

## AN EXPLOSION OF CHICANO CREATIVITY

As the artist of this mural, I would not only like to explain its content, but I would like to give you, the viewer, a little background on myself.

The roots of my heritage, those from which I draw my subject matter, are a mixture of Mexican Indian on my Fathers side, and Spanish and American Indian on my Mothers side. Our last name DeSiga is said to be of Portuguese origin.

A wealth of creativity comes from the stories of my Mothers childhood as she grew up in Oklahoma. The hardships endured by her Native American family, the romantic thoughts of a young Spaniard falling in love with my grandmother. Many stories are woven into the artwork.

My Mexican heritage is a strong influence on the person that I am today. My grandfather moved his family from Oklahoma to McAllen, Texas which is where my parents met. Before settling in the Pacific Northwest, my parents followed the vast stream of migrants who went from state to state following the seasonal crops.

My first experience with art was when as a child, I created wooden toys from a wood pile. The toys I created simulated the toys my parents could not afford to buy me. However, it was in the first grade that my creative skills were first noticed. I was the only migrant child in the school and as such, of lesser value to the teachers. We were asked to paint an event we had seen. After astonishing the entire school with my artwork, I was asked to do it over and over again. I had a photographic memory and to the teachers it was a game.

I had an illness as a child which kept me bedridden for what seemed like years. I was home schooled for three years and it was there that I felt my creativity and hand skills were sharpened.

In High School It was not expected that I would attend college. Consequently, I was not included when my schoolmates took the pre-college exams. The tide turned, however, when two recruiters from the University of Washington, Chicano Division, contacted me and provided me the opportunity to attend the University of Washington. It was there that my life as an artist began.

My first years in college were not only academic but I was also introduced to the Chicano Art Movement. It was because of my first mentor, Tomas Ybarra Fausto, that I became aware of the Chicano mural movement. It was then that I decided to follow in the steps of the great muralists of Mexico and document the struggles of the United Farm Workers.

In 1972, I learned of the takeover of an abandoned school on Beacon Hill led by a brilliant young warrior, Roberto Maestas. I decided to become a part of this historic event and I painted the mural on the first floor of what later became El Centro de la Raza. The mural was created to let Seattle know we were here and it gave me the opportunity to paint my first major piece of art.

The corner stone to the mural is the painted Chinese plaque over the doorway. It means Peace, Prosperity and Happiness. I painted it in honor of the Asian community that started Beacon Hill and surrounded it with many kinds of fruit to exemplify the many cultures reflected here at El Centro.

To the right is the subject matter I am most fond of; the Farm Worker. He plays an important part in the mural, as in all my art.

The man on the cross is crucified and bound to cross on one side by the rosary, "religion" and on the other side with a "field hoe", to symbolize the crosses one bears as a Farm Worker.

Music plays an important role in the lives and the livelihood of many people. The accordion represents Mexican conjunto music, an essential and traditional aspect of our culture.

The shoeshine boy represents child labor and the sad but necessary responsibilities children face as a result of poverty. The loss of childhood innocence through the harsh reality of poverty.

The Monster Machine represents the big \$\$\$ money \$\$\$ machine of agriculture that controls government and how it can run over and destroy the livelihood of the Farm Worker. The two Farm Worker logos represent protection from this impending doom.

The sunrise represents the beginning of a new day. As the Farm Worker lies on the cross he points to the glove on the ground, below the hoe. It represents "Basta", "Chale" with the oppression of this life and this work. At the top of the hoe a glove points up to the sky ... the new hope of that new day, and a new path to take is written in the clouds, "edúcate". Education, a way out.

The mountain skyline represents the Pacific Northwest and shows Mt. Rainier.

The hanging "ristras" red and green represent the Southwest and New Mexico. These were painted for my good friend, Roberto Maestas, founder and executive director of El Centro de la Raza.

The water and palm trees represent the island Latino people who live in the tropics, like Cuba and Puerto Rico.

The golden eagle worn as a headdress represents the strength and pride of Latina women.

The pregnant woman over the ocean represents the history of birth and its beginning. We are connected to the earth and water and we will all return there.

The pyramids underwater are a prediction that in the end all will be covered by water, as it was in the beginning.

The two faces have a very important meaning. The first time I painted this mural, in 1972, I painted male faces. After 25 years, upon my return to El Centro, I became aware that the female involvement is and always has been, central and critical. I equated this to the strength and importance of the woman in our family structures and in our culture and consequently changed the faces to female figures in honor of, and to commemorate this fact.

The faces also represent the Aztec, Mayan and other South American Gods.

The underwater life represents the ocean surrounding all continents and the important role they play in our entire livelihood.

I call this Mural, "An Explosion of Chicano Creativity". It represents all of us and is here to welcome everyone to El Centro de la Raza. I hope it brightens your day and comforts you if you need help or feel lost. El Centro de la Raza can help you start a new beginning and can help you, support you and encourage you to rise to all occasions.

The Artist,  
Daniel DeSiga