Dissertation, The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository, 2012, 194.

different from what is seen in California: they are less directly inspired by Mexican Muralism. Philadelphia, in particular, is primarily known for its historical murals inspired by the art of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe and North America. These murals are often accompanied by historical literature and are elaborate in their inspiration. They are idealized and full of nature scenes and the landscape surrounding them outside the urban city center.[16]

Murals are significant to the communities in which they exist because of their interaction. The public process of creating a mural is inherently community-oriented and involves groups of people that may never have the chance to be included in the creation of art otherwise. Timothy Drescher recounts his time driving through the city of Philadelphia with Jane Golden in the book *Philadelphia Murals and the Stories they Tell*. He says, "The vociferous recognition, the brief conversations at the car window, the delight with which people greeted her and spoke about their murals to me, showed beyond a shadow of a doubt that these murals were painted with, not just for, their audiences." [17] Individuals and groups get involved with the project's creation processes rather than just the artists. They get to walk by the mural every day and see its progression; they get to speak to the artists to provide feedback and ideas that often change the content or form of the mural. The communities view the project on their daily commute, visiting friends and family, and running their daily errands.

In an interview for the New York Times, Jane Golden, executive director of the Mural Arts Program in Philadelphia, said that "while each of these cities supports mural programs differently, they all share the approach of looking at public art as a shared vision of artists and

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[16] Jane Golden et al., *Philadelphia Murals and the Stories They Tell* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2002).
[17] Jane Golden et al., *Philadelphia Murals and the Stories They Tell* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2002), 27.

their communities."[18] the fundamental aspects of a mural make it successful, not the individualized ideas. It is the way the project involves the community and how it tells a story that makes a mural successful. Golden finished her interview, saying, "The wonderful thing about murals is that they demonstrate a commitment to diversity and social justice. Ultimately, this artwork is the purest expression of a city's collective voice."[19] Baca's *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* takes this a step further by giving these city members a direct part in creating a mural, thereby amplifying their collective voice.

Murals are a long process from idea to finished artwork. Not only does the artist plan and design the mural concept, but they also find a location to begin. Once they find a location, they can plan dimensions and elaborate details depending on the wall's size. Then, they must locate and gather all of the necessary materials. The primer to prepare the wall for the mural, the paint, the finishing lacquer, brushes, paint rollers, ladders, and paint trays are all necessary elements for the construction. As emphasized in this in-process photograph of *The Great Wall* (fig. 6), Baca's project required even more supplies than would be standard for a mural project. The location along the flood control channel often required heavy equipment, sandbags, and scaffolding. These elements need to be funded and sourced to begin creating a mural.

Inherent within Chicano Muralism is the idea of rasquachismo. Rasquachismo was a term first coined by Chicano scholar Tomás Ybarra-Frausto to describe a distinct underdog perspective, or a view from *los de abajo*. This view from below was common in the working-class *barrios* Baca was working in. The term has since been applied to Chicanx and Mexican art

[18] Matt Villano, "A Neighborhood Is a Gallery, Its Brick Walls Canvases," The New York Times (The New York Times, March 28, 2007), https://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/28/arts/artsspecial/28mural.html?_r=0.
[19] Matt Villano, "A Neighborhood Is a Gallery, Its Brick Walls Canvases," The New York Times (The New York Times, March 28, 2007), https://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/28/arts/artsspecial/28mural.html?_r=0.

as a way to highlight the distinct, unique perspective provided by members of these silenced communities. Chicana artist Amalia Mesa-Bains wrote that,

> In rasquachismo, the irreverent and spontaneous are employed to make the most from the least... one has a stance that is both defiant and inventive. Aesthetic expression comes from discards, fragments, even recycled everyday materials... The capacity to hold life together with bits of string, old coffee cans, and broken mirrors in a dazzling gesture of aesthetic bravado is at the heart of rasquachismo.[20]

Rasquache art uses the simplest and most efficient means to create the end result. These artists are working with almost nothing in order to create their desired end image. The general subject matter, simple compositions, and additions of title descriptions along *The Great Wall* showcase this idea of the underdog.[21]

Murals as Public Art

One thing that mural projects have in common as public art projects is the congregation of people. Baca employed hundreds of students and artists while working on this project. There were differing jobs: designer, painter, and researcher. Each of these jobs worked with the skills of the individual filling the role. The grandeur of these projects requires public and community collaboration to bring them to life.

The scope of public art encompasses nuances and elements that make it unique in the canon of Art History. The primary characteristic of public art is that it exists for *a* public. It does not exist for *the* public, but for many versions of a public. Artists directly interact with the setting and community members in the creation process. Their focus is not on recognition but on collaboration. Muralists use large scales to portray a message and utilize location to add to the

[20] Amalia Mesa-Bains, "Domesticana: The Sensibility of Chicana Rasquachismo," *Chicana Feminisms*, 1999, 157-158.
[21] Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility," *Chicano Aesthetics: Rasquachismo*, 1989, 5–8.

narrative. Public art is a shared image between the artists and the communities, and this work by Baca is an excellent example of such.

Baca had a distinct advantage when categorizing her work as public art. The mural's location in the Tujunga Wash situates it in a public space. We often think of site-specificity when considering the public and work made for the community. Baca and others who followed her had to recognize that these spaces already existing within their neighborhoods were great places to put their art. Unlike many artists, they were not given a portion of an established gallery space to share their story. They transformed and invented a new space within a larger setting where they could share their work. The people Baca features as the mural's characters are the people they see in their neighborhood. They look at the figures within the mural and see similar features like dark skin, hair, and eyes that remind them of their own bodies, reminding themselves of the distinct ethnic presence of Van Nuys and the *barrios* of Los Angeles.

Chapter III: Judith F. Baca

Judy Baca was born in Huntington Park, California, in 1946. She has been a state resident for her entire life, dedicating much of her time and career to beautifying the land using murals. Women dominated her young life. Until she was six years old, she lived in a house with her mother, grandmother, and two of her aunts in Watts in Southern Los Angeles. Upon her brothers' advice, her mother had taken a chance and moved to California at 18 from La Junta, Colorado. Shortly after arriving in Los Angeles, she met a military man stationed in the city and bore her first child, Judith. This man, who was only briefly stationed in California, left the state, not knowing of Judy's existence. The remainder of her family followed her to Los Angeles, where they lived together until she eventually married another man. In a Smithsonian Archives of American Art oral history interview with fellow artist and educator Amalia Mesa Baines, Baca spoke of her family highly. She said,

> "And my mother led the way. My mother was eighteen. It was during the war, or just after the war, coming to the close of the war. And she wanted -- her father had died -- and she wanted to come to California, and it was an unheard-of thing for a young single woman to do this. And, in a sense, she was a kind of pioneer and very daringly rejected her… Above the cries of my grandmother, she came to California" [22]

Baca was not unfamiliar with powerful women making significant decisions that changed the entire trajectory of their lives. However, this changed when her mother met her stepfather, and they all moved to Pacoima, California. Suddenly, there was an expectation that both Baca and her mother would manage the house while her stepfather worked at Lockheed Aircraft.[23] These expectations were widespread for women during the 1950s and even more so for Chicanas. Women granted the ability to work during this time were primarily white. Women of color were

[22] Oral history interview with Judith Baca, 1986, August 5-6. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
[23] Oral history interview with Judith Baca, 1986, August 5-6. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

further disenfranchised from the system, and their job was to take care of the home and the children while the men went to work. The influence of Baca's maternal family cannot be ignored when it comes to her upbringing and subsequent views of the value and capabilities of women.

Education

Baca experienced what many before her had within the education system in the United States. As a young Chicana, Baca experienced discrimination and hindrance to her education based on her gender and ethnicity. She was prohibited from speaking Spanish in the classroom, but her English skills were not helped. Instead, Baca was pushed to the back of the school with paints and a paintbrush while the other children studied.[24] Speaking Spanish at home meant learning English was slow-going. Still, she persevered and eventually developed the skills needed to continue moving forward in the English-forward culture of the United States. However, she continued drawing and painting because of encouragement from a district art teacher. In 1964, she graduated from Bishop Alemany High School.[25]

Baca refuted the traditional roles imposed upon her as much as she could, and after graduating from high school, she was the first in her extended family to attend college. As much as her mother accepted her role within the household and tried to instill its importance in her daughter, she still valued education highly and encouraged Baca to attend a university and continue the path of art as a career. She attended California State University, Northridge (CSUN) and earned a bachelor's degree in fine art in 1969.[26]

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[24] Oral history interview with Judith Baca, 1986, August 5-6. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
[25] Oral history interview with Judith Baca, 1986, August 5-6. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
[26] Oral history interview with Judith Baca, 1986, August 5-6. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Early Career

In 1970, Baca was an art teacher for the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks. While there, she noticed the bare and neglected walls of the Eastside *barrios* and recreation centers and decided to do something about it. She enlisted twenty teenagers' help, all without artistic training, from four separate neighborhoods. Baca picked these young men in particular because they were just that. She noted that these places in Boyle Heights were "spaces of male social bonding for youth disenfranchised from the dominant public sphere."[27] These young men took to calling Baca "mural lady." The act of referring to Baca as a lady, however intended, reinforced the idea that Baca transcended the boundaries that were understood of these spaces. It directly becomes an example of feminist leadership in a time when that was not accepted or expected of her. Baca was aware of this shift and used it to her advantage. She had a reclaimed power when using her authority to direct these *machismo* young men in creating her designs. That idea transferred throughout her career and pushed her to take leaps that she may not have taken otherwise.

Baca recounts the similarities between Boyle Heights and Pacoima. She says, "Boyle Heights had cultural markers – graffiti –with roll calls written on the walls that told you who lived there, what the neighborhood was called, and who was from there."[28] During her time as an art teacher in these neighborhoods, Baca worked with different members from different neighborhoods. She worked to redirect their ideas of public expression and give them an outlet to create a more constructive cultural signifier than simply tagging the buildings with names.

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[27] Anna Indych-López and Chon A. Noriega, *Judith F. Baca* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2018), 21.
[28] Oral history interview with Judith Baca, 1986, August 5-6. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Las Vistas Nuevas

Las Vistas Nuevas, or "New Views," was behind the Boyle Heights murals. Comprised of a team of twenty members, aged sixteen to twenty-one, from four different gangs, the group decided on the name together and worked to create a series of murals that showed images that would be familiar to the Chicanx living in the neighborhood. The first is titled *Mi Abuelita* (fig. 7). Created in 1970, the mural spans three walls in a bandshell in Hollenbeck Park. *Mi Abuelita, or "my little grandmother,*" depicts a Chicana grandmother, standing center with arms outstretched as if waiting for the viewer to come in for an embrace. Now destroyed, this mural is considered the first Chicano-designed and created mural in Los Angeles. [29]

Baca based the design of *Mi Abuelita* on a photograph of her grandmother, Francesca Baca. This is the grandmother she lived with during most of her childhood. Despite being inspired by this photograph, Baca designed the *abuelita* to be universal. She wanted the portrait to appear as more of a general image of a matriarch rather than a personalized depiction. The *abuelita* is a contemporary figure designed to represent the diverse backgrounds of the youths who worked on the project. Acting as a solitary monument, the *abuelita's* head covers the tilted ceiling, and her arms stretch out to both side walls. Removed from the domestic setting where she might be expected to be situated, Baca designed the *abuelita* as a monumental figure. Baca utilized her own experience and honored the archetypal matriarch embodied in the person who played such a pivotal role in her formative years.

The focus on a single figure with an abstract, colorful background lays the groundwork for the group figures and heavy sense of setting that Baca utilizes in *The Great Wall*. With this mural, she still attempts to learn to work with untrained hands. The geometric background is

[29] Anna Indych-López and Chon A. Noriega, *Judith F. Baca* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2018) 20-21.

more straightforward to construct than a more complex setting. The design still suggests that the *abuelita* is outdoors, but it has been simplified for ease of execution. Baca said, "That actually was the first band shell ever to be painted in Los Angeles, with a mural. That band shell is where the children dance, so the idea of having in her arms, outstretched arms. These children dancing seemed like a perfect thing for an *abuelita* to be doing." [30]

Mi Abuelita interacts with the viewer in multiple ways. Baca's decision to title the piece using the possessive *mi* instead of the general *la* reinforces this idea. Using *mi* implies possession of the word that follows it; it suggests a sense of belonging. The outstretched arms covering the bandshell's sides are intended to envelop the viewer and bring them into the composition. Baca utilizes the entirety of the space. Therefore, the figure envelopes the bandshell in a way that makes it seem like she is projecting forward rather than receding into the background (fig. 8). This was achieved by using a projector to display the drawn image on the walls of the space. This meant that the image still came to life despite the bandshell's awkward shape and angular walls. Baca draws this technique from the practice of David Alfaro Siqueiros. Throughout his career, he often used this method to determine the success of a given image in a given space. The projector was a tool used to work with the environment rather than just on top of it.[31]

Not long after the creation of *Mi Abuelita*, Baca, and *Las Nuevas Vistas* took on another project. *Medusa's Head* (fig. 9) was painted in 1973, just north of Hollenbeck Park in Boyle Heights. The entrance doors, wall, and ceiling of the Recreation Center were adorned with a psychedelic image of Medusa. Rather than depicting the Greek mythological character as the monster she is usually shown as, Baca decided to replace the snakes that typically form the

[30] Oral history interview with Judith Baca, 1986, August 5-6. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
[31] Anna Indych-López and Chon A. Noriega, *Judith F. Baca* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2018), 23-24.

strands of her hair with roses. These roses travel the entire expanse of the portico and surround the viewer once they are within the space. No longer is Medusa shown as a horrific monster who turns anyone who looks at her into stone. She is now the life source for these blooming flowers that spring from her head and wrap around the entrance. Using a distinct Chicana perspective, Baca created this Medusa as a feminist inversion of the traditional story. Baca says that she was explicitly "…looking for a really powerful female image"[32] when it came to the design of *Medusa's Head.* As seen in a work-in-progress photo (fig. 10), Baca utilizes the *machismo* men of the barrios to bring the design to life.

These early mural projects taught Baca how to interact with the public and the community. In the case of *Mi Abuelita,* in particular, the mural was relatively non-threatening to the members of the public. However, Baca still received backlash almost immediately. She expressed that she was in a no-win situation, saying, "And at both ends I was despised -- the community, because they saw me as being part of the city; the city, because they saw me being a community person and a radical."[33] This response deepened the planning and process for creating a mural and followed Baca throughout her career and into constructing *The Great Wall.* Because of reactions like this, Baca would schedule town meetings to discuss the projects. Town members would be invited to share their opinions and concerns openly.

SPARC

These projects in Boyle Heights continued to expand, and beginning in 1974, Baca founded the city of Los Angeles's first Mural Program. Baca approached the city with an idea,

[32] Anna Indych-López and Chon A. Noriega, *Judith F. Baca* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2018), 29.
[33] Oral history interview with Judith Baca, 1986, August 5-6. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

and they accepted. These first few projects were minimally funded and were essentially just passion projects. However, these led to the foundation of her organization, SPARC. SPARC, the Social and Public Art Resource Center, is a non-profit organization that focuses on preserving and creating public art. They also sponsor artists and host exhibitions and workshops. SPARC was formally founded in 1976 by Baca, American artist Christina Schlesinger, and American filmmaker and director Donna Deitch. The first project within the organization was *The Great Wall of Los Angeles,* now the project that Baca and the non-profit are known for. Today, the non-profit focuses on preserving the Chicano murals created decades ago and providing archival resources for information and research.[34]

The acronym SPARC was chosen intentionally, as the organization intended to "spark" a movement surrounding justice. The organization was born during a time in the 1970s when a plethora of movements were happening in the United States, namely the Feminist Movement, the Counterculture Movement, and the Gay Liberation Movement. SPARC wanted to capitalize on the public progress surrounding these movements because of their goals. According to their website, SPARC's mission is to "produce, preserve, and promote activist and socially relevant artwork; to devise and innovate excellent art pieces through participatory processes; and ultimately, to foster artistic collaborations that empower communities who face marginalization or discrimination." [35] Since its founding, SPARC and those working for the non-profit have created a distinct artistic culture surrounding Los Angeles's collection of public art. SPARC always has been, and still is, an instigator of social change through the arts.

Concurrently, Baca returned to CSUN and earned a master's degree in fine art. During this time, she discovered her genuine desire when creating art: to make art accessible beyond the

[34] "Social and Public Art Resource Center," SPARCinLA (SPARC, April 2023), https://sparcinla.org/.
[35] "Social and Public Art Resource Center," SPARCinLA (SPARC, April 2023), https://sparcinla.org/.

constraints of the gallery and the larger museum institutions. Baca knew her family, neighbors, and peers were not going to galleries. To her, it did not make sense to put art behind a guarded wall. In an attempt to discover a way to break this cycle, Baca continued her education at Taller Siqueiros in Cuernavaca, Mexico. Spending six weeks in the mountains south of Mexico City, Baca learned fundamental design techniques that dramatically changed the trajectory of her work moving forward.

Baca divides *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* into pre- and post-1977. Or pre- and post-studying in the Siqueiros workshop and learning about his concept of the musical ratio. This musical ratio is crucial to scaling a mural project successfully. Siqueiros used a ratio of three to five to divide the space. These numbers can change depending on the given area they are working within, but the ratio creates a rhythm within the composition. Baca describes the process of learning this ratio, saying,

> And it was an amazing experience for me to see how when lines, directional lines, went through forms -- how forms, if moved to fit within the ratio, to hit the points. Like in other words, if an arm flies out, it goes to the point. Suddenly there's this like visual kind of connection between the forms, and it fits like, clicks like pieces of a puzzle, right into place. And I have been speeding up that time, as I come to the present, making the time faster, you know -- as opposed to four-four time to, you know, one-sixteen or something. I've been using three to five.[36]

This process carried her through the design and construction of her work from then on out. She believes that *The Great Wall,* in particular, shows a distinct change.

Working with disadvantaged and often criminalized youth made Baca a cultural worker and a community organizer. Interviews with the Mural Makers were conducted on the last day of the 1983 summer panels. Everyone who contributed to the project over the summer wrote about

[36] Oral history interview with Judith Baca, 1986, August 5-6. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

their experiences working on the mural. Sergio Moreno, a sixteen-year-old student who was first involved with *The Great Wall* that summer, said,

> When I started working here I did it for the money, then I began to take great pride in the mural and in the Chicano section in particular. At first I didn't think an assortment of races could work together because in my neighborhood there is primarily one race. This project made me realize that the prejudices I had inside me were not only false but also ignorant. I only wish all mankind could have gone through this experience with me. I regret that when I leave here my new attitude will change back to before. I hope that when people see this mural they forget all their prejudices and try to live with all people, no matter what race, in peace.[37]

Moreno's written experience matches that of many others who were interviewed on this last day. The Mural Makers were often apprehensive at the beginning of the project, but as time passed, they realized the benefit of working with others and the importance of being a part of a project like *The Great Wall.*

After finishing the 1983 panel of *The Great Wall*, Baca continued to receive commissions and create murals across Los Angeles. She was a professor at three different locations of the University of California: Irvine, Monterey Bay, and Los Angeles. She spent almost four decades teaching classes in various programs at each school. At the same time, she has remained the artistic director at SPARC since its founding in 1976. Her goals of accessibility and establishing community have remained the same throughout her years as an artist, activist, and educator.

[37] "Social and Public Art Resource Center," SPARCinLA (SPARC, April 2023), https://sparcinla.org/.

Chapter IV: *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*

The Great Wall of Los Angeles was created between 1974 and 1983. In 2021, an extension project was announced to cover the 1960s to the 2020s. This massive project was a group effort, employing hundreds of students and artists to create a half-mile-long mural decorating a drainage canal in the San Fernando Valley. The creation was incredibly technical and broken up into sections created over five summers by varying artists. Each section represents a dedicated full year, if not longer, of research, organization, and then execution.[38] This chapter describes in detail the iconographic content of each mural panel, divided up according to the chronology by which it was painted.

The time spent actively painting was relatively brief in the grand scheme of the project. Not only did multilayered research take up a vast amount of time, but preparing the wall for the mural itself was a great project within itself. Preparing the wall for paint included sandblasting, water blasting, and sealing. Then, the wall had to be primed before the initial sketch could be applied. It required taking measurements and using specialized equipment to transfer imagery from the design blueprints to the wall. Art historian Anna Indych-Lopez wrote, "It (*The Great Wall*) provided underprivileged and at-risk youth an opportunity to occupy and claim public space in meaningful ways that have a direct impact on their lives, a model that changed the paradigms for art making and forged a model of community and activist art practice that has inspired generations."[39] This mural is the product of discourse between artists, community members, scholars, and youths from diverse backgrounds. The impact of this mural reached an

[38] Unless otherwise noted, all information from this chapter comes from: Judy Baca. "The Great Wall – History and Description." Judy Baca, 2015.
[39] Anna Indych-López and Chon A. Noriega, *Judith F. Baca* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2018), 150.

array of audiences. The collaborative dialogue developed the mural makers' stake in the murals as a form of cultural capital.

One issue that arose during creation was one of practicality. How could these artistically untrained youths create a mural? Additionally, how could artists who were untrained as teachers teach these youths to paint? Could this be done without sacrificing the aesthetics and, therefore, the ability to provide viewers with a specific message? Muralism is a simple art form but complex in its design. Scaling projects to this size requires mathematical knowledge and experience. A design must be dynamic, captivating, and visible from afar. Icons and symbols have to be accentuated so they are noticed in the grand scheme of the project.

Baca chose to tackle these problems by creating a large-scale paint-by-numbers system. Before the youth painters even arrived, Baca and the designers at SPARC would draw a connect-the-dots on the wall after it was primed. Supervisors would connect these dots, and then the youth painters would engage in flat color application. A five-color application technique was used for the base transfer. After this was done, Baca and a few other members of the finishing team would refine the work (fig. 11). This team, consisting of youths who showed a high level of skill and a few of SPARC's designers and painters, assisted Baca in adding highlights, shadows, and final touches to ensure that the message was clear for the viewer. As the project continued, Baca refined this process and could complete entire mural sections in a much shorter amount of time than the first summer saw.

The Summer of 1976

Section one, completed in 1976, consists of thirty-five panels in total. Each segment was designed by artists, who then worked with youth design teams to bring the design to life.

Beginning with Pre-Historic California, the mural depicts contemporary understandings of 20,000 BCE, with the animals and plants native to the area. *The La Brea Tar Pits* follow this, what is now the home to much of downtown Los Angeles, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Artist Kristi Lucas designed these first two panels. Transitioning into the next panel, there is the introduction of peoples native to the land.[40] Roughly situated around 1000 A.D., this panel focuses on the life of the Chumash. The Chumash are a widespread group of California native people who lived along the southern California coast and the Channel Islands of Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, and San Miguel. The area was first settled at least 13,000 years ago. Current estimates of Chumash individuals today range from 4,000 to 10,000, according to the United States Census Bureau.[41] Traditional homes, known as "aps" (fig. 12), and religious ceremonies are depicted in this panel, designed by Christine Schlesinger.

These early depictions still reinforce antiquated ideas of Native Americans here in the United States. The individuals are shown in little clothing and with exaggerated ornamentation. I do not attempt to justify this depiction but want to acknowledge it as a product of its time. While progressive in 1974, we can better understand its flaws in 2024. Baca and SPARC have not acknowledged this antiquated depiction (or discussed any plans to redo these panels) in the larger scheme of the mural, at least not that I have been able to find at the time of writing this.

Kristi Lucas created the fourth panel, *Indigenous Plants,* which shows plants native to the area along a body of water. Erupting from the body of water is a giant gray whale. Out of the mountains above the water comes the face of a Chumash woman. Another interpretation of these peoples' daily lives follows, once again designed by Christina Schlesinger. A red circle

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[41] U.S. Census Bureau, "TOTAL POPULATION," 2021. *American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates American Indian and Alaska Native Detailed Tables, Table B01003*, 2021, accessed on April 1, 2024.

represents the three worlds the Chumash believed in: the world they live in and the one above and below them. Two serpents are thought to hold the world up from below. From above, a giant eagle holds the world in the air. Six lightning bolts extend from the center of the circle. Chumash religion holds that the Sun carries a torch of tightly rolled bark to light up the world. He snaps his torch to throw sparks after his daily journey across the sky. Schlesinger finishes this panel by showing figures fishing, practicing archery, and cooking: all elements crucial to the Chumash culture.[42] These panels end abruptly with a white hand rising from the sea, grasping a naked person of color. This hand represents the destruction that comes from the hands of the white settlers.

Baca herself designed the following five panels. Beginning with *Portolà Expedition 1769*, Spanish explorer Gaspar de Portolá stands within the crow's nest of a ship, gazing upon the California coast. Swirling in the sky above the water are depictions of Califia, California's namesake. We see this same scene from the indigenous perspective in a continuous narrative. A group of natives are standing along the coastline, some watching with spears drawn and others cowering in fear, almost as if they are aware of what is to come for them. In the ninth panel, a Native American yells at Junipero Serra, the Spanish Catholic Priest and missionary of the Franciscan Order, riding at him on a mule. The mule acts as a symbol of power for the rider. Out of the dust trail created by the mule rises the pueblo of Los Angeles during its founding in 1781. Standing before the pueblo are five members of the expedition responsible for the founding of what is now one of the largest cities in the entire world (fig. 13). In 1774, King Carlos III of Spain authorized the settlement of California communities now known as San Gabriel, Los Angeles, and Santa Barbara. He believed that establishing pueblos in these areas would defend

[42] Damian Bacich, "Native Americans of the California Coast: The Chumash - Early California Resource Center," Early California Resource Center, September 1, 2023, https://www.californiafrontier.net/chumash-people/.

against the looming threat of the Russian and British empires, both of which were moving closer to California. The almost a thousand-mile expedition founded a small pueblo just north of the extensive Spanish Empire. That small pueblo, now known as Los Angeles, would eventually become the center of the multi-ethnic and multicultural urban center we understand it to be today. The Sinaloans and Sonorans, who had contributed so significantly to the establishment and the life of the pueblo, continued to play an essential role in the growth of Los Angeles.[43]

Two mules separate the pueblo from the eleventh panel, designed by Judith Hernandez. This segment is primarily taken up by a depiction figure of a Spanish land baron raising the flag of the state of California on a flagpole, showcasing who dominated early California under Mexico's rule by exploiting the land and labor of the remaining Native Americans who were living there. As they claim the land, the lush landscape surrounds the Baron and a crowd of soldiers. Hernandez is responsible for the design of the four following panels as well. Depictions of Missions showcase what life in the state was like following Spanish settlement and under Spanish rule. Large churches were constructed and attended by a new group known as Californios. A distinctly new public working to define their own culture, Californios possessed a complicated mix of Indigenous, Mexican, and Spanish heritage. This meant that these individuals did not quite fit into any category and, therefore, had to create a new one.

Mexican Hacienda is the design of panel fourteen. These haciendas were expensive estates situated on a large amount of land and were often given as rewards from the Spanish crown. This panel ends with the battle between the Mexican army and the U.S. cavalry for the power to govern the state. The Mexican-American War, known in the United States as the

[43] John Schmal, "The Expedition of 1781: The Founding of Los Angeles," Indigenous Mexico, October 3, 2023, https://www.indigenousmexico.org/articles/the-expedition-of-1781-the-founding-of-los-angeles#:~:text=Most%20people%20living%20in%20Los,years%20old%20in%20September%202019.

"Mexican War" and in Mexico as "the United States invasion in Mexico," was an invasion of Mexico by the United States from 1846 to 1848 following the United States' annexation of Texas just one year prior. The two countries were fighting over the rule of the land, determining who could lay claim. No longer considered in the equation are the people who have lived there for centuries, the groups native to the California coast.

Ulysses Jenkins designed the following seven panels, beginning with the Gold Rush era, including the first discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill and the migration of people of color by ship to California. Sutter's Mill is shown vacant, surrounded by a barren landscape with two dying trees. The mining of gold stripped the land of all it once possessed, leaving behind the remainder of "innovation." Mifflin W. Gibbs and Mary Ellen Pleasant are situated in the mountains of the next panel. Gibbs published the first black newspaper in California, and Pleasant used her ability as an entrepreneur and financer to expand the Underground Railroad west during this time. Separated by a steamboat chugging across the water, a portrait of William A. Leidesdorff is at the center of the composition. Leidesdorff was one of the founders of the city of San Francisco.

A globe blends the nineteenth and twentieth panels (fig. 14). *California Gold Rush* shows a man crouched down, panning for gold in the water. A Confederate flag waves behind him just before a large white estate. A covered wagon pulled by a set of four large animals signifies the desire on behalf of the American people to move west during this time. Standing atop a pile of gold is a man with a shovel, standing just before a sign that, in a large white font, says "white only." Monterey, the state capital, had just passed "whites-only" laws. This ban was not just to exclude black people; it was exclusionary of Native Americans, Hispanics, and Asian people as well. A portrait of Bridget "Biddy" Mason sits atop a yellow outline of the state. Biddy Mason founded the First African Methodist Episcopal Church in the state in 1872. Just next to her are

three figures shown hanging from a large tree. The individuals are Mexican, Asian, and Black. An image of famed outlaw Joaquin Murrieta follows them up. Murrieta is seen as a social bandit who was the victim of ethnic discrimination. Initially an immigrant miner, Murrieta turned to a life of crime only after American miners beat him, tied him up, hanged his half-brother, and ravished his wife.[44]

Gary Takamoto designed the three following panels. *Sojourners 1868* showcases Chinese immigrants who came to the United States hoping to make money and return to China to live a life of ease. Instead, they were met with hostility and racism in California.[45] The next panel depicts the transcontinental railroad's construction, including the faces of those who died during the construction in the smoke from a locomotive. This inclusion was a way to honor those who dedicated more to the construction than they were likely aware of. The transcontinental railroad was built almost entirely by Chinese immigrants (fig. 15). Next, five figures represent the nineteen Chinese immigrants who were killed in the Chinese Massacre of 1871.

Arnold Ramirez designed panels twenty-six through twenty-eight. *Frontier California 1880* showcases what life was like for the ranchers and farmers living in what we now call the frontier. The spread of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 follows the frontier. There is no provided explanation for this break in chronological order. Although many of the designs by the same artists were grouped, that could be a potential reason why the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo 1848 came after *Frontier California 1880.* This treaty ended the Mexican-American War after Mexico ceded around fifty-five percent of its territories to the United States. Individuals on horseback are shown handing off the treaty, and a US Mail carrier rides just behind them.

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[44] John Rollin Ridge and Joseph Henry Jackson, *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta: The Celebrated California Bandit: By Yellow Bird* (Norman, OK: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1962).
[45] Gunther Barth, Chinese Sojourners in the West: The Coming. *Southern California Quarterly* 1 March 1964; 46 (1): 55–67.

California Citrus Industry shows workers in the field, handpicking oranges off the trees in the orchard. A train carrying thousands of oranges cuts through the composition and represents the labor of those harvesting the fruits.

Olga Muniz designs the following three panels. A newspaper cutting showing Suffragette protestors is a harsh transition between the two panels. Two Californian women were then shown reading the newspaper and learning about the movement. *LA Mountains to the Shore 1890* shows lush farmland being maintained by the invention of the gear and chain. *Red Car* represents the Pacific Electric Railway Company, a privately owned mass transit system developed in Southern California at this time (fig. 16).

With direct input from the youth painting team, Charlie Brown designs *Youth Team at LA Harbor*. This panel showcases the bustling city, stretching the length of two standard panels; it details the people, their activity, and the markets being established by businesses. Cup of Joe, Winery Depot, Western Union, and others make up the storefronts along the Harbor. A rocky cliff signifies the land's end and the water's beginning. An abrupt change to nighttime is showcased by a dark sky, with a bright full moon shining light on the man alone on a boat in the San Pedro Harbor. Choppy waters are full of birds and fish, but they bleed into calm shores when the night transitions into the day. A pier stretches out into the harbor, and even more shops are constructed by the turn of the century.

From the waves of the bay come the flags of the migrants to the west coast, designed by Isabel Castro. A family stands before the array of flags, looking directly out to the viewer as a way to relate. Some of the viewers of this mural would have been able to recognize themselves within this family dynamic. The flag stretches out into the farming fields, where a man is shown harvesting rows upon rows of crops by hand, one at a time. Red and white stripes are all that

remain of the combination of flags shown before. The distinct new American flag cuts through the fields, creating a road for a car to drive.

Castro also designs *World War I*, showing planes flying over Europe and a tank rolling across the landscape. This thirty-fifth panel concludes the work of the first summer. Just under half of the mural was created in this first summer alone; roughly one thousand feet were completed in nine weeks. The first conclusion panel highlights seventy-four contributors to the project, fourteen of whom were supervisors and sixty members of the youth painting team.

The Summer of 1978

In an attempt to make the project more unified, Baca exercised more control over the panels' designs during the second summer's work. She stated in 1985, "One person must have the overall vision for the work to become a whole. I have the ultimate veto power when I think something is not working. Although the conceptualization takes place in a group, I approve every image idea before it goes to thumbnail." [46] Baca tried to bring out a significant concern about artistic collaboration on projects like this one, which has conflicting voices. By ensuring that she is aware of this, she can tackle it head-on and ensure that her project, despite its scale, is concise. Following this first summer, Baca reduced the crew sizes to five youths working under one supervising artist to foster more direct communication. Supervisors who worked on the project during the first summer returned to the site with experience and provided another level of direction.

Beginning where the last summer left off, panel thirty-six shows the WWI Doughboys. A train waits to be boarded as groups of men kiss their partners goodbye. The next panel

[46] Anna Indych-López and Chon A. Noriega, *Judith F. Baca* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2018), 123.

emphasizes the role of women in the war and their jobs as the men left. A woman holds a wrench in the air as she is pulled through the smoke produced by a smokestack. Two women carry a wounded, or potentially dead, body out of the trenches to receive medical attention (fig. 17). Named *Women in the War Industry*, the title references how wars are manufactured, that they are an industry just like any other at the time.

Panel thirty-eight shows Charlie Chaplin exiting a bunker dressed in full uniform. A large portrait of inventor Thomas Alva Edison follows this. His left-hand holds a film strip and directs a camera pointed back at Chaplin. While this inclusion of Edison is initially shocking, during their research, the Mural Makers found that he was actually born in Mexico. The Library of Congress contests this finding, claiming he was born in Milan, Ohio.[47] A woman with the body of an ear of corn stretches out of an Aztec temple just behind him, attempting to call out to Edison while he stands straight ahead. His right-hand grips a lightbulb, causing it to illuminate just with his touch (fig. 18).

Panel forty depicts the Great Train Robbery. This 1903 film was made for the Edison Manufacturing Company and follows a group of outlaws in the Wild West. Section two concludes with panel forty-one, featuring William S. Hart. Hart was a renowned silent film star during this era.

At the end of this summer, the credit panel lists only Baca as a director but adds special thanks to several individuals and organizations. Four supervisors are credited, with a tagline noting that SPARC sponsored this project and funding was provided through a grant. Thirty-four individuals were credited as members of the youth painting team during this summer. The

[47] "Life of Thomas Alva Edison," Inventing Entertainment: The Early Motion Pictures and Sound Recordings of the Edison Companies, accessed February 5, 2024, https://www.loc.gov/collections/edison-company-motion-pictures-and-sound-recordings/articles-and-essays/biography/life-of-thomas-alva-edison.

change in this dedication panel showcases the attention this project was getting and the scale at which it grew. This project, which was dedicated to vocalizing the marginalized, was quickly gaining an intense amount of traction. These six panels are all that were completed in the summer of 1978. No painting was conducted during the following summer. Baca and the Mural Makers moved on to finish the remaining 1,050 feet of the wall in 1980, 1981, and 1983.

The Summer of 1980

The summer of 1980 included twelve total panels, with panels forty-two through fifty-three being the larger composition. Baca was the designer for each panel within this segment. A suited man actively firing a bullet from a gun at two enlarged bottles of Don Perignon champagne begins panel forty-two. Large barrels of whiskey divide the panels, and an axe cuts one open, letting the contents pour out and pool on the floor. Panel forty-four features Dunbar Hotel, the most prestigious hotel in the African American community in Los Angeles. A nightclub within the hotel became the epicenter of the jazz movement in the West. A Black man plays a large brass trumpet just over the hotel. Still yet, just next to him, a Black man drinks out of a "colored only" water faucet, indicating the complex relationship African Americans had with the larger public at this time. The heyday of jazz music cannot be discussed without the subsequent racial discrimination that came with it.

A representation of the 1929 market crash follows this. A battered and boarded-up bank sinks just below the composition. Child labor laws are the focus of panel forty-six. A single person manages a factory full of workers. A gold film strip cuts across the panels, showing how Hollywood fantasies desperately try to cover up what is happening for the people outside this tiny circle in the film industry. The *Great Depression* shows the stark contrast between the

classes during this time. This is the beginning of the idea we still see today regarding the disconnect between the average citizens and the elite. The “regular” people are shown standing in bread lines, warming their hands over a trashcan fire, and selling apples desperately attempting to make any income.

Labor Strikes follow with a swarm of individuals engaging in their right to peaceful protest. One of the protestors, a Black man, is beaten by a formally undefined blue figure, representing the way these protests were met with violence from the police force (fig. 19). Panel forty-nine represents the Long Beach Earthquake of 1933. This earthquake was considered relatively mild on the Richter scale but caused mass destruction due to poor construction and a lack of information for the citizens.

Out of the earthquake's rubble rises a group of Natives, holding unsigned treaties that determine the fate of their futures. Just next to them is a white man holding a burning cigar, physically pushing groups of Mexican Americans back onto a train that will take them to Mexico. These figures represent the 500,000 Mexican Americans who were deported from the United States in the 1930s. Panel fifty-two depicts a family of Dustbowl refugees abandoning their homes and trekking across the barren landscape in hopes of escaping the tragic natural disaster they are experiencing. An abandoned clothesline stretches to a tree with a propaganda poster nailed to it. The poster warns viewers about “Yellow Peril” and perpetuates stereotypes and fearmongering surrounding Asian Americans. Just beyond this tree, Manzanar, the Japanese Internment Camp, is depicted. Manzanar War Relocation Center was one of ten camps where the United States government incarcerated Japanese immigrants who were ineligible for citizenship. 110,000 women, men, and children were detained in these remote military-style camps between 1942 and 1945. An Asian family is shown tearfully moving from their home and entering this

camp in the final panel created in the summer of 1980. In the credit panel for this summer, Baca is now credited as the art director. The sponsor list grows longer and includes significant institutions like the National Endowment for the Arts. Forty mural makers are credited, ten of whom were acknowledged as supervisors.

The Summer of 1981

The summer of 1981 begins with a depiction of the 442nd Japanese American infantry. They are shown marching out of the stripes of the American flag, representing their alleged allegiance to the country that has always treated them so poorly. The red, white, and blue stripes of the flag bleed into the home of a Jewish American family through their television. As they sit and watch, a portrait of a screaming Adolf Hitler looms behind them. The California Aqueduct is the design of panel fifty-six. Rows and rows of crops bloom behind the flowing water, showcasing the abundance that came with this project. The Aqueduct is a 444-mile-long artificial river that carries water throughout the state. The project was voted upon and passed in 1960. The water of the Aqueduct flows into the next panel and up to a miniature portrait of Jeanette Rankin speaking to the House of Representatives. Rankin was the first woman to hold federal office in the United States. She was elected to the House of Representatives from Missoula, Montana, but spent many of her later years in California, eventually passing away in the state in 1973. In 1941, she was the only member within both houses of Congress to vote against the war on Japan. Because of this, Baca chose to surround her with the destruction that surrounded World War II. Fighter jets soar through the sky above the scene, bombs are being dropped, and are shown just seconds away from hitting the chamber itself. The largest bomb in the panel is shown just inches above Rankin's head.

World War II follows this panel. In this scene, military helmets are lined up in rows. Each helmet has a label with a country and the number of casualties that country had in the war. Looming above these helmets is a group of men sitting and pointing to places on a large tabletop map. A conveyor belt of bullets cuts the composition in half and shifts our attention to *Rosie the Riveter*. Three women are shown welding large steel beams to showcase how gender roles and expectations changed as the men went to war.

A portrait of Dr. Charles Drew, the inventor of blood plasma, showcases how the war opened the door for people of color to move into careers not previously allowed. This is short-lived, however, as he is shown cradling his own body after dying unnecessarily because he was refused treatment in a southern hospital. Individuals exercising their right to peaceful protests are the subject of panel sixty-one. A cross looms in the background, standing tall above all the protestors. A tribute to David Gonzales follows this. Gonzales received the Medal of Honor for his actions during WWII. The city of Pacoima dedicated its Recreation Center to him, which remains so today (fig. 20).

The sixty-third panel shows the Zoot Suit Riots. In these riots in 1943, members of the United States Navy and other white Angelenos stripped and beat men wearing a style of suits that were called “zoot suits.” Zoot suits, most often worn by Chicanos, were considered unpatriotic at the time due to the large amount of fabric required to make them. A man is shown stripped and crouching on the ground while the shadow and legs of a man in a military or police uniform loom above him.

Luisa Moreno appears next in the panels. Moreno was a social activist and active participant in the United States labor movement. She is best known for convening the 1939 *Congreso de Pueblos de Habla Española*, the first national Latino civil rights assembly.

Extending just behind Moreno is a train carrying a *bracero*, or a *farm worker,* to work in the hot fields in rural California. The Bracero Program took place between 1942 and 1964. It was an agreement between the United States and Mexico to allow Mexican citizens into the United States temporarily to work in the agriculture fields.

Panel sixty-six begins with a depiction of the ship St. Louis, filled with Jewish immigrants who were refused entry into the United States because the quota for entry was already met. A man is shown clutching at American soil, indicated by the erection of a flag in the dirt, as he is pulled back towards the death camps in Europe. Just beyond those death camps is the mushroom cloud of the Atomic Bomb created by Oppenheimer, another symbol of the death that was imminent for the characters depicted here.

A large, open-mouthed baby sitting in a highchair begins the final panel created in the summer of 1981. He holds a box of food with the word “boom” written across it. A mother and father sit at a kitchen table behind the baby. The father clutches at a coffee mug, shown in military uniform, while the mother stares off into space, imagining a life she once lived and would soon no longer be allowed to return to now that her husband has returned from the War. Billowing curtains around an open window give us a glimpse into the outside world of suburbia. Cookie-cutter houses line the streets and become the norm for the affluent white families existing inside (fig. 21). The dedication panel for this summer once again names Baca as artistic director. Thirty-nine mural makers are credited, seven of whom were designated as supervisors. The sponsor list and special thanks list grew longer this summer.

The Summer of 1983

The summer of 1983 consisted of eighteen total panels. It begins with a farewell to Rosie the Riveter as the men return from war and women are expected to return to their everyday lives as homemakers. A woman loses grasp of her wrench to clutch onto the wall of the Tujunga Wash itself, breaking the fourth wall and bringing this representation of Rosie into the viewer's space. She is being sucked back into the television by a vacuum cleaner operated by a smiling woman pictured in the domestic space—a stereotypical family peers out from behind the television. Mom, Dad, and three children stand in front of the same cookie-cutter homes we saw in the final panels created during the summer of 1981. Here, by contrast, the streets are filled with moving trucks extending to a vanishing point of a downtown city with several skyscrapers.

That was followed by the Red Scare and McCarthyism, depicting McCarthy himself holding up a blacklist of those in the film world who were accused of being Communists. People on the list are being physically sucked into a typewriter. That typewriter then produces the lanes of a freeway. This freeway wraps around a Chicano family, representing the division of barrios during the infrastructure construction in Los Angeles. The construction physically separates the family, and the mother and father reach their hands out in hopes of being reconnected. Dodger Stadium looms in the background as a Native woman is shown being forcibly removed from her home by a white police officer. The white officer is much larger than the woman he carries, drawing on a centuries-old tradition of hierarchical scale (fig. 22).

Panel seventy-two is a large portrait of Elvis on screen at a drive-in theater, surrounded by the black artists he stole work from and never credited. *Big Mama Thornton* depicts the original singer of “Hound Dog,” Willie Mae Thornton. An interior depiction of a city bus featuring Rosa Parks and several other Black figures is the focus of *Forebears of Civil Rights*.

Outside the bus window, right next to Parks, we see the origins of the Gay Rights Movement. A page from "The Ladder," the first nationally published and distributed lesbian periodical in the United States, falls to the ground as three police officers threaten an unknown individual. *Daughters of Bilitis* shows a meeting of the first lesbian rights group in the United States. This is juxtaposed next to *Mattachine Society,* where a group of men sit at a bar staring out the window, watching members of the public space. Masks representing the anonymity inherent within the group hang on the back of their heads, illustrating their dual lives within two different publics.

The next panel showcases the Beats movement and Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg is shown reciting his poem *Howl*. Albert Einstein is the central image of *Jewish Achievements in Arts and Sciences.* Panel eighty shows the realities of assimilation for those outside of the dominant white American culture. A government official is shown robbing a young Native boy of his traditional dress and cutting his hair before sending him several states away to a conversion boarding school (fig. 23). Next, a Korean man is being sworn in and granted American citizenship. Behind him, a "Sold" sign is planted in a field of crops, indicating that with this citizenship, the man can now buy land and live out the idea of the American dream.

Panels eighty-two through eighty-five highlight the contributions of four athletes. Divers Vicki Manalo Draves and Sammy Lee are shown mid-jump, falling gracefully towards the water below them. Runner Wilma Rudolf sprints away from her past self, the child version of her who had been diagnosed with polio, to cross the finish line. Billy Mills has a similar depiction to Rudolf. Shown running out of the smoke of his past life, Mills celebrates as he crosses the finish line.

The Summer of 1984

The final summer, 1984, was the shortest section of them all. It consisted of only one design and one panel describing the project. In the final panel of the final summer, a woman runner carries the Olympic torch towards the next stage of history (fig. 24). The eternal flame of the torch builds from the blaze of Manalo Draves, Lee, Rudolf, Milly, and all of the others who had come before them. The sections from the summers of 1983 and 1984 do not include the same credit panels as the summers before. However, the summer of 1984 includes a synopsis of the project by Baca herself. She wrote,

> The half-mile-long mural on the history of California, depicting prehistory to the 1950s, is a work in progress. The mural is a landmark to the history of America and California and a monument to interracial harmony created between the youth who participated. Begun in 1976 by distinguished UCLA professor Judith F. Baca and the co-founder/artistic director of the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC). The Great Wall of LA employed over 400 youth and their families from diverse, social, and economic backgrounds working with artists oral historians, ethnologists, scholars, and community members to determine its content.

While the mural creates a necessary dialogue for the public, Baca makes her intentions as straightforward as possible. She leaves nothing up to interpretation regarding the message she is trying to convey.

This analysis reinforces the rebuttal of the societal understanding of people of color and women that Baca was trying to portray. The details of the individual scenes were all deliberate within the design, using Baca's direct wording to "acknowledge the presence of ethnic peoples and women." [48] She was telling the hidden stories, expressing the pain, sorrow, and suffering of the people who were not within the positions of power in the state. She highlighted the voices of people who have been muted since the beginning. Chinese immigrants were no longer meant to

[48] Frances K. Pohl and Judith F. Baca. "'The World Wall: A Vision of the Future without Fear,' an Interview with Judith F. Baca." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 11, no. 1 (1990): 34.

be feared; they were meant to be thanked for their contributions to infrastructure. Mexican laborers were no longer meant to be mocked and overworked; they were to be acknowledged for keeping the country fed. Women were not to be used; but appreciated for stepping up when it was deemed necessary. Not only was her choice of narrative revolutionary, but the fact that she was a young Chicana pioneering this massive project was subverting the expectations that society and her family had placed upon her.

Embracing its conflictive meanings, Baca used the concrete wash as a vessel for designs that communicate the racialization of public life and public space. The mural brings to life how history is constructed and contradictory. However, despite bringing attention to marginalized characters and stories, it should be remembered that these figures in the mural operated in a larger historical context, as does Baca and SPARC. *The Great Wall* humanizes these figures. But it also challenges conventional means of immortalizing those who contributed to the overall public that has been constructed, good or bad. *The Great Wall* introduces us to complex narratives to visualize broad historical events affecting said constructed public.

Chapter V: Public Art as a Voice

The public is a complex and unique idea explored by many theorists and artists during the twentieth century and beyond. Public art has its style and category with thousands of examples, yet each differs. Murals, sculptures, and performances are all examples of public art. The common characteristic between them is that they interact with the space where they are housed. Public art is embedded in the communities in which it exists. Political, economic, and ethical concerns surround the creation of public art.

Public art and public space are inextricably linked. It breaks away from the white cube of the gallery space and directly into the world in which people live. Placing or performing a work in a public space alters how the space is perceived. It reinforces the idea of the public and how it forms a public space by including and excluding different members of the larger societal public. Jan Brennan, Senior Fellow at the National Civic League, an organization dedicated to promoting civic engagement, wrote,

> Public art allows for varied participation, including public engagement in planning, selection, creation, installation, maintenance, and collective appreciation. Participatory public art better reflects neighborhood identity, culture, and history. The shared experience of creation and interaction with public art builds community cohesion. Participation amplifies the sense of ownership, discouraging graffiti and vandalism while supporting beautification, safety, and economic development.[49]

What any given public takes from public art is incredibly individual. However, public art is a part of public history. It is a part of our ever-changing culture as it reflects the larger society at its creation. As artists utilize public art to respond to the times, they create an archive of public experience.

[49] Jan Brennan. "Public Art and the Art of Public Participation." *National Civic Review* 108, no. 3 (2019): 35.

The Public vs. *A* Public

We often use the term public daily; however, our understanding of the word varies. Public is a complicated term as it relies heavily on our knowledge of the opposite, the private. The problem lies in the fact that what is public versus what is private is an individual matter. Literary critic Michael Warner explores the idea of a public in his essay "Publics and Counterpublics." He brings forth the difference between *the* public and *a* public. He claims that *the* public is a sense of the totality of a community. It is meant to encompass everyone within that community, whether general or specific. The public could be as small as a university classroom or as large as a class of people. On the other hand, *a* public is much more concrete. It is an audience or crowd bonded by the physical space in which they are. There are more guidelines for *a* public. Warner decides on a few necessary elements to determine what is and what is not public: (1) a public is self-organized, (2) a public is a relation among strangers, (3) a public is constituted through mere attention, and (4) a public is the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse.[50]

Warner is saying that the people must run a public from within it. Those existing within its boundaries get to decide them. The relationship that the individuals within a public form gives them a bond; it gives them something to rely on. Additionally, it does not stop changing once the public has been formed. There is a constant discourse ongoing. These stipulations give more agency to this process than is likely realistic for day-to-day. The members of a public often do not realize they are members of a specific public. They are so deeply ingrained within our society that we think nothing of the conversations, the attention, and the ideas that *a* public

[50] Michael Warner. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York, NY: Zone Books, 2014, 50-62.

brings forth. We do not question societal expectations and understandings often enough to question our existence within the larger public properly.

Philosopher Nancy Fraser noticed the people who do question these thoughts, however. She noted that a critical element was left out of public discourse as it was understood as a "single, comprehensive, overarching public."[51] There was no room for members of subordinated groups in this definition. Those whom Fraser calls subaltern counterpublics are forced to create their own publics. Fraser clearly defines these subaltern counterpublics as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs." [52] These spaces exist to incorporate the personal and impersonal and have to be considerate of their discourse and its implications. This is unnecessary for a dominant public; they can take it for granted with a sense of normalcy.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, an Indian scholar and literary critic, explains why the subaltern often feel like they are not being heard or are even being muted in their article *Can the Subaltern Speak?* [53] They speak regarding the influence of capitalism on the public and how it promises equality yet never delivers. The capitalistic society reinforces the fear-mongering tactics of the dominant public as it exists within the United States. Capitalism has an almost debilitating influence on artists. So many artists do not get the opportunity to create because they cannot afford to live on the income it generates if any at all. Spivak believes class has a significant influence on the power of your voice. The higher your class, the louder your voice.

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[51] Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*, no. 25/26 (1990): 62.
[52] Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*, no. 25/26 (1990): 67.
[53] Gayatri Spivak. *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*. Columbia University Press, 2010. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/morr14384.

Therefore, the individuals living in these manufactured neighborhoods had practically nonexistent voices.

Judy Baca took risks and put herself on the line to ensure that her voice was heard. And while it took a long time, it eventually led to the voices of so many other individuals finally being considered. The subaltern is fighting to be heard in a counterpublic space, let alone a public. Without these counterpublics, the subaltern would have no voice at all. Without creating our faction within the larger manufactured ones from the people in power, there is no sense of involvement, fulfillment, or community.

Baca draws her understanding of *a* public and *a* counterpublic from her experience growing up in the central metropolitan area of Los Angeles. She grew up in a small neighborhood called Watts, specifically near 85th and Central.[54] Watts is a mixed black and brown community in Southern Los Angeles. Most famously, it is the location of the Watts Riots in 1965. A young black man, Marquette Frye, was pulled over for drunken driving, and officers attempting to arrest him struck him repeatedly with a baton while a crowd of citizens watched. This led to civil unrest that was the worst seen until the Rodney King riots just a few decades later. Thirty-four deaths were caused, and over forty million dollars was spent on property damage after 14,000 members of the California Army National Guard were called in. [55] This violence was commonplace for the citizens of Watts and something Baca herself would have witnessed during her time growing up there.

After her mother married, Baca moved to the city of Pacoima in Northern Los Angeles. Pacoima was the only place where people of color could purchase land in the San Fernando

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[54] Oral history interview with Judith Baca, 1986, August 5-6. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
[55] Watts Rebellion (Los Angeles), June 5, 2018, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/watts-rebellion-los-angeles.

Valley of California for a long time. Because of this, it is considered one of the largest black and brown communities in Los Angeles. Baca speaks about her time living there, saying,

> I discovered that the reason our neighborhood was as it was and filled with these people who were mostly Mexican people and mostly black people -- black people lived just a few streets down across the tracks -- was because it was designated and designed by the city planners to be an area for workers of the Lockheed Aircraft industry. It was absolutely programmed, written in... You can find it on the books in writing. And I always wondered why across the Laurel Canyon it was all white and, you know, had a whole different look, you know. But it was obviously planned.[56]

Baca's stepfather worked for Lockheed Aircraft and was able to purchase the home they lived in because of that job. City planners had designated an area for the low-income people working in this factory to live to contain them. It was guided as a convenient opportunity, but it was all a more extensive form of gentrification and racism. This community was manufactured to house low-income families, most of which happened to be families whose members were people of color. In this case, the city planners determined a subaltern counterpublic and designed for it to exist outside of the realm that they lived within.

Judy Baca is an excellent example of someone who grew up only existing in a specific, manufactured public. Despite this, she circumvented the traditions and became an institutional artist and educator. The University of California, Los Angeles, is a prestigious university that is not easy to break into, and it is undoubtedly a counterpublic to Watts and Pacoima. The art that Baca creates is inspired by existing in these public spaces that many members outside of it do not socially accept. When speaking of her own art, she commented,

> I think it's been affected, and it's been sort of changed and molded by the situations within which I've worked and also by a sort of basic philosophical idea, which has to do with the integration of that public art into the environment that it is set [within--Ed.]. And

[56] Oral history interview with Judith Baca, 1986, August 5-6. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

> when I talk about environment, I use that term really loosely because I think about the environment including the social situation as well as the physical situation.[57]

Baca acknowledges that her art exists within a particular realm and is appreciated by a specific group. She understands, and that is why she continues working in these spaces despite having the access she does now as a leading educator and artist. She is giving agency to these spaces, something they would typically not have.

Baca created a community among these mural makers and students who bonded over the project and its creation. *The Great Wall* project has its own community and its own public surrounding it. I would argue that this project would be considered a counterpublic in the art world. It breaks free of the expectation that art exists within four white walls. The mural is outside, adorning a drainage canal that is necessary for the city's infrastructure. And yet, the mural is art, nonetheless. Representing marginalized histories creates a dialogue that would not have been started otherwise. She works directly with other artists to invent this space for her community and the public. Judy Baca is not allowing the dominant public's expectations to mute her. She does not stay quiet nor allow its reception to determine the content. Baca wants this project to create the discourse that is a crucial component for a public. It fulfills all the critical elements of the public as previously defined by Warner. This public is self-organized; it is a relation among strangers, it is constituted through attention, and it is the social space surrounding the discourse.

[57] Oral history interview with Judith Baca, 1986, August 5-6. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The Artist as Activist

American artist and educator Suzanne Lacy illustrates how artists can embody multiple identities in their practice. She designed a diagram, recreated below, that shows a continuum of positions public artists can encompass.[58]

PRIVATE			PUBLIC
artist as experiencer	artist as reporter	artist as analyst	artist as activist

Following this diagram, Baca, creating art as an activist, would fall entirely in the public category on the spectrum. She is an artist who is working as an activist within her work. Oxford English Dictionary defines an activist as "a person who campaigns to bring about political or social change."[59] Not only is Baca herself acting as an activist, but the organization she co-founded, SPARC, cites activism as a primary goal of their organization. Using this definition by Lacy, Baca and her work fall squarely within the boundaries of public art.

Lacy brings forth a few ways to understand a public space. According to her, a public space may be imagined as (1) a dead or neutral zone, (2) a site of agonistic conflict from which citizen identities emerge and as a protected safety zone sheltering individual rights, or (3) as an endangered commons needed for survival in a world of cultural difference and a fluid medium of exchange, in which cultural identities meet, are exchanged, and receive recognition.[60] Lacy uses these guidelines as a background for looking at the transformative function of public art. She also acknowledges the influence access and ownership have on the formation of these public spaces

[58] Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain New Genre Public Art* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1996), 174.
[59] Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "activist (adj. & n.)," July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4881040328.
[60] Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain New Genre Public Art* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1996) 177-80.

and how they can inform the images produced within them. The Tujunga Wash, the site for Baca's grand oeuvre, is owned by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works. The larger institution of the city still owns the land. Still, the mural's content is copyrighted by Baca and SPARC—this collaborative effort between the two works to bridge the gap and create a dialogue between them.

Public artists are no longer responsible for creating art that adorns a public space. Contemporary society expects more from these artists. These artists do not simply create a piece for presentation; instead, they construct *a* public of their own. The expectations of public artists shifted around the time that Lacy was writing. This dialogue would spark a participatory audience and, therefore, create a community that shares the ideals the art was trying to convey. They encourage citizens to explore the relationship between art and democracy.

According to Lacy, public artists are also agents. They are engaged in democratic processes that inform the work they create, are active participants in communities, and are informed about the problematic larger institutions that heavily influence the lives of those that do not exist within their demographic. Baca writes,

> We can evaluate ourselves by the processes with which we choose to make art, not simply by the art objects we create. Focusing on the object devoid of the creative process used to achieve it has bankrupted Eurocentric modernist and postmodernist traditions. Art processes, just as art objects, may be culturally specific, and with no single aesthetic, a diverse society will generate very different forms of public art.[61]

She is looking to the larger creation process rather than the physical act. Artists do not exist in a vacuum; they have influences from those who may have come before them, from their environment and experiences. The political narratives of the Mexican Muralists and the historical

[61] Judith Baca, "Whose Monument Where? Public Art in a Many-Cultured Society," in *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1996), 138.

narratives of the Philadelphia muralists are excellent examples outside of Baca to reinforce these claims made by Lacy. The public artist has always had another responsibility compared to the gallery artist.

Public Art and its Reception

Ingrained in public art is the issue of its reception. In a diverse society, art cannot appeal to every individual. Art attracts attention; it is inherent to its design. Varied opinions surrounding public art are inevitable and can only be controlled so much by the artist. The negative feedback that Baca and *Las Nuevas Vistas* received after the creation of *Mi Abuelita* and *Medusa's Head* helped shape her process and fundamentally changed how she created the public works that would follow these first two examples.

Baca encountered another problem while creating *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*. The content representing oppressed groups is essential and beneficial to forming a well-rounded public society; however, it can also create social divisiveness. Philosopher David Fisher says,

> The problem is that the funding of community-based art simply gives voice to diverse subcultures and inhibits the development of a united, strong, and widely shared common culture. Further, funding for "community-based" art inhibits the educational, transformative, culturally cohesive potential of "great" art. The promotion and dissemination of community art encourages disdain among the urban "masses" for "great" art.[62]

Public art sustains a sense of self and a sense of community. However, if the viewer is receptive to recognizing a sense of self they do not necessarily belong to, the public art that acknowledges this needs to be better received. While *The Great Wall* recognizes *a* marginalized public, it could be perceived as muting *the* dominant public. No singular view of public space and the art that

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[62] David H. Fisher. "PUBLIC ART AND PUBLIC SPACE." *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 79, no. 1/2 (1996): 42.

adorns it will work in a metropolis of perspectives. Each individual viewer will provide a different perspective. By working with the community and hosting public forums, Baca was working to ensure that her attempt to vocalize one group did impact the voice of another.

A public artwork can merely occupy a public space, or it can visualize the culture of a public space. However, public art will always modify the space in which it exists. It alters how that space is seen by the members of *the* public that surround it. The addition of public art fundamentally transforms the area. In Baca's case, the Tujunga Wash is dramatically different than before the addition of *The Great Wall.* This will also modify how the audience perceives the work. This influences both *the* public and the artist as a member of it. The artists are components of *the* public just as much as they are the creators of the public work.

The City of Los Angeles

Not only would Baca's *Great Wall of Los Angeles* be considered a representation of a counterpublic in the art world, but its location in Los Angeles is also one. Located in the San Fernando Valley, Van Nuys houses a dominant population of Hispanic people. According to the Los Angeles Times, 60.5% of its residents reported that they were Latinx. By comparison with the county as a whole, this is higher than the average of 49.1% of the Latinx population. Additionally, residents had a lower-than-average income and a higher average of citizens twenty-five and older without a high school diploma. 73.9% of the residents rent their home, and 21.3% are single parents. 49.8% of the residents are foreign-born.[63] The home of the longest mural in

[63] "Van Nuys," Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles Times), accessed May 2, 2023, https://maps.latimes.com/neighborhoods/neighborhood/van-nuys/index.html.

the United States is also the home of thousands of residents fighting for their voice in the dominant sphere. This subaltern space is trying to ensure its place in the larger public.

This breakdown is similar to the demographic breakdown during the construction of *The Great Wall.* Ricardo Romo wrote in The Western Historical Quarterly in 1982 that "Mexicans fit into the scheme of Western growth in a very important way." [64] He cites the September 1981 edition of *American Demography.* They found that the Spanish-origin population experienced an eighty-six percent growth during the 1970s. This compares to a twenty-two percent increase in the north-central region—additionally, a thirty-seven percent increase in the northwest. The majority of this population is Mexican. Therefore, the Mexican population in the West grew four times more than other regions in the United States. During this time, roughly nine million Mexicans resided in the United States, and ninety percent lived in the sunbelt states in the South. Roughly three-quarters of this percentage live in California and Texas.

The City of Los Angeles has formed a variety of publics within its limits. Unlike most major metropolitan centers, Los Angeles is decentralized in its structure. There is no single urban center. Institutions typically centralized at the city's core are geographically dispersed. This design led to urban sprawl, which intensified the creation of segregated neighborhoods and increased gentrification. These neighborhoods were created long before the metropolis expanded into its contemporary state. Displacement, restrictions, and segregation contributed to this design long before the city expanded to its current size. In a blatant use of state power to displace communities of color, Los Angeles used eminent domain and funds from the Federal Housing Act of 1949 to acquire land owned mainly by Chicanx individuals in the Chavez Ravine. The city used California's redevelopment law to justify removing the people who called this place

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[64] Ricardo Romo. "The Unfinished Story: Chicanos in the West." *The Western Historical Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1982): 299.

home.[65] As a California native, Baca knew how the city had worked against her community and her public. She said,

> One of the most catastrophic consequences of an endless real estate boom was the concreting of the entire Los Angeles River, on which the city was founded. The river, as the earth's arteries—thus atrophied and hardened—created a giant scar across the land which served to further divide an already divided city. It is this metaphor that inspired my own half-mile-long mural on the history of ethnic peoples painted in the Los Angeles river conduit. Just as young Chicanos tattoo battle scars on their bodies, the *Great Wall of Los Angeles* is a tattoo on a scar where the river once ran. In it reappear the disappeared stories of ethnic populations that make up the labor force which built our city, state, and nation.[66]

The marginalization of communities of color is not only happening at a societal level but at an institutional level, as well. *The Great Wall* reclaims the concrete infrastructure designed to divide neighborhoods and disenfranchise these communities.

The *barrios* and neighborhoods of Los Angeles are full of individuals who are muted and disenfranchised by the supposed public that is designed to take care of them. The capitalistic society reinforces the fear-mongering tactics of the dominant public as it exists within the United States. Capitalism has an almost debilitating influence on artists. So many artists do not get the opportunity to create because they cannot afford to live on the income it generates if any at all. The higher your class, the louder your voice. Therefore, the individuals residing in these manufactured neighborhoods had practically nonexistent voices.

Judy Baca took risks and put herself on the line to ensure her voice was heard. And while it took a long time, it eventually led to the voices of so many other individuals finally being

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[65] Melany De La Cruz-Viesca, Paul M. Ong, Andre Comandon, William A. Darity Jr., and Darrick Hamilton. "Fifty Years After the Kerner Commission Report: Place, Housing, and Racial Wealth Inequality in Los Angeles." *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 4, no. 6 (2018): 164–69. https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2018.4.6.08.

[66] Judith Baca, "Whose Monument Where? Public Art in a Many-Cultured Society," in *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1996), 133.

considered. The subaltern is fighting to be heard in a counterpublic space, let alone *the* public. Without these counterpublics, the subaltern would have no voice at all. Without the creation of *a* public within the larger manufactured ones from the people in power, there is no sense of involvement, no sense of fulfillment, and no sense of community.

Judy Baca uses her ability to break through these barriers to highlight the voices that are being muted. She works directly with communities that would not have the opportunity to create institutional-level art and give them this opportunity. The subject matter of her work is meant to give voice to the marginalized and to tell the stories that have been hidden. She saw blank walls and decided to work with the community members to adorn them. She chose people to help her who would have never been chosen otherwise. Gang members, young students of color, and disenfranchised artists who embodied the 'starving artist' trope all had newfound opportunities to break down the walls that trapped them inside their counterpublic. She gives them agency to determine their public and find their community within the other members working on these projects. *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* and its success bridges the gap between the public and the counterpublic. It works to ensure that the voices of the marginalized are finally heard.

VI: Conclusion

Baca refers to *The Great Wall* as a work in progress because vocalizing the marginalized remains a work in progress. In the United States, we are still minimizing the experiences of people of color; we are still muting their voices in the grand scheme of *the* public. While these communities have formed versions of *a* public, they still do not have as much of a voice in *the* public as the dominant members. Years' worth of content remains to be added to the wall's narrative, and this number grows with each passing year. Numerous events have changed the trajectory of history since the last panel was completed. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the subsequent Iraq War, a global pandemic, and, most recently, the overturn of Roe v. Wade are all events that have happened since the turn of the century. Notably for California, the boom of Silicon Valley, the mass destruction from forest fires in the 2020s, and the formation of the #MeToo Movement surrounding the Hollywood elite have all occurred since the last panel was created. These events have influenced not only *the* public but every public.

Regarding the Tujunga Wash, Judy Baca and SPARC are working with wHY Architecture to design a solar-lit "Green Bridge" that will replace the former bridge over the mural to connect the land on either side. The new bridge will function as a means to cross the flood channel and view *The Great Wall* from a different perspective. The bridge will be partially made from debris from the Los Angeles River. Interpretative panels are being added along the bridge and the banks of the mural. These panels increase accessibility for other marginalized communities and continue to spread the message within *The Great Wall*. These additions, paired with the relatively self-explanatory historical imagery, will make the mural even more accessible

to the larger public. The bridge will serve as an instructional and informational site about the city of Los Angeles and the diverse groups of people who contributed to its creation.[67]

From October 23, 2023, to June 2, 2024, the Resnick Pavilion at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) holds Baca's studio. For the first time in her practice, she works within the museum space for the exhibition *Painting in the River of Angels: Judy Baca and The Great Wall.* She and artists from SPARC are painting two sections of the expansion project for *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* within the gallery. The exhibition presents murals from the Chicano Movement and the Watts Renaissance as a backdrop, highlighting Baca's inspirations and her contemporaries. Additionally, archival materials that have never been exhibited reveal Baca's processes.[68]

Baca is changing the process for creating and designing this next mural section. However, one element remains the same: the involvement of the community. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art is world-renowned and brings in a much broader and different audience for creating these following panels. LACMA's programming brings in educators, visitors, and artists alike and draws attention to the mural in its home city. This attention brings individuals to the site and allows them to interact with the content that Baca designed over six decades ago. Historically, muralists who have already established themselves have successfully collaborated with museums. *Los Tres Grandes* are an excellent example of such.

Rising threats of climate change and unpredictable weather suggest the future of *The Great Wall* and its location may be more ephemeral than initially designed. An increase in the frequency of rainfall in Los Angeles County poses a risk to the mural due to its location in the

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[67] "Announcing the Continuation of The Great Wall Monument," SOCIAL AND PUBLIC ART RESOURCE CENTER, February 9, 2021, https://sparcinla.org/.
[68] "Painting in the River of Angels: Judy Baca and the Great Wall," LACMA, 2023, https://www.lacma.org/art/exhibition/painting-river-angels-judy-baca-and-great-wall-0.

flood control channel. The last two rain seasons in Los Angeles, August 2022 through April 2023 and August 2023 through April 2024, were the wettest two consecutive rain seasons since 1879.[69] If this trend continues, the location of *The Great Wall* may become too detrimental for it to remain there.

Baca's work as an activist, artist, and educator has had a profound impact on the fields of public art, muralism, and art history. Her work has helped provide a voice for many marginalized communities in California and the United States. *The Great Wall* helps to deconstruct dominant historical narratives. Her ability to use art as a tool for change continues to inspire young activists, artists, and educators like she once was. Baca challenged the parameters surrounding muralism and American art. Art historian John-Michael Warner writes that Chicanx artists construct the legacy of their practice "by embodying it, constructing a visual vocabulary that is not static but changing, fluid, and productive." [70] Baca's ability to pivot her practice as necessary, as evidenced by the change in method of creating *The Great Wall* following the first summer, reinforces her ability to make a legacy surrounding *The Great Wall*, but also a legacy surrounding herself.

By representing diverse, underrepresented communities within the ongoing history of California, Baca countered the erasure of a distinct ethnic presence. She countered the whitewashed vision of the state perpetuated by institutions. She navigated the treacherous waters of angering the community while working with them. Baca highlighted the tension in visualizing inclusivity and the contradictory nature of telling history. *The Great Wall*'s ability to make the

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[69] "Season Rainfall (Precipitation) 2023-2024," Current Season Rainfall Totals for Los Angeles, California, accessed April 16, 2024, https://www.laalmanac.com/weather/we13a.php#:~:text=With%20a%20cumulative%20total%20of,with%20a%20combined%2054.12%20inches.

[70] John-Michael H Warner, "Traces: Land Use and Representation in Arizona, U.S.A and Sonora, Mexico Border Arts," *Interventions*, Borders and the Global Contemporary, 2, no. 1 (January 2013).

viewer question history and its creation process establishes itself as more than just a mural of Californian history. Baca wanted the wall to encourage viewers to utilize history to their advantage and work not to make the same mistakes that were once made. By showcasing the state's history, she urged viewers to recognize this past and ensure that it informs the present.

Baca discovered how to establish and build her own public space while working on this project; without public input, she would not have been able to complete it. Baca's art empowers participants to address race, class, and gender from their experiences. The mural extends beyond the wall of the flood control channel. Like *Mi Abuelita* and *Medusa's Head*, the mural envelops the viewer. It compels them to interact directly with the many surrounding communities. By breaking outside the gallery's walls and into *a* public space, Baca is actively dismantling the idea that art only has value if it exists within the white cube. *The Great Wall* is a living and breathing educational and cultural site. Visualizing the complex and contradictory history it provides is always a work in progress, just like the histories it represents.

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Figures

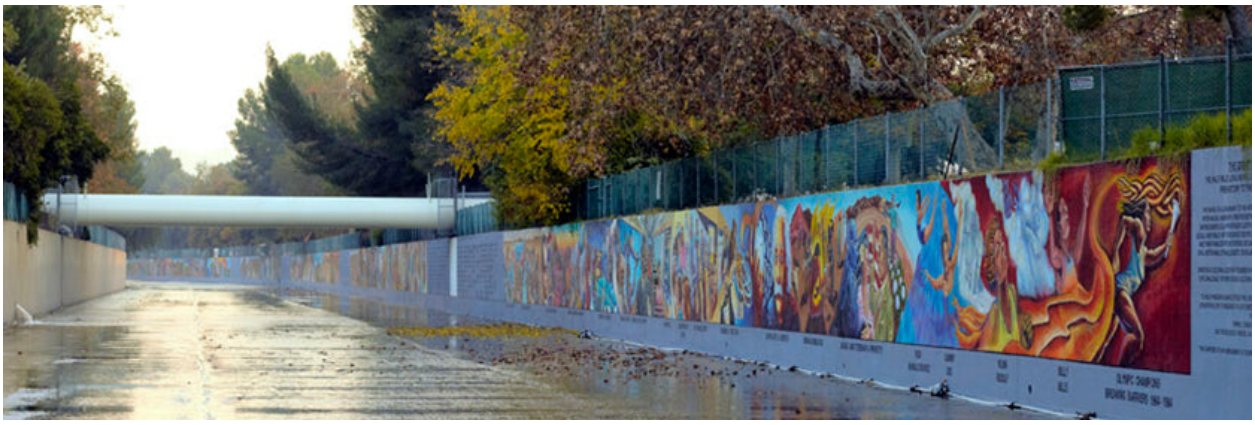

Figure 1. *The Great Wall of Los Angeles,* Judy Baca, 1974-1983, Van Nuys, California.

Figure 2. *Dr. Charles Drew, The Great Wall of Los Angeles,* Judy Baca, 1974-1983, Van Nuys, California.

Figure 3. *Division of the Barrios & Chavez Ravine, The Great Wall of Los Angeles,* Judy Baca, 1974-1983, Van Nuys, California.

Figure 4. Credit panel - Summer of 1978, *The Great Wall of Los Angeles,* 1974-1983, Van Nuys, California.

Figure 5. *Atentado a Las Maestras Rurales,* Aurora Reyes Flores, 1936, Centro Escolar Revolución, Mexico City, Mexico.

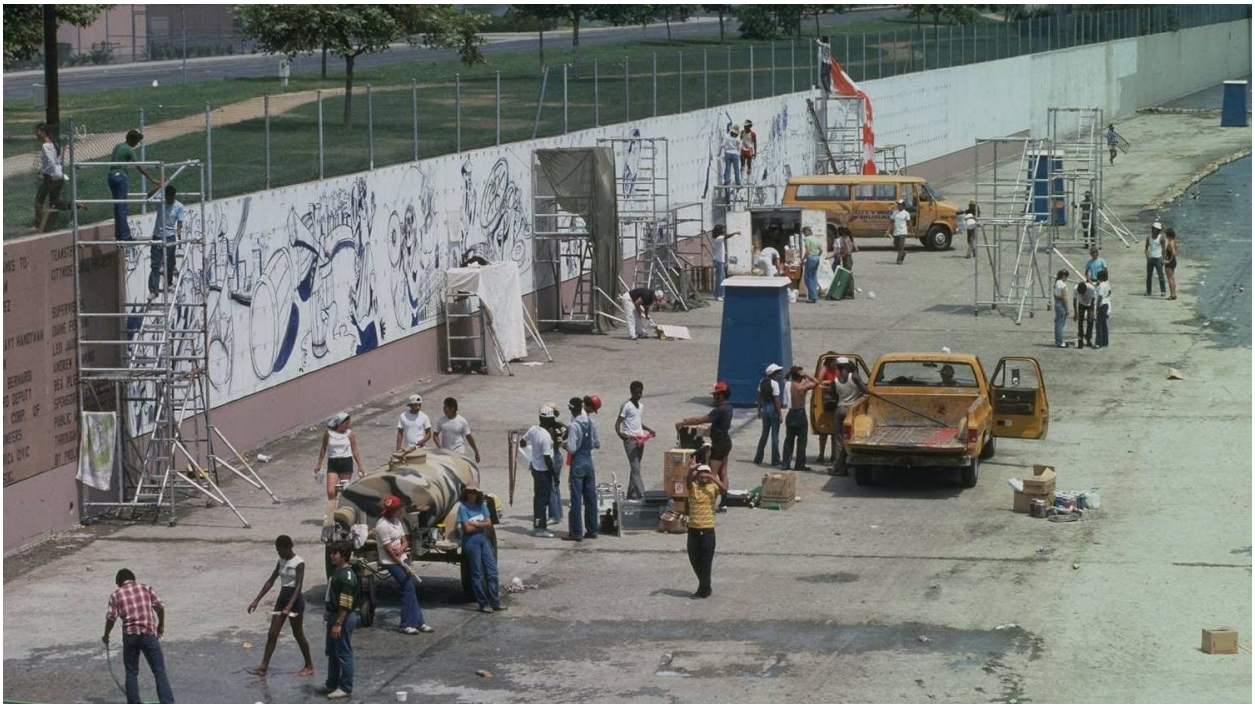

Figure 6. Construction overview, *The Great Wall of Los Angeles,* 1974-1983, Van Nuys, California.

Figure 7. *Mi Abuelita,* Judy Baca and *Las Nuevas Vistas*, 1970, Logan Heights, California.

Figure 8. In progress image, *Mi Abuelita,* Judy Baca and *Las Nuevas Vistas*, 1970, Logan Heights, California.

Figure 9. *Medusa's Head*, Judy Baca and *Las Nuevas Vistas,* 1973, Logan Heights, California.

Figure 10. In progress image, *Medusa's Head,* Judy Baca and *Las Nuevas Vistas,* 1973, Logan Heights, California.

Figure 11. Detail, Judy Baca, *The Great Wall of Los Angeles,* 1974-1983, Van Nuys, California.

Figure 12. *Indigenous Perspective, The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, Judy Baca, 1974-1983, Van Nuys, California.

Figure 13. *Founders of Los Angeles 1781 – Mulatto & Mestizo Descent, The Great Wall of Los Angeles,* Judy Baca, 1974-1983, Van Nuys, California.

Figure 14. *California Gold Rush, The Great Wall of Los Angeles,* Judy Baca, 1974-1983, Van Nuys, California.

Figure 15. *Chinese Build the Railroad, The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, Judy Baca, 1974-1983, Van Nuys, California.

Figure 16. *Red Car, The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, Judy Baca, 1974-1983, Van Nuys, California.

Figure 17. *Women in the War Industry, The Great Wall of Los Angeles,* Judy Baca, 1974-1983, Van Nuys, California.

Figure 18. *Tomas Alva Edison, The Great Wall of Los Angeles,* Judy Baca, 1974-1983, Van Nuys, California.

Figure 19. *Labor Strikes, The Great Wall of Los Angeles,* Judy Baca, 1974-1983, Van Nuys, California.

Figure 20. *David Gonzales – Pacoima, CA, The Great Wall of Los Angeles,* Judy Baca, 1974-1983, Van Nuys, California.

Figure 21. *Baby Boom, The Great Wall of Los Angeles,* Judy Baca, 1974-1983, Van Nuys, California.

Figure 22. *Division of the Barrios & Chavez Ravine, The Great Wall of Los Angeles,* Judy Baca, 1974-1983, Van Nuys, California.

Figure 23. *Indian Assimilation, The Great Wall of Los Angeles,* Judy Baca, 1974-1983, Van Nuys, California.

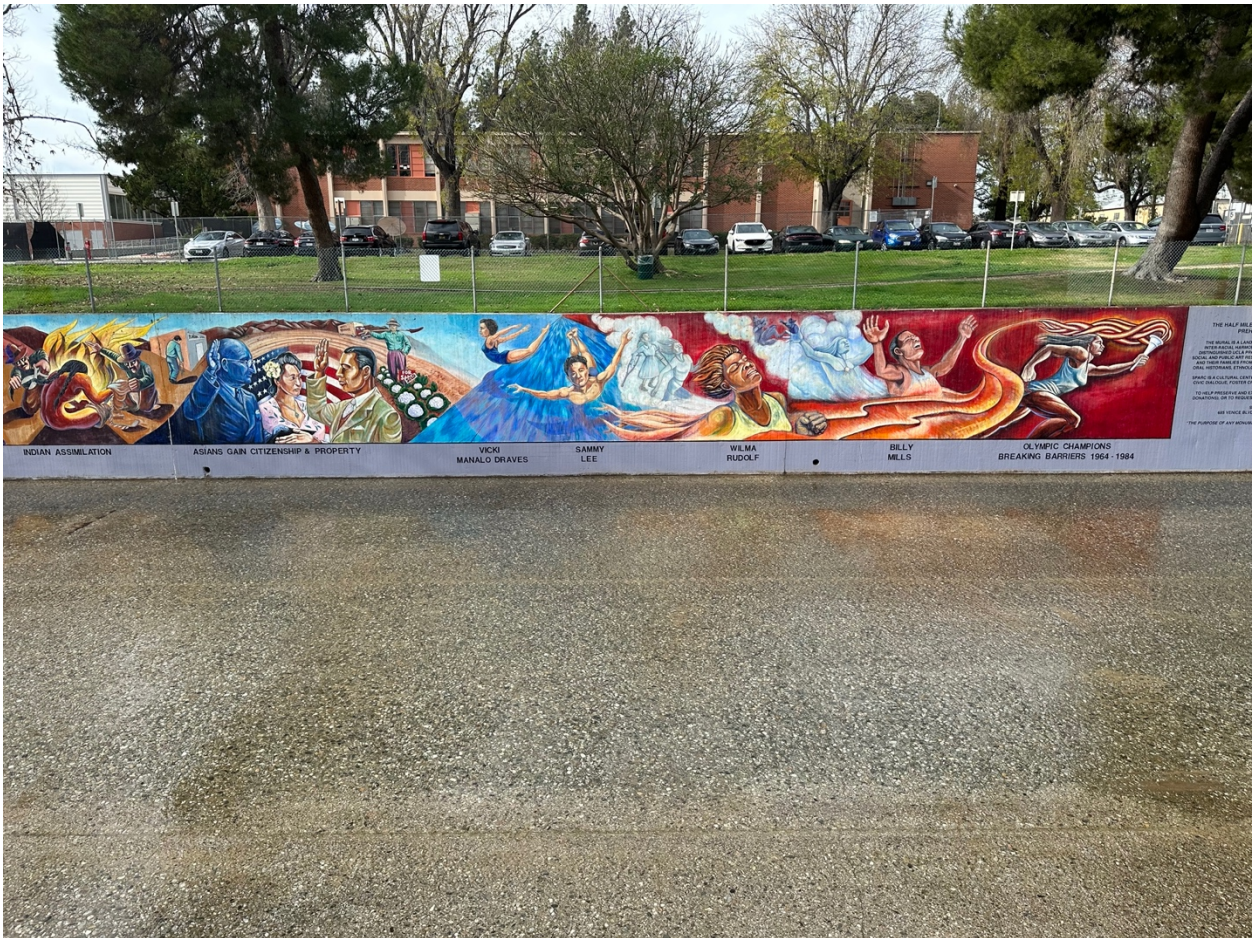

Figure 24. *Olympic Champions – Breaking Barriers 1964-1984, The Great Wall of Los Angeles,* Judy Baca, 1974-1983, Van Nuys, California.