

# THE GREAT WALL OF LOS ANGELES AND THE INTERPRETIVE GREEN BRIDGE

## The Great Wall of Los Angeles and The Interpretive Green Bridge

Begun in 1976 and completed over five summers, the Great Wall employed over 400 youths and their families from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds to work with artists, oral historians, ethnologists, scholars, and hundreds of community members. “The Great Wall” is painted on a half-mile concrete-retaining section of the Tujunga Wash in the San Fernando Valley. This summer, SPARC will restore “The Great Wall of Los Angeles” mural, a half-mile long monument and landmark visually recording the varied ethnographic histories found in California ranging from prehistoric times to the 1950s. We will once again bring hundreds of community members together, including the original participants in the project, now adults with children of their own. In addition to restoring the mural SPARC will be constructing a new solar-lit “green” bridge with interpretive stations, as well as five stations along the wall providing additional context for the images on the wall.



*(above) A digital model of the Interpretive Green Bridge;  
(next page) The Great Wall of Los Angeles, full 1940s and 1950s murals.*

The Project was created and directed by California Chicana muralist Judy Baca, SPARC’s Founder/Artistic Director. Over the last thirty years, the mural has suffered extensive damage due to sun exposure and lack of restoration funds. The restoration plan includes reconsolidation and reattachment of loose paint, removal of surface oxidization for color revival, and the application of ultraviolet protective coatings that will extend the life of the mural for additional thirty-five or more years.









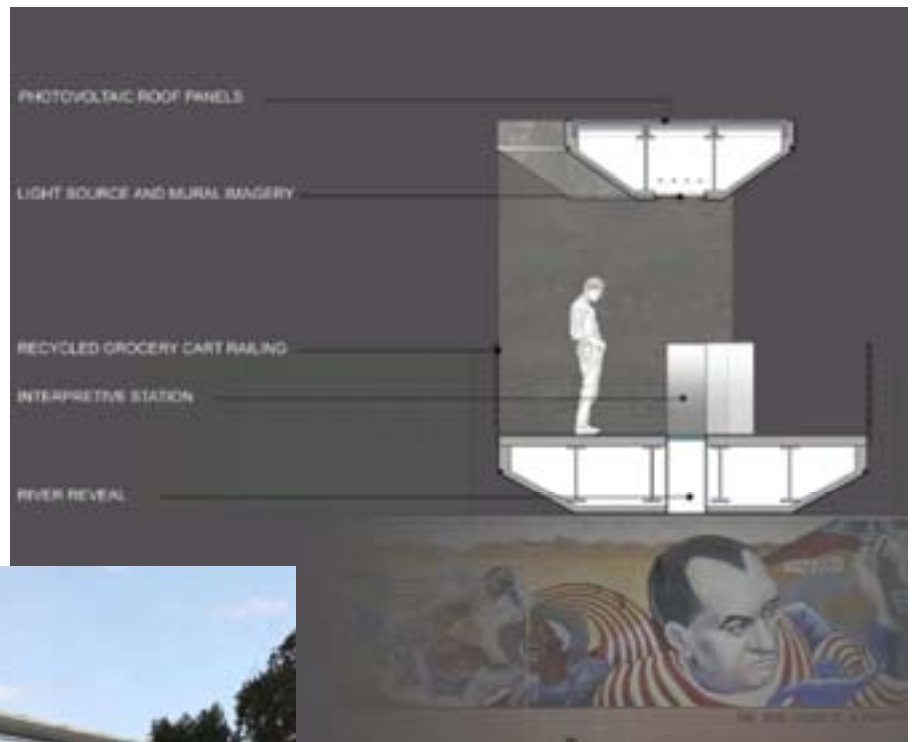
Aesthetic recovery also includes repainting the disappearing sections of the mural. A newly designed replacement bridge (the previous deteriorated wooden was recently removed) will become a central public entrance and interpretive center about the mural and river. It will be outfitted with solar lighting panels and will provide an excellent viewing platform for the mural. Judy Baca and SPARC have collaborated with WHY Architects to complete the designs for a “Green Bridge” which will be solar lit and composed in part from the debris of the Los Angeles River with interpretive panels along the expanse of the Bridge from which the public can view the River and the half mile of mural along its banks.

A site plan, elevations for the bridge, materials, budget, schedule of construction have been completed for the bridge. A full model has been built of the bridge and has been reviewed by County, and City department representatives. The new Valley College Bridge will replace the former bridge which crossed the Tujunga Wash Flood Control Channel between Miranda Street and Hatteras Street on the west side of Coldwater Canyon Blvd. The new bridge will function not only as a point to cross the Tujunga wash but also as a viewing station and interpretive center to view the Great Wall of Los Angeles mural and the Los Angeles River.

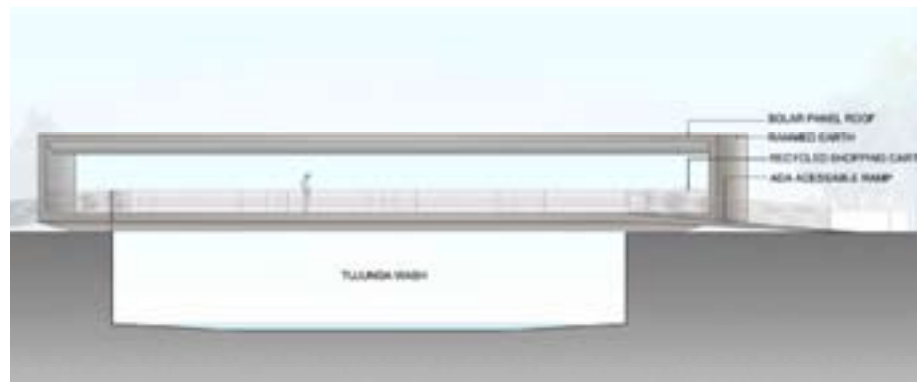
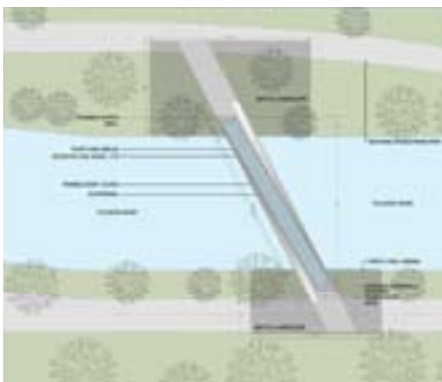


(above)  
1950s section of the Great Wall, detail;  
(below right)  
The former deteriorated wooden bridge is removed to make room for the Green Bridge.

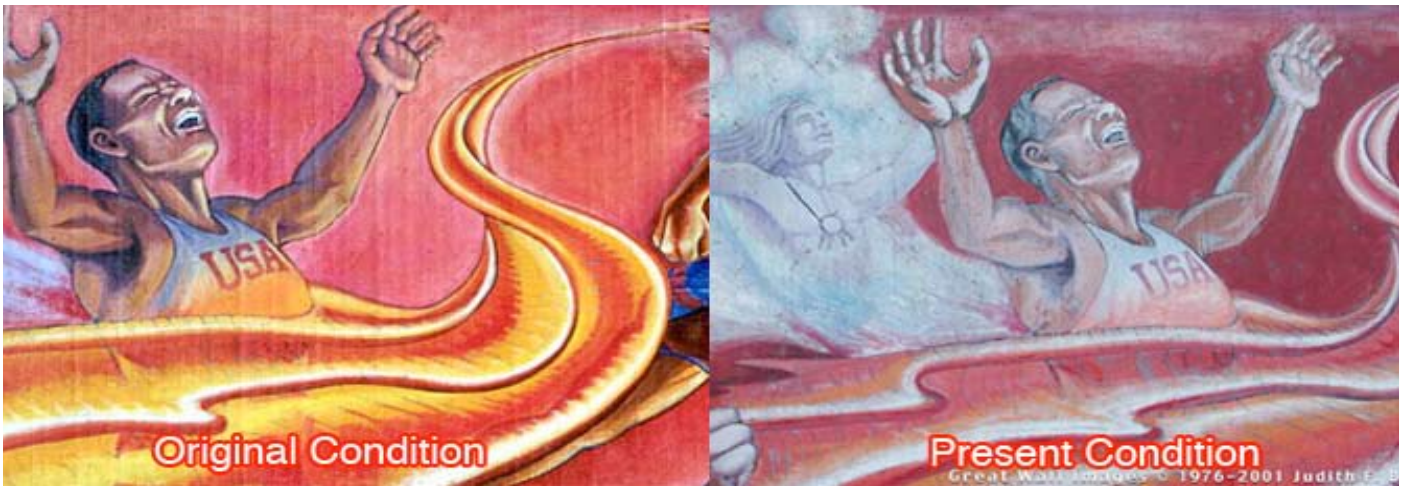
(top right)  
 Design for Interpretive Station;  
 (top left)  
 Digital Model of Green Bridge;  
 (below left)  
 Aerial view of Green Bridge design;  
 (below right)  
 Design for Green Bridge



The structure of the bridge will consist of prefabricated built-up plate steel girders, steel framing and new poured concrete footings. The finishing material will consist of prefabricated textured fiberglass concrete panels on the sides of the footbridge and canopy, and composite plastic impregnated wood decking on walkable surfaces. End panels will be troweled stone face plaster over steel framing with guardrails constructed of powder-coated steel for durability. The look will be one of layered sediment with broken glass, and other plastic debris common to the river. The roof of the canopy will consist of aluminum framed, clear glass panels with thin film photovoltaic strips. Photovoltaic cells will collect solar energy and distribute back to the department of water and power, monitored by PV meters. On the underside of the canopy will be a clear skylight finished with two layers of laminated polycarbonate panels with images of the River and the Great Wall silk screened on film and sandwiched between them. Light will filter through this skylight during the day illuminating the images. The total impact of the bridge will be that it will be an instructional site about the river and the history of the diverse people of Los Angeles while it reconnects the two sides of the channel.







## Great Wall Restoration

The Great Wall needs urgent restoration and has been funded by the California Cultural and Historical Endowment. The first sections of the Great Wall are now 30 years old and have been damaged by sun, the water of the flood control channel (it's been submerged many times), and park neglect. Additional chemical damage has occurred from broken sprinklers and lawn fertilizers. The good news is that it can be fixed and will last another 20-30 years if done properly. The California Cultural and Historical Endowment has designated funding for the Great Wall of Los Angeles' restoration efforts. Contracts are in process now and will be made available hopefully this year to completely recover the historic work over a three year period.



*Judy Baca and team work on restoring 1948-1964 mural panels.*



## Great Wall of Los Angeles Testimony - The Ernestine Jimenez Story

*(top) Ernestine as a teenager working on the Great Wall.  
(center, left to right) Age 16 with son Rudy; Age 41 with son Rudy.  
(bottom) Ernestine, age 14, pregnant with Rudy.*



Ernestine's story is a testament to the value of our work. As a pregnant fourteen-year-old, Ernestine desperately needed an outlet from her troubling environment; Judy Baca immediately knew that Ernestine could benefit from the experience of working with other young people and at the same time be part of a monumental cultural landmark. Ernestine spent four significant years on the project and at the end became a crew leader. She has shared the story many times of how Judy Baca and the Great Wall project helped change her life those many years ago.

### IN ERNESTINE'S OWN WORDS:

The way I grew up was, you know, you fight through life, you know, I got ten brothers and six sisters, and I'm the baby, and there was a fight in my house all the time. And that's the way I believed you were suppose to have grown up, to fight through life. Don't like nobody but your own race, and even sometimes don't even like your own race.

I wouldn't have went back to high school because I wouldn't have had a role model to push me to go there. Education was Judy's number one thing. As long as I stayed in school, "you can come back and paint the mural." Even though I got in trouble in school and fought and everything, that was my number one goal. I wanted to come back. I had to come back.

What really kind of freaked me out though was when I met the people that...when we painted the mural of the holocaust, and I met the people that had the tattoos on them, that kind of blew my mind. That actually made me cry because I knew there was another world that was harder than mine. And, I just really felt for it.

This mural opened my eyes so much. Even when I'm down and out, I still walk by here. And I thank god I did accomplish something in life. It makes me feel good. I think if it wasn't for this mural, for me to have my name on it and to have accomplished something, I don't know where I'd be.

Actual Testimony of Ernestine Jimenez Click: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rA2HdXugXi0>







*(top)*  
***Youths discussing the content of a Great Wall panel.***  
*(bottom, left to right)*  
***A young man explains the content of a Great Wall panel; Youths sand-bagging to divert water in the flood control channel.***

## **Great Wall of Los Angeles Youth Ambassador Program**

The core of the Re-educate/Re-Dedicate component of the 3-Phase Campaign is The Great Wall of Los Angeles Youth Ambassador Program, which involves young people citywide in a public awareness campaign about the ethnic histories of Los Angeles. Over four hundred youths from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds worked on the Great Wall of Los Angeles, working on everything from sand-bagging to divert water in the flood control channel to the creation of the mural's content. SPARC and Judith F. Baca are committed to approaching public awareness and conservation of the artwork in the same way. Traditional approaches to conservation would entail hiring a professional team of conservationists and treating the artwork as an object frozen in time. The Great Wall is a living monument in which an essential aspect will be young people once again participating and being trained in conservation techniques in the flood control channel and, most importantly, serving as youth ambassadors for the monument. SPARC is proposing the development of a Youth Ambassador Program to formalize the aspects of public education on the content of the Great Wall carried out in the past informally by youth participants in the schools and at the mural site.



*(top)*

*Youth mixing acrylic paint for restoration;*

*(middle)*

*Team building three-tier scaffolding system for restoration work;*

*(bottom)*

*Youth applying B72 acryloid to reconsolidate paint layers.*



## **Current Condition of the Great Wall**

As of right now, the first sections of the mural painted in subsequent summers are in need of repair. The original youths of the Great Wall have grown up and many are still present to speak about this life-transforming process.

These testimonies are greatly needed in our field as few examples exist that can provide such concrete validation of the power of art in community cultural development. The educational techniques have been repeated and codified in the citywide Neighborhood Pride program of SPARC, which replicated the intentions of the Great Wall to develop imagery through the creation of civic dialogue and democratic processes with participation of the public.

105 of these murals have been completed; this program also leaves behind a strong legacy of having worked with hundreds of youth who worked along side community and artists.

There remains an unfulfilled promise to all those who labored so long in the unbearable sun. The mural is not complete (it ends with the 1950s panels) and the historical sections must be preserved. The research, the analysis, the oral histories and testimonials, and the painting methodology: all must be preserved to maintain this national monument to interracial harmony. To accomplish this, SPARC has embarked on a 3-Phase Great Wall Campaign, namely, to Re-educate/Re-Dedicate, to Conserve/Preserve and to Continue/Complete.







**If I can come back next year I would come back right away. I have a lot of feelings that I can't explain on paper. All I can say is I wish everybody the best of luck in the future and I wish Judy all the success that she needs to continue.**

**Robert Martinez, age 18, Third summer on the project.**



**The Great Wall of Los Angeles Youth Ambassador Program will reach thousands of Los Angeles residents directly through the orientation and Presentation/Public Awareness phases. Through the production of an interactive web site inviting the public to participate in the designing of the next sections of the monument there is an even greater potential to reach larger numbers of youth.**

**Equally important is the development of youth leadership in the arts through the youth ownership of the Great Wall's history and legacy. The discussions that the Great Wall is designed to initiate will not only result in youth's reflection on the ethnic history of California, but will inspire an active engagement with the contemporary issues. This work is a living work still in process and interacting with the large audiences both virtually and at its exhibition site in the San Fernando Valley. Most importantly it lives in the hearts of the 400 youth who worked on this artwork beginning in 1976 summer after summer and remain its caretakers and vocal advocates for its conservation and continuation. The young voices of yesterday are a testimony to its impact and SPARC is committed to sharing their story with the youth of today, making this project not only an intergenerational model but one that continues to be centered on youth voice.**

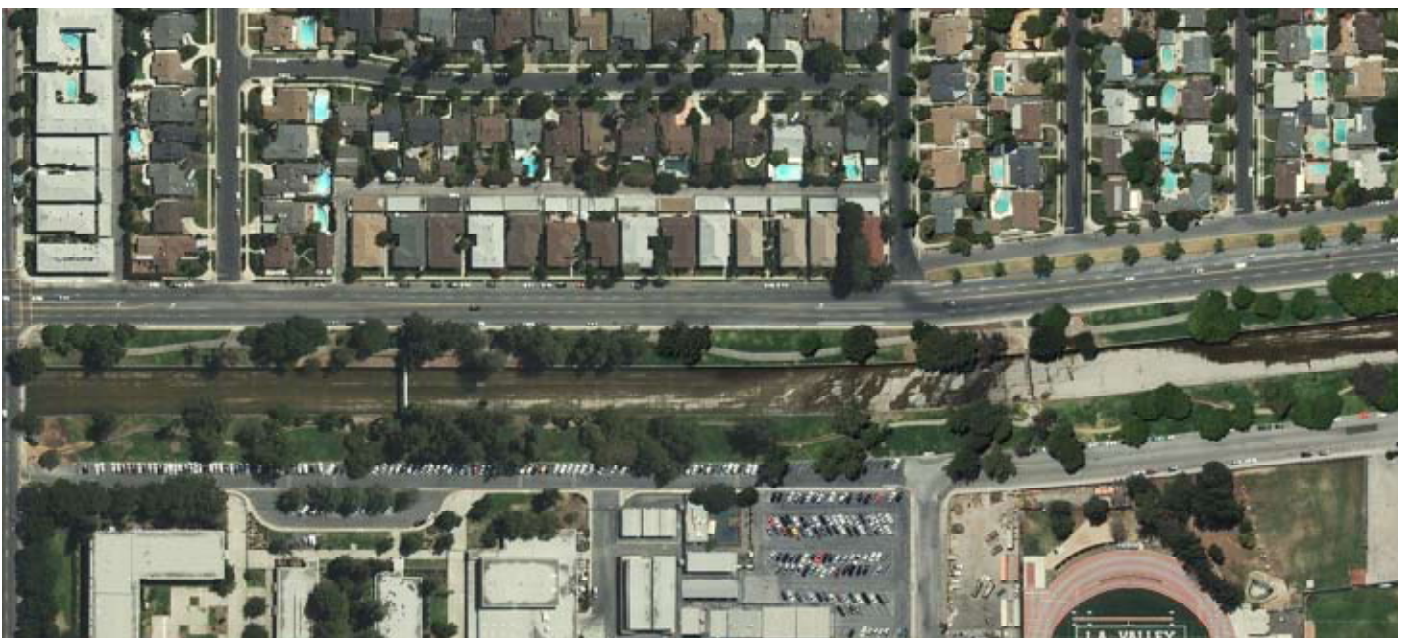
**(top)**  
**Young women relax while working on the Great Wall;**  
**(middle)**  
**A team of youths work on a panel of the Great Wall;**  
**(bottom)**  
**Judy Baca awards the Golden Paintbrush to a young man.**



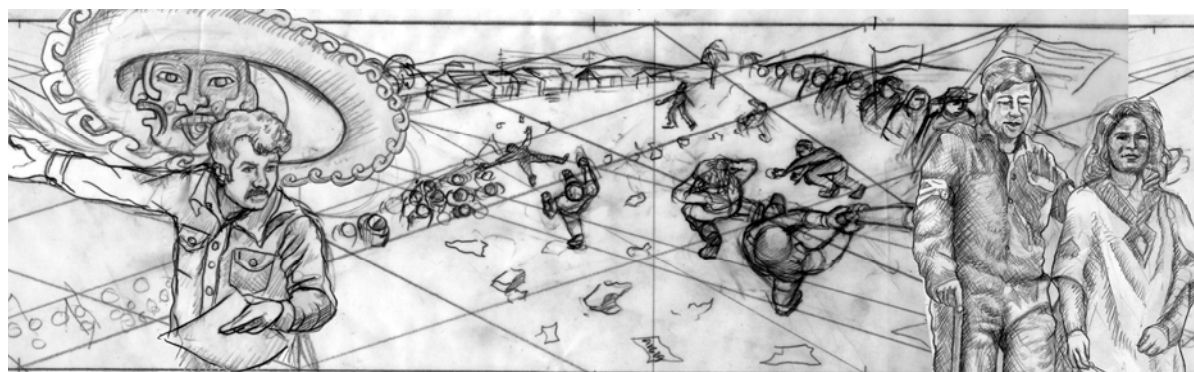
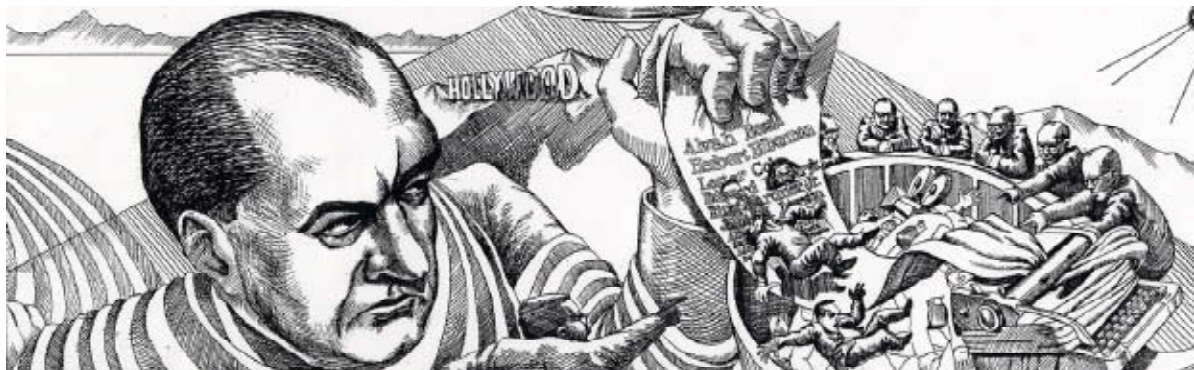


Initiated in the Fall of 2002 and completed in 2003 as a joint collaboration between the UCLA/SPARC Digital/Mural Lab and the UCLA Visualization portal, the Virtual Great Wall of Los Angeles 3-D model brings the signature work of Professor Baca and SPARC into the virtual world of real-time 3-D visualization. UCLA/SPARC Digital/Mural Lab staff worked with the staff of the UCLA Visualization Portal to model in 3-D the entire Great Wall of Los Angeles mural site and the surrounding city area. To accomplish this enormous task, satellite photos of the site were used along with blueprints to model the entire flood control channel to scale. Photos of the Great Wall taken from the SPARC MREC Archive were scanned and stitched together to texture the virtual wall of the channel and photos of the surrounding area were used to texture the rest of the model. The completed 3-D real time model is displayed in the UCLA Visualization portal, which boasts a 160 degree IMAX style screen where viewers can navigate through the virtual Great Wall in real-time, literally flying through the site to view the mural from perspectives not possible at the actual mural site. The virtual model will also be used to pre-visualize how the next four decades of the Great Wall of Los Angeles (currently in early design phases as part of the extension and continuation of the mural) will look before they are actually in situ.

*(above)*  
*Still from 3-D model of Great Wall using Visualization Portal;*  
*(below) Aerial photograph of Great Wall.*







*Sketches for the Great Wall of Los Angeles by Judith F. Baca*



*(above)*  
*Visitors walk along the Great Wall;*  
*(top right) Judy Baca working on the mural;*  
*(below, left to right)*  
*Priming the concrete with gesso; Sketching the*  
*design onto the wall using a grid; Painting large*  
*sections of color;*  
*Painting the final details.*



The Great Wall was already the longest mural in the world by the summer of 1976 when a team of eighty youths, ten artists, and five historians collaborated under the direction of Chicana artist Judith Francisco Baca to paint a thousand feet of California history from the days of dinosaurs to 1910 in the Tujungo Wash drainage canal in the San Fernando Valley. Baca, executive director of the Social and Public Art Resource Center in Venice, California, a history of large collaborative mural projects behind her, was not ready to stop at 1910. Mural Makers worked in the wash again in the summers of 1978, 1980, 1981 and 1983. Each year they added 350 feet and a decade of history seen from the viewpoint of various ethnic groups found in California, focusing on their contributions to society and struggles to overcome obstacles.

By 1980 the mural, dubbed "The Great Wall" in place of its official name, "The History of California," stretched more than a third of a mile and had consumed some 600 gallons of paint and 65,000 volunteer hours. With the completion of the decade of the Forties in September 1981, the total length reached 2,085 feet and the number of young people who had worked on the mural rose to 185. In the summer of 1983, a new segment was painted, depicting the decade of the 1950s. To date, the length of the Great Wall totals 2,754 feet, and over four hundred underprivileged youths have participated in its creation.

