

¡Murales Rebeldes!

L.A. Chicana/o Murals under Siege



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Perspectives

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We began developing *¡Murales Rebeldes!* as an exhibition about Chicana/o murals that had been censored, perhaps as a result of their content and/or their reception by the public. We wanted to find out why so many Chicana/o murals had ceased to exist over the past few decades. Given these wall paintings' inherently contested nature, we assumed that most had been censored and eventually destroyed as a result. What we encountered in the course of our research, however, was far more complex. While many murals had been deliberately destroyed or whitewashed due to their supposedly subversive or threatening content, many had been made to disappear in less conspicuous ways. A narrative of overt censorship did not tell the full story of these murals, nor did it give us full insight into the life and work of muralists who had to contend with the destruction, ill treatment, and rejection of their work.

Expanding our thinking about murals involved examining them from multiple viewpoints, including those of the artists who created them, the communities for which they were intended, and the organizations that commissioned, regulated, championed, and/or challenged them. We also broadened our scope for interpreting murals, drawing upon methods from the fields of history, political science, and art history, among others. By considering these varied viewpoints, we achieved a better understanding of the murals and how best to tell their stories.

Each of us has brought diverse experiences and perspectives to the project. Erin M. Curtis is a history curator who holds a Ph.D. in American Studies; she has focused her research and exhibitions on the cultural history of Los Angeles, from food and popular culture to refugee and economic policy. Jessica Hough works as a contemporary art curator with a focus on collaborating with living artists, involving them with exhibitions and the documentation of their own art history. As an art historian with a specialty in modern and contemporary Chicana/o and Latin American art, Guisela Latorre offers a deep knowledge of Chicana/o mural history. 2

¡Murales Rebeldes! has tapped our expertise and combined backgrounds in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of contested murals. What follows are our individual perspectives on bringing *¡Murales Rebeldes!* into focus and sharing this important project with the public.

Contested Histories

Erin M. Curtis

Who has the right to tell history? Who has the right to occupy public space? As a historian of Los Angeles, a city with a contested past and a series of ongoing struggles over space and place, I am deeply interested in these questions and how they have manifested themselves continually throughout the city's history. As a curator of history exhibitions, I strive to examine these issues in ways that are both accessible and meaningful to the public.

Chicana/o muralists have long explored similar questions. While developing the *¡Murales Rebeldes!* exhibition and book, I became fascinated by the ways in which murals articulate alternative histories that have been otherwise excluded from dominant narratives, and the public contexts in which these critiques have occurred.

Muralists have asserted Chicana/o identity in the streets, giving visibility to longstanding struggles over police brutality, educational inequality, inferior working conditions, and unequal access to public institutions. At the same time, they have portrayed the past with Chicanas/os and other historically marginalized peoples at its center, boldly establishing a figurative precedent for their claim to physical spaces throughout the city. For example, Judithe Hernández placed Mexican farmworkers prominently among city landmarks in her depiction of Los Angeles for *Recuerdos de Ayer, Sueños de Mañana* (1981), while Alma López's digital mural *Las Four* (1997) created a visual link between celebrated women such as Dolores Huerta and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and the young Chicanas living in the Estrada Courts housing project in East Los Angeles. Through our research, I have come to see murals as metaphorical extensions of Chicana/o communities and even Chicana/o bodies, bearing witness to lived histories in public places. It is important that we remain mindful of the power that these visions and representations have for artists and communities.

As a result, I believe we can—and must—compare the dismissive, fearful, angry, and even violent reactions against Chicana/o murals documented in these pages with historic patterns of violence against brown bodies. In the attempted censorship of Barbara Carrasco's *L.A. History: A Mexican Perspective* (1981), the sudden destruction of East Los Streetscapers' *Filling Up on Ancient Energies* (1979), the policing of Willie Herrón's *The Wall That Cracked Open* (1972), or the ongoing neglect of Ernesto de la Loza's body of mural art, we can find parallels to the unconstitutional deportation of as many as one million people of Mexican descent (1929–39), the Sleepy Lagoon trial and the Zoot Suit Riots (1942–43), the Bloody Christmas incident (1951), and the forced displacement of the communities of Chavez Ravine (c. 1951–59). With the recent rise of activism aimed at ending unfair policing and mass incarceration of Latinas/os throughout the United States, new skirmishes over gentrification and the right to affordable housing in Los Angeles, and the reactionary election of a president who campaigned on direct insults and threats to Mexicans and Mexican Americans, it has become increasingly important to remain mindful of the connections between the suppression of Chicana/o art and Chicana/o people.

I kept these ideas in mind while working on *¡Murales Rebeldes!* alongside an art curator and an art historian. The project challenged us to merge historical and art historical inquiry as we pieced together the stories of contested murals. I realized that art history, while crucial for understanding murals within broader contexts of artistic practices and iconographies, cannot alone suffice for interpreting Chicana/o

murals. Chicana/o muralism is, purposefully and distinctively, a social and historical as well as artistic practice. Historical inquiry offers us a deeper understanding of the stories that Chicana/o muralists tell, allows us to situate their work within the times, places, and communities that were crucial to their creation, and helps us connect the mural stories to broader historical patterns. Of course, the distinctions between 4

these two disciplines aren't so stark: art history takes social and historic influences into account, while history can incorporate aesthetic concerns. Ultimately, they are inseparable when it comes to understanding Chicana/o murals and the people they represent, and together they can illuminate important connections and reveal new answers to questions about access to history and public space.

If These Walls Could Talk

Jessica Hough

I knew there would be challenges from the start. How would we represent these large-scale works of art in the gallery space and in this book? What chance would we have of “resurrecting” these murals in any way to really appreciate them as they were? But what I did not anticipate was the extent of investigative reporting required to tell the stories of these murals. Initially, we began working with photography of the artists’ original murals, preparatory sketches, and other artwork from the same period but soon realized that this was not nearly enough. Research into the critical nature of this material unfolds the contexts, conditions, and controversies about murals that viewers looking at photographs or even visiting them in situ are unlikely to uncover. It is not just the historical context broadly, but the particulars of each mural—its own story—that are essential to understanding.

Photography of Chicana/o murals has been considered crucial as a means of documentation. As Colin Gunckel writes in his illuminating article “The Chicano/a Photographic: Art as Social Practice in the Chicano Movement” (*American Quarterly* 67, no. 2 [2015]), “One of the only ways in which the ephemeral and social dimensions of muralism can be apprehended in retrospect is through photography, whether these be images of the mural’s creation or those that situate the finished product within its spatial context.” But we must also look beyond photography to fill in the gaps of understanding. Press coverage, community response, 5 documents related to the commission, oral histories, and whatever else might be available will help us to better situate the mural as an event in time and space.

An example is Roberto Chavez’s *The Path to Knowledge and the False University* at East Los Angeles College (ELAC), where he was the founding chair of the Mexican Studies (later re-named Chicano Studies) department. Though stylistically it shares very little in common with more iconic Chicana/o murals, a look at Chavez’s earlier art helps us understand the European influences on his work. Even more critical are articles from ELAC’s campus newspaper, which provide evidence of the factions within the Chicano community at the time, the disappointment that the mural did not use more obvious Chicana/o iconography, and the growing rift between ELAC faculty and administration, all of which ultimately led to the mural’s whitewashing.

Unlike most other works of art, murals are acted upon by outside forces from inception, often even before anyone puts brush to wall. In the case of Barbara Carrasco’s *LA History: A Mexican Perspective*,

the artist was pressured by the Community Redevelopment Agency to edit out of her composition certain factual incidents in Los Angeles's history prior to beginning her work. More often, it is the forces of nature or of vandals that act on murals, visibly altering them over a relatively short period of time. Unlike the aging of a painting in a museum collection or the slow yellowing of a work on paper, a mural are generally ages in noticeable in ways that we can observe with the naked eye.

To fully grasp the story of a mural, it is important to consider the changes it endures during its planning stages, its production, and for the duration of its existence. I would argue that a mural is not only art as social practice but also, to some degree, a time-based medium. It is not finished on the day the paint dries but evolves in ways that often are not in the artist's control and that she/he accepts and sometimes might even cultivate. This is especially true with many Chicana/o murals. In *The Wall That Cracked Open*, Willie Hérron incorporated graffiti already on the wall and left room for more, positioning his mural as a space where the disenfranchised young people in his neighborhood could leave their marks, and allowing for a constantly evolving work of art. 6

What we know about Chicana/o murals that is different from most contemporary art we see in museums is their function in the community. In other words, the art was not made for art's sake alone, but was intended to demonstrate something or teach something, or to be part of a potent experience of collaboration within its community. With that in mind, we must, in part, evaluate a mural's success by its concept, the maker's intent, and the impact it had, or still has, on the community.

I believe Chicana/o murals have been misunderstood or misevaluated by those outside their communities. A visual evaluation of the mural itself, the quality of the painting, or photographs of the mural are not enough to understand the complete work of art. For someone who was not there to witness the mural's execution or its role in situ over time, understanding the mural requires information that has not been easily accessible and has not been considered relevant by art historians in the past. I have come to appreciate this deeply while working on this project.

Many Chicana/o murals, though conceived, designed, and planned by professional artists, were executed by amateur artists from the community. In some cases, the enormous scale of the mural required collaboration. But more often the idea was to involve others in the mural-making process. The concept of the individual artist working alone or keeping complete control was anathema to the Chicano Movement. "It was like Tom Sawyer's fence," said Sergio O'Cadiz about the experience of working on his Fountain Valley mural. "I would put the paint out there and kids came running."

In cases where it is clear that amateurs did the painting, it is especially important to recognize that the work is much more than paint on the wall. Preparatory drawings ground our understanding of the painting's concept and the artist's vision of how it will look. The final execution is a community effort and is changed and altered by those collaborators. To fully evaluate a collaboratively made Chicana/o mural, proposals, concept art, drawings, and related work are essential to comprehending the work and weaving it into the history of art. 7

The history of Chicana/o murals is not easily told, but digging into their individual stories helps us to contemplate the complex conditions of their genesis and demise. It also helps us to connect with the experiences of censorship, protest, power, and privilege that cross cultural boundaries and generations of artists. These human experiences borne from living in our complex, and so often flawed world, are universal.

Inclusion/Exclusion

By Guisela Latorre

Working on *¡Murales Rebeldes!* allowed me to address a lingering thought that plagued me near the completion of my book *Walls of Empowerment: Chicana/o Indigenist Murals of California*. In the book's epilogue I took notice of unsurmountable challenges that Chicana/o muralists were up against at the close of the twentieth century. I observed that the country's conservative backlash had led to a decrease in mural commissions and a lack of funds for conservation.

At the time, in 2005, I was not fully aware of just how systematic and widespread the destruction and disappearance of Chicana/o murals in Los Angeles would become. I was nevertheless reminded that this was an arts movement that had emerged out of the sheer will and determination of its artists and of communities with little or no resources. I knew that Chicana/o artists would find ways to transform their praxis but did not have the chance to follow up on their efforts or responses.

¡Murales Rebeldes! has given me the opportunity revisit my work in California and explore how these artists are finding creative and resourceful ways to resist and combat the damage done to their artwork. Their stories are not necessarily ones of triumph over adversity, for most of the murals featured in *¡Murales Rebeldes!* are no longer in our midst, but they are ones that speak eloquently of Chicana/o artists' conviction to preserve the city's mural legacy, one that honors Los Angeles's most marginalized populations.

It was indeed Chicana/o artists' individual responses to their circumstances of erasure that inspired us to make the deliberate and calculated decision to focus *¡Murales Rebeldes!* on individual mural histories. I had been long committed to giving artists a voice in my research by carrying out interviews and oral histories and interspersing those accounts into my academic arguments. I also understood the importance of individual narratives within the larger scope of arts and activist movements. Moreover, I was patently aware that their voices were silenced on various levels in our society. Our emphasis on individual mural stories worked to highlight the muralists' unique perspectives.

In working with the muralists to construct their stories, however, I discovered their inherently contradictory position. Their work had made critical contributions to Chicana/o mural history, ones recognized by countless scholars and students of Chicana/o art, yet their creations in the public sphere often were met with rejection and disregard from local authorities. Their individual experiences as Chicana/o artists were unique but they were also broadly symptomatic of how public expressions by people of color are deemed inadequate at best and threatening at worse.

This inclusion/exclusion dynamic operates transnationally when it comes to muralism and street art. My work on *¡Murales Rebeldes!* coincided with another complex and simultaneous project, namely the writing of my second book on community muralism. This new project explored the post-dictatorship mural and graffiti movement in my native Chile, whose sixteen-year dictatorship placed strict controls on the activities and movements of people in public spaces. The murals created by artists and activists on Chile's political left were systematically erased and whitewashed, signaling that city streets were no longer spaces of inclusion. The advent of democracy in the 1990s, however, freed those spaces for the creation of grassroots- and community-driven public art.

These “twin” projects, one in California and the other in Chile, gave me an appreciation of their 9 affinities and differences. As I write this text during the fall of 2016, Chile is undergoing a tremendous moment in the history of public art. Cities such as Santiago and Valparaiso are now sites of thousands of brightly colored walls, many of which espouse social justice, altruistic, and democratic ideals. The structures of power in these Chilean cities, unlike those in Los Angeles, do not at the moment target these works of art for destruction. Moreover, the laws pertaining to the creation of public and street art are ambiguous and not consistently enforced. In many ways, the mural scene in Santiago and Valparaiso now looks like that of Los Angeles during the 1970s, a time when Chicana/o muralists enjoyed greater freedom and less legal constraints. Nevertheless, the impetus to create spaces of inclusion through the use of the public mural is equally powerful in both locales, despite the desire on the part of power elites to silence, erase, and destroy those efforts.

The narratives in *¡Murales Rebeldes!* depict artists with strong social justice convictions who sought to give a voice and a history to aggrieved communities using the public mural as their tool. They did so with little to no resources and at times at their own personal risk. Because their work represents the collective consciousness of larger populations in the city of Los Angeles, their disappearance and neglect—abetted by structural systems of inequality, including institutionalized racism and class discrimination—signifies a symbolic silencing of Chicanas/os’ right to greater visibility and to shape the spaces where they live. Many of the narratives in this book are precisely about the loss of urban, cultural and social space. For me, making a community-driven mural is often about opening up a space for greater inclusion. The eradication of that same mural signifies, in my opinion, a retreat into exclusion

Foreword

Recapturing the Lost, Reigniting the Present, Remembering the Future

by Gustavo Arellano

I owe my nearly lifelong fascination with the endangered Chicana/o murals of Southern California to my 1980s childhood membership in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Okay, so I wasn’t the boozehound—it was my father. And I tagged along mostly so I could play whatever new arcade game the Alana Club in Anaheim had in its rec room. That’s where dozens of other Latino males and I gathered before our AA meeting in a tiny upstairs room, reciting AA’s 12 Steps, the Serenity Prayer, and hearing wrenching testimonials about the ravages of liquor for hours. But to get to those revivals, my father had to pass by a humongous mural at a nearby liquor store. It always caught my eye, and I tried to memorize it by heart because it haunted my dreams.

I had no idea of its history then, its significance; I just knew it was awesome. On a 100’ x 15’ wall that dwarfs me even in my adulthood stood a testament to Mexican pride—Aztec warriors, heroes of the Mexican revolution, *vatos locos*, and grimy working men like my dad. The colors were vibrant; the people depicted, proud. During late-night AA gatherings, I’d sneak out just to try and make out the

figures under halogen lights. I'd ask my immigrant *papi* about the mural's history, but he didn't know anything.

It wasn't until about fifteen years later as a cub reporter for the *OC Weekly* that I decided to stop again and really examine the mural. The years had taught me a couple of things: that it was painted by Emigdio Vasquez, a legendary local muralist who had painted the majority of other such Chicana/o murals I had seen across Orange County. That it was painted to commemorate a riot against police brutality that had happened in that neighborhood. That its name, *Memories of the Past and Images of the Present*, was an appropriately grandiose name for this masterpiece.

And that seemingly no one cared about the mural or its peers.

Vasquez' work sparked a love affair with Southern California's Chicana/o murals, defiant anomalies in a region that to this day still prefers sun-kissed fantasies over the realities of the barrios when it comes to art. And I was sad to see *Memories of the Past* dying in public. Decades of exposure to the elements had faded it away so much that paint chips gathered at the base of the wall. I did a story about Vasquez' endangered artwork and found the situation even more depressing: The city of Anaheim wouldn't fund a restoration, claiming a tight budget at a time where they were giving away hundreds of acres to private developers. Vasquez couldn't raise the funds on his own because political Chicana/o art had become passé by the twenty-first century. And so *Memories of the Past* had been left to rot, waiting for a savior that would probably never come. 2

The story sparked what has become a cause for me: identifying and fighting for the preservation of Orange County's Chicana/o murals in the best way I can—by writing about them. And it gives me great honor to join the regional struggle by penning this foreword to *¡Murales Rebeldes! L.A. Chicana/o Murals under Siege*. Not only is this book a much-needed examination of some of Southern California's most notorious case studies in artistic censorship, it's also an inspiring yet sobering reminder of the struggles we've faced and the *luchas* ahead for those of us who see SoCal Chicana/o murals as essential a part of the region's graphic identity as Google and Mission Revival.

Here, we have a veritable Dream Team of people for *la causa*: scholars, curators, artists, archivists, all united in their love for murals that some saw painted in real life, others fell in love with through living among them, and all fell under their hypnotic spell of activism and beauty. It's such a great book that there's an essay about a Chicana/o mural in Huntington Beach that I had never heard about—! *El mero mero de Orange County!*

This is no mere cataloguing of the past, a booklet to carry around as you enjoy the concurrent exhibit at LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes only to throw it away at the end. In the essays that follow you will get history, anger, prose. They call upon the works of Shifra Goldman, Rudy Acuña, and Carey McWilliams in depicting a Southern California far away from the booster vision, one eternally imperiled—and worth remembering.

These pages are mini-altars to works not seen for years, sometimes decades. *¡Murales Rebeldes!* represents not just individual artists tasked with provoking the public, but also a community and a time when art was acknowledged to be as important to *raza's* well-being as good jobs and a proper education. Paintings on walls might seem like frivolities in an era of overcrowding and wage depression,

but the stories retold for each mural prove otherwise. California's Chicana/o murals remain criminally unappreciated—but that wasn't always the case, and it doesn't have to remain so.

This is by no means a comprehensive look at all of Southern California's contested Chicana/o murals. I wish we could've included a deeper look at Vasquez, who spent the last years of his life fighting accusations by police officers and the Orange County District Attorney's office that one of his murals in his barrio in Orange glorified gang violence. And I've got to give a special shout-out to a mural painted in Old Town Placentia by members of Cal State Fullerton's MEChA chapter; the tones hadn't even set before a local business leader demand the large piece get whitewashed. What upset him so? The mural's content. What did it depict? Education, not incarceration. Stay classy, OC!

Vasquez' *Memories of the Past* still stands in disrepair, with only a tiny section of the mural restored in an unfortunate manner that recalls the Spanish *Ecce Homo* of recent notoriety. So view this tome as a primer, a *cri d'coeur*, a wake-up call, an essential piece of Southern California history, art history, Chicana/o history, ALL history. Read these essays, marvel at the photos, visit the sacred spaces where these epics once stood, check out my call to action at the end of this book. And never forget.

Gustavo Arellano is editor of *OC Weekly* and author of the syndicated column *¡Ask a Mexican!*

La Historia de Adentro/La Historia de Afuera, The History from Within/The History from Without

Yreina Cervántez and Alma López

526 Main Street, Huntington Beach

Painted 1995

Covered up 2009

“As muralists we are coming from the tradition of the school of Mexican mural painting, in which the function of murals as a public art form is rooted in the idea of reclaiming the purpose and identity of people.”

What is the best way to preserve local community histories? Chicana artists Yreina Cervántez and Alma López would probably point to murals. Indeed, we can regard such wall paintings as historical monuments as well as works of art. Many Chicana/o murals depict oft-ignored and overlooked histories of people of color. Thus, when these murals are destroyed, the histories embedded within them retreat back into obscurity.

Cervántez has dedicated much of her life's work to preserving community histories and collective memories through the creation of murals. “In light of the fact that Los Angeles is going through such a great transition in terms of all the gentrification,” Cervántez has commented, “the idea of historical memory and the memory of communities that have existed is Guisela Latorre

very important.”² The whitewashing of *La Historia de Adentro/La Historia de Afuera*, *The History from Within/The History from Without* (1995), a mural Yreina created in collaboration with López in Huntington Beach, made two realities very clear to her: first, that local arts professionals did not see her work as worthy of protection and second, that public images of people of color were not a priority when it came to preserving Huntington Beach’s historical heritage.

The artists painted *La Historia de Adentro/La Historia de Afuera* as part of the Huntington Beach Art Center’s (HBAC) inaugural exhibition under the directorship of Naida Oslone.³ The mural depicted the history of Huntington Beach through the eyes of the city’s ethnic minorities, deploying the imagery of water and waves as a unifying visual element. The mural’s dynamic and rhythmic composition was meant to reflect the pulsating movements of sea and ocean life. As Cervántez would later remark, “We looked at different cultural representations of water, and we designed the waves to connect everything [in the mural].”⁴

Cervántez and López also used live models to fashion many of the figures on the mural, engaging in painstaking preparation before painting. It was their hope that the mural’s imagery would give visibility to those communities and initiate productive dialogues across race. “We did our homework,” Cervántez remarked. “We did a lot of research for that mural because it was an important topic.”⁵ But these live models were not mere props for the artists; these were Guisela Latorre

living and breathing residents of Huntington Beach and Orange County who had shaped the local history in transformative ways. The artists spent countless hours with them, establishing relationships of trust before depicting them in the mural.

Martha and Raymond Furuta, members of a leading Japanese American family, were featured prominently in the mural’s composition. Immigrants from Japan, the Furutas arrived at northern California’s Angel Island in 1912 and settled in Huntington Beach. Like other Japanese Americans, they experienced the xenophobic sentiments of other Californians who “believed that Japanese immigration posed a threat to white Americans.”⁶ With the outbreak of World War II and the attack on Pearl Harbor, anti-Japanese sentiment intensified.⁷ Shortly thereafter President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which gave the U.S. military the right to create restricted areas, banning anyone believed to be disloyal and antipatriotic. Detentions and evacuations of Japanese-descent populations were swift and comprehensive, relocating entire families to internment camps.⁸ Many Japanese Americans from Orange County were incarcerated in the Poston Internment Camp (Arizona,) including Charles Mitsuji Furuta.⁹

Another renowned Orange County family featured in this mural, the Mendezes, were at the center of the landmark court case *Mendez v. Westminster*, which desegregated public schools in California in 1947, eight years before *Brown v. the Board of Education* did the same for the entire nation. When Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez’ children were turned away from their Guisela Latorre “whites only” local public school, they and four other Mexican American families took their case to the U.S. District Court in Los Angeles. Cervántez and López’ recognition of this family preceded more public recognitions. In 2007 the U.S. Post Office issued a stamp in honor of *Mendez v. Westminster* and in 2011 Sylvia was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom at the White House.¹⁰

Understanding the singular experiences of the Furutas, the Mendezes, and other people of color depicted in *La Historia de Adentro/La Historia de Afuera* was key for Cervántez and López; it required

them to think critically about how history is written and who is left out of these narratives. The mural's title was inspired by the writings of Mexican anthropologist Miguel León Portilla and French philosopher Michel Foucault. Portilla argued that a community's cultural identity can dissolve without the preservation of its history, while Foucault maintained that those who have power determine what is historical truth in our society.¹¹ Cervántez and López thus wanted to show the hidden histories that are not always seen, in particular those that feature people of color within a predominantly white urban area of greater Los Angeles.

The importance of painting a mural about people of color represented a significant intervention into the local culture of Huntington Beach. The city's written histories often highlight and celebrate the contributions and accomplishments of Euro-American families such as the Slaters, the Prestons, the Morses, and others who became wealthy ranchers, developers, and business Guisela Latorre people.¹² Many of these histories also recount how twentieth-century local officials turned their attention to developing the city's leisure and tourist industries. By the latter decades of the century, Huntington Beach had fully embraced the moniker "Surf City USA," which was trademarked in 2005. While many local histories recognize that it was Native Hawaiian swimmer Duke Paoa Kahinu Mokoe Hulikohola Kahanamoku who first introduced surfing to the city in 1924,¹³ most overlook surfing's origins in Polynesian cultures prior to European contact. Needless to say, Cervántez and López's vision of Huntington Beach history and culture signified a radical shift from histories more familiar to the city's residents and visitors.

Given its distinct perspective on local history, *Historia de Adentro/Historia de Afuera* was poised to become a unique public monument in Huntington Beach, but a number of years after its creation the mural was vandalized with large graffiti letters that ruined its overall composition and aesthetics. In 2008 Kate Hoffman, the HBAC's executive director, contacted the artists with disturbing news from the building's new owner about the mural's future: "The owner has notified us that he needs to paint that wall to handle some building issues. In addition, the mural was recently damaged by graffiti that cannot be removed without destroying the mural."¹⁴ Even though Hoffman thanked Cervántez for "the beautiful work you did for us"¹⁵ and hinted at the possibility of a mural commission for the artist sometime in the future, she emphatically stated Guisela Latorre that "the owner now has the right to paint over the mural."¹⁶ After all, the artists had signed a contract with the HBAC assuring them that the mural would remain up only until 2000. It was now 2009. Cervántez was, nevertheless, disturbed by the news and requested a meeting with Hoffman and the owner to discuss the possibility of restoring the mural and cleaning up the graffiti. The artist proposed a modest budget of \$1,500 for the job. Though the HBAC seemed initially receptive to the idea, it later changed its mind upon seeing even more graffiti on the wall, thus concluding—without consulting Cervántez—that the mural could not be repaired and had to be removed to prevent it from becoming a "magnet for graffiti." Cervántez recalled these conversations with great frustration: "[I was told] that the mural was up longer than it was allowed to, and that I just needed to move on and let somebody else do something with that space."¹⁷

When it seemed clear to Cervántez that support from HBAC was no longer an option, she contacted numerous Chicana/o art scholars and community leaders to help her save the mural. Laura Pérez from the University of California, Berkeley wrote an impassioned plea to the HBAC stating that "to paint over a mural by Cervántez and López today is equivalent to painting over the work of Diego Rivera or David Alfaro Siqueiros, now recognized as world-class artists."¹⁸ Having worked with Cervántez in the past on numerous occasions, I too reached out to the HBAC, asking them to preserve the mural on both artistic

and historical grounds, likening its destruction to that of Siqueiros' *América Tropical* (1932) on Los Angeles' Olvera Street. While Pérez and I highlighted the cultural and artistic value of the mural, Executive Director of the Guisela Latorre

Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) Debra Padilla, who also lent her support to the artist, assured the HBAC that the restoration of the work was feasible:

. . . you happen to have a willing artist and I know Yreina has expressed an interest to get the paints and volunteers to repair/restore this important mural. If given the opportunity to bring the mural back to its original glory, perhaps taggers will see that the wall is cared for and won't tag again. And if it is tagged, then I'm sure Yreina would rally the troops to come out and fix it. . . . The fact that the mural has been tagged should not be the prime reason for its disappearance.¹⁹

In response to our attempts to save the mural, the HBAC argued that they were powerless to prevent the mural's destruction, repeatedly underscoring that the building's new owner was under no legal obligation to keep the mural and reminding us of the expiration date in the contract the artists had signed.

That the artists had signed this agreement with the HBAC and that the mural "survived" an additional nine years after the contract had expired might suggest that the work's destruction was fair and ethical. However, one must take into consideration that when Chicana/o community artists enter into contract negotiations with gallery directors, property owners, and other power brokers, the agreements reached are not between individuals on equal footing. In many cases, Chicanas/os' working-class backgrounds, coupled with a lack proper support for their work, gives them no real leverage during such negotiations. When thinking back to her experience with the Huntington Beach mural, Cervántez indicated that it "was the first time I had to sign a contract like that and at the time, quite frankly, Alma and I needed to take on a commission. We were looking for work [but] that was probably something I would never do Guisela Latorre again."²⁰ Nevertheless, had she not signed such a contract, would she and López have been allowed to paint the mural at all? When the artists entered into this agreement, were they consenting to the eventual destruction of their work?

Although the circumstances that led to the destruction of *La Historia de Adentro/La Historia de Afuera* were complex, it is relevant that this was a mural about the history of people of color painted by Chicana artists in a predominantly white area of Orange County. The mural's demise coincided with the city's centennial celebration, a time when Huntington Beach reflected on its own history and when the contributions of people of color were beginning to be incorporated into larger narratives. The HBAC itself celebrated a month of diversity that included films about farming communities of color, the Furutas, and the devastating effects of the Japanese internment camps on Japanese American communities.²¹ The Furutas would later be prominently featured in the PBS documentary series *Our American Family* (2013).

This recognition of the city's diverse history, however, was uneven and tenuous, as the story of Cervántez and López's mural indicates. The mural received little community support during its tenure in Huntington Beach. Very few local newspapers and media outlets actually covered the mural's presence when it was initially painted. Nor did the HBAC keep any records of the project. The mural's destruction received even less press coverage, especially if compared to the 2012 effacement of a McDonalds-themed mural also in Huntington Beach that was tagged Guisela Latorre up with large block letters

reading “VEGAN.”²² To put it bluntly, no one seemed to care about the destruction of La Historia de Adentro/La Historia de Afuera. Why the indifference? Did the local community truly value the artistic merits and historical imagery of the mural? Did it regard the people depicted in the mural as part of its own history? Could the mural have been saved if it had received more community support from its inception?

Including histories of people of color during a centennial celebration is one thing, but supporting a mural that showcases those histories in a more permanent and visible manner is another. The mural’s challenge to Huntington Beach’s predominantly white surf culture cannot be dismissed as a contributing factor to its destruction. It was not the case that the mural was viewed as too radical and thus in need of destruction, but rather that it most likely was not deemed sufficiently important and historically valuable to justify the funds and resources required for its protection. The “hidden histories” theme of La Historia de Adentro/La Historia de Afuera thus has taken on added meaning with the disappearance of its historical figures who were pushed into “hiding” behind the layers of white paint that now cover it.