

WHERE ART MEETS COMICS

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ARTnews



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The Next Generation

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Decoding Léger's Portraits



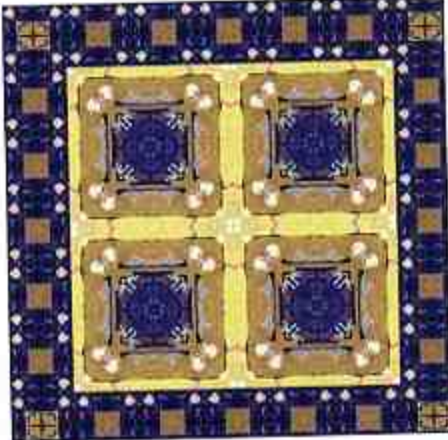


Intramural Activity

Starting in the 1960s, hundreds of bright, figurative paintings began materializing on the walls of commercial buildings and apartment complexes and underneath freeway overpasses around Los Angeles. The movement was led by Mexican American artists from the city's east side, many of whom were politically charged by the issues of the era: civil rights, the Vietnam War, police brutality. For decades, the conventional wisdom has been that the Chicano mural movement was didactic, meant to raise awareness of hot-button issues through Mexican nationalist imagery of Aztec warriors and sombrero-wearing revolutionaries.

That view, says artist **Sandra de la Loza**, is myopic. "There was a lot of really great fantasy landscape," she says. "There was the 1970s super-flat graphic style that was influenced by commercial art. There were countercultural elements." De la Loza would know: she has spent several years poring over a vast photographic archive of L.A. murals for her installation *Mural Remix*, opening at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art on October 15.

As an artist, de la Loza has long had a fascination with subjects that get glossed over in history books, such as female punk rockers in East L.A. For *Remix*, she pays homage to the Chicano mural movement while transforming it into something new. The multimedia installation will include video, photography, and



Mural in East Los Angeles (detail, far left), ca. 1975. Sandra de la Loza's *Mural Remix*; Unknown, *Believed to Be* by José A. Gallegos, 1975, Funded by Citywide Murals, 2010, Duratrans in a light box.

elaborately patterned light boxes that take their abstract designs from reconfigured bits of mural iconography. **Franklin Sirmans**, head of contemporary art at LACMA, says that de la Loza's project provides museumgoers with a nuanced way to consider a vital aspect of the city's art history. "This is not just an homage or another mural," he says. "She gives a format for us to see the mural within the context of something contemporary."

Ultimately, the research has provided de la Loza with a fresh perspective on the artistic form. "Muralism is often dismissed as agitprop art," the artist says. "I'm arguing that it was a response to the urban landscape." Many of the compositions featured pastoral scenes with mountains, horses, and wildflowers. Others reflected the era's psychedelic

consciousness. One of the more unusual pieces de la Loza uncovered was an image of a 1975 mural thought to be by **José A. Gallegos**. It shows a man lying in the desert. Below him is a lake that reflects a dreamlike alternate reality. "It totally reminds me of an acid trip," de la Loza says. "There were all kinds of psychedelic things that popped up in these murals."

As an increasing number of L.A.'s vintage Chicano murals are lost to redevelopment and whitewashing, the timing of de la Loza's project is poignant. "Literally, this history is being erased," she says. "There's a resurgence of interest in public practice, yet muralism is being written out of that inquiry." *Mural Remix* should help set the record straight.

—Carolina A. Miranda

Mural featuring Mexican imagery (detail, far right), ca. 1970s. De la Loza's *Mural Remix*; Unknown, Artist Unknown, ca. 1970s, 2010, Duratrans in a light box.

