

## Judith Francisca Baca

Mexican-American public artist, activist, and educator, Judith Francisca Baca was born in Los Angeles on September 20, 1946. She received her Bachelors Degree in Art from California State University in 1969. She also completed an intensive course in Mural Techniques from the Taller Siqueiros in Cuernavaca, Mexico in 1977. And in 1979, Baca earned a Masters in Art Education from California State University.<sup>1</sup>

Baca is renown for her accomplishments in mural arts. She is revered for her unique arts pedagogy and image making methods that are community based. Some of Baca's best known projects include establishing the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, the *World Wall: A Vision of the Future Without Fear*, and the development of SPARC Digital Mural Lab at the University of California in Los Angeles.

Early in her career, Baca was hired by the Cultural Affairs Division of the City of Los Angeles to oversee many mural projects, and in 1975 she facilitated the first Citywide Mural Program.<sup>2</sup> From these beginnings evolved a community focused art organization in which Baca became Artistic Director.<sup>3</sup> She was co-founder of the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), along with Donna Dietch and Christina

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Baca, "Official University Curriculum Vitae 2012" *Judy Baca Artist*, accessed November 16, 2014,

[http://www.judybaca.com/now/images/stories/JudyBaca\\_CompleteCV2012.pdf](http://www.judybaca.com/now/images/stories/JudyBaca_CompleteCV2012.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Carlos Francisco Jackson, *Chicana and Chicano Art: ProtestArte* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2009), 82.

<sup>3</sup> *Social and Public Art Resource Center*, accessed November 16, 2014, <http://sparcinla.org/staff/>

Schlesinger in 1974.<sup>4</sup> Today SPARC is a thriving community arts organization responsible for making, preserving, and researching public art in Los Angeles.

Another acclaimed undertaking is *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*. An ambitious creative and social endeavor that started in 1974. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers requested the aid of Baca to make a mural in the Tujunga flood-control channel in the San Fernando Valley as part of a city beautification project. Originally titled *The History of California*, it is now known as *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* and it boasts as the world's longest mural at 2,754 feet.<sup>5</sup>

The historical research, conceptualization of the images, and the communal aspect of the creative process were important factors in the project. The mural was initiated in decade long segments and each section was thoroughly researched for a years time before execution.<sup>6</sup> She hired teenagers from the juvenile detention courts and paid them for summer employment working on *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*. Many of the youth were from different ethnic backgrounds and some were gang affiliated. They were supervised by professional artists and aided in the process of uncovering the history of Los Angeles. Alongside community members and historians, the youth were able to assist in the visual telling of histories not yet told.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Frances Pohl, "Judith F. Baca: Community and Culture in the United States," *Women's Studies* 25, no.3 (1996): 215.

<sup>5</sup> "The Great Wall of Los Angeles: The History and Art of the Great Wall," *Social and Public Art Resource Center*, accessed January 12, 2014, [http://www.judybaca.com/now/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=151&Itemid=98](http://www.judybaca.com/now/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=151&Itemid=98)

<sup>6</sup> Eva Cockcroft and Robert Pierson. *Walking Tour and Guide to the Great Wall of Los Angeles*. (Venice, Calif.: Social and Public Art and Resource Center and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1983), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Cockcroft and Pierson, *Walking Tour and Guide to the Great Wall of Los Angeles*, 3.

Another major artistic contribution of Judith Baca is *The World Wall: A Vision of the Future Without Fear*. This project also employed the art making process as a tool to unify people from different backgrounds. Similar to Baca's efforts to bring together neighborhoods in the making of the *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, her intentions for *The World Wall* were to connect people from different countries.<sup>8</sup>

*The World Wall* project started in 1987 with an international brainstorming session and a research focus of global conflict.<sup>9</sup> In total, the group consisted of forty-five artists and students.<sup>10</sup> The artists collaborated from many countries including Finland, Russia, Palestine, Israel, and Mexico.<sup>11</sup> Continuing with Baca's multidisciplinary approach experts were called into *The World Wall* planning sessions for guidance; these experts consisted of Native American Healers, and nuclear weapons specialists, among others with unique perspectives on the idea of world peace.<sup>12</sup>

The portable and collaborative design of *The World Wall* project is also unique. The base of the mural was built with weatherproofed fencing in a circular layout. Blank spaces on the fence were intentionally left to enable participation from artists as the project traveled internationally.<sup>13</sup> The mural's configuration echoed the project's sentiment in that collaboration on and international scale would be necessary to achieve peace in the world.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Frances K. Pohl, "The World Wall: A Vision of the Future without Fear," An Interview with Judith F. Baca," *Frontiers*, XI, no. 1, (1990): 40.

<sup>9</sup> Pohl, "The World Wall: A Vision of the Future without Fear," 34.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Carole Gold Calo, "Judy Baca's Legacy," *Public Art Review* 17, no. 1 (2005): 39.

<sup>12</sup> Pohl, "The World Wall: A Vision of the Future without Fear," 41.

<sup>13</sup> Pohl, "The World Wall: A Vision of the Future without Fear," 34.

<sup>14</sup> Pohl, "The World Wall: A Vision of the Future without Fear," 35.

Furthermore, in 1996 Baca established SPARC Digital Mural Lab in partnership with the University of California, Los Angeles.<sup>15</sup> This is a unique educational facility that continues to focus on collaborative projects that aim to promote development of community. The difference in this program is that the murals are produced through digital technology.<sup>16</sup> By updating the mural making process, Baca not only championed the continued relevance of the mural making tradition but also solved some conservation issues by incorporating digital technology in place of conventional paint.<sup>17</sup>

One example of Baca's digital murals is *La Memoria de Nuestra Tierra* located in the Denver International Airport. This mural is a permanent display that illustrates the story of Baca's grandparent's immigration from Mexico to Colorado.<sup>18</sup> After extensive research, she incorporated primary sources such as images and documents, with scanned paintings of landscapes. The finished mural is digitally printed on aluminum and ten by fifty feet in size.

Baca has won numerous awards including: the "National Award in Public Art" in 2010 from Americans for the Arts and the Public Art Network, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship in 2003, "Educator of the Year" from the Hispanic Heritage Foundation in 2001, Master Artist and Senior Scholar fellowship for the "Institute on the Role of the Arts & Civic Dialogue" at Harvard University in 1998,

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<sup>15</sup> "Current Public Art Productions at UCLA/SPARC Digital Mural Lab," *Social and Public Art Resource Center*, accessed January 12, 2014, <http://sparcinla.org/current-public-art-productions-at-uclasparc-digital-mural-lab/>

<sup>16</sup> "Our Approach" *The University of California at Los Angeles, SPARC Digital Mural Lab*, accessed January 12, 2014, <http://digitalmurallab.com/approach/>

<sup>17</sup> Calo, "Judy Baca's Legacy," 39.

<sup>18</sup> Judith F. Baca, "The human story at the intersection of ethics, aesthetics and social justicem," *Journal of Moral Education* 34, no. 2, (2005): 163.

and was named “One of Americas 100 Most Influential Hispanics” from the Hispanic Business Magazine in 1991.<sup>19</sup>

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By Alana Coates  
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<sup>19</sup> Judith Baca, “Official University Curriculum Vitae 2012” *Judy Baca Artist*, accessed November 16, 2014,  
[http://www.judybaca.com/now/images/stories/JudyBaca\\_CompleteCV2012.pdf](http://www.judybaca.com/now/images/stories/JudyBaca_CompleteCV2012.pdf)

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