



Judith F. Baca

Artist, Educator, Scholar/Activist and Community Arts Pioneer

“I really want to produce artwork that has meaning beyond simple decorative values. I want to use public space to create public voice, and consciousness about the presence of people who are often the majority of the population but who may not be represented in any visual way. By telling their stories we are giving voice to the voiceless and visualizing the whole of the American story.” **Judy Baca**

Baca is a native Angeleno, a visual artist, arts activist, community leader and educator. Baca is best known for her large-scale public organizing murals. Her art involves extensive community dialogues and participation. Baca founded the first City of Los Angeles mural program in 1974. In 1976 she founded the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) in Venice, California. SPARC is a socially relevant, activist minded and spirited organization, at the heart of what it believes is that art is a tool for social change and self-transformation. Baca’s true signature piece is *“The Great Wall of Los Angeles”*: As a site of public memory, the Great Wall is one of Los Angeles’ true cultural landmarks and one of the country’s most respected and largest monuments to inter-racial harmony produced with the participation with over 400 inner city youth, 40 ethnic historians and 100’s of community residents.

Baca and SPARC continue to work on The World Wall: A Vision of The Future Without Fear, which consists of eight 10ft x 30ft portable mural panels on canvas. This 240ft mural addresses contemporary issues of global importance: war, peace, cooperation, interdependence, and spiritual growth. As the World Wall tours the world, eight additional panels by artists from eight countries are added to complete this visual tribute to the “Global Village-An Arena for Dialogue.” To date Finland, Russia, Palestine/Israel, and Mexico panels have been added; Canada is currently being worked on.

To advance the field of muralism, in 1996 Baca created the UCLA/SPARC Cesar Chavez Digital/Mural Lab, a research, teaching and production facility based at SPARC. She serves as a full Professor in the UCLA Chicano/a Studies Department and World Arts and Cultures Department.

In 2010 she completed the Cesar Chavez Memorial at San Jose State University, and the Robert F. Kennedy monument at the Old Ambassador Hotel site, which is now the LAUSD K-12 RFK Community Schools. She is currently working on a digital painted mural for the Richmond Arts Center in Northern California and a interactive digital mural for the Miguel Contreras Learning Complex in downtown Los Angeles.

Nina Simons, Co-Founder and Co-President of Bioneers on Judy Baca

Baca is at the top of a distinguished list of artist creators. What sets her apart from many other artists is an inspired ability to teach and a creative pursuit of relevancy in developing educational and community based art methodologies. Through a lifetime of achievement, Baca has stood for art in service of equity for all people. She is a lesson for us on the integration of one's ethics with creative expression, never compromising and never flagging in her devotion to a practice that is committed to public education for all and to pedagogical process for its participants

Art and creative expression are at the heart of what makes us human. A social or political movement that isn't fueled by vibrant and deeply inspiring art and music has a hole in its soul and should probably not be trusted. As we learn to appreciate more keenly the key relationship of arts to social change, I hope we're coming to value our artists in a deeper way. As one activist in British Columbia told me: "It was more difficult for me to come out as an artist than as a lesbian!"

Around the world, artists are responding in abundantly creative ways to the calls of the Earth - and people - in trouble. In Queensland, an Australian Aboriginal artist named Dr. Pamela Croft makes Mud Maps, integrating the language of her indigenous art form with the tangible evidence of climate change to the creek nearby, where the altering tides create delicate patterns in the mud.

She does this to inspire people to act. She also makes this art to challenge non-Aboriginal people to come to an understanding of the world as her people see it - a people who are estimated to have inhabited that land for over 50,000 years.

Like these Mud Maps, Judy Baca's murals are as much about the process of how they're made as they are about the end result. Each artist begins from the awareness that the land has memory that must be expressed. Both create art that's shaped by an interactive relationship among history, people and place, that marks the dignity of hidden historical precedents, restores connections and stimulates new relationships into the future.

Judy Baca's murals focus on revealing and reconciling diverse peoples' struggles for their rights and affirm the connections of each community to that place. She gives form to monuments that rise up out of neighborhoods, rather than being imposed upon them. Together with the people who live there, they co-create monumental public art, places that become "sites of public memory."

Judy is a world-renowned painter and muralist, community arts pioneer, scholar and educator who has been teaching art in the UC system (including at UCLA) for over 20 years. She was the founder of the first City of Los Angeles Mural Program in 1974, which evolved into a community arts organization known as the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC). She continues to serve as its artistic director and focuses her creative energy in the Cesar Chavez Digital Mural Lab, employing digital technology to co-create collaborative mural designs.

Judy's public arts initiatives reflect the lives and concerns of populations that have been historically disenfranchised, including women, the working poor, youth, the elderly and immigrant communities. Throughout Los Angeles and increasingly in national and international venues, SPARC's projects have often been created in impoverished neighborhoods that have been revitalized and energized by the attention these murals have brought and the excitement they have generated. Underlying all of SPARC's activities is the profound conviction that the voices of disenfranchised communities need to be heard and that the preservation of a vital commons is critical to a healthy civil society.

Judy Baca's work channels the creative process of monumental mural design to develop models for the transformation of both physical and social environments in public spaces. And she does mean monumental, both in space and time: The Great Wall of Los Angeles is 'tattooed' along a flood control channel in the San Fernando Valley. It is currently the world's longest mural, at 2,400 feet long. The Great Wall depicts a multi-cultural history of California from pre-history through the 1950's. It was begun in 1976 and plans are underway for its next four decades of evolution.

Drawing from diverse traditions ranging from the great Mexican muralists such as Rivera and Siqueiros, to some of the WPA's public art initiatives of the 1930s to Joseph Beuys' experiments in "social sculpture," what Judy has initiated and nurtured in Los Angeles may represent the grandest, most ambitious and empowering, authentic people's art project in the U.S. in the last 60 years, and the most diverse one, ever.

Judy Baca is one of the most remarkable public artists for social transformation in modern American history. One of her most indelible quotes is: *Collaborative art brings a range of people into conversations about their visions for their neighborhoods and their nations. Finding a place for those ideas in monuments that are constructed of the soil and spirit of the people is the most challenging task for public artists in this time.*

To learn more about Judy and SPARC visit: www.sparcmurals.org

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