

**THE INTERNATIONAL MURAL ART ENCOUNTER**  
**MEXICO CITY, MEXICO**  
**MAY 16-18, 2006**

**CONCLUSIONS**

The International Mural Art Encounter was convened in Mexico City during May 16-18, 2006. The Encounter was organized by the Diego Rivera Foundation in collaboration with Arte Público Press of the University of Houston, TX, the New York creative advisory firm Mauer Kunst Consulting, the Philadelphia, PA-based Mural Arts Program, and the Social and Public Art Resource Center of Los Angeles, CA.

This gathering, one of the only global convenings of its kind ever assembled, brought together nearly 200 mural arts practitioners and community activists, government officials, creative consultants, journalists, scholars, and youth leaders from Mexico, the U.S., Europe, Latin America, and Oceania. This important assembly was inspired by a May 2004 national mural arts conference organized by the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program with major support from the Ford Foundation. Key sponsors of the Mexico City gathering included the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the Mexican Federal Education Department, the Mexican Council of Arts and Culture, the Office of the Mexican President, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, and the Jesus Reyes Hercoles Cultural Center of Coyoacán, Mexico.

Following are the essential observations, discussion highlights, and agreements that resulted from the meeting as presented at the convening's close by Mauer Kunst Consulting principal Henry A. J. Ramos, a member of the Mural Art Encounter organizing committee.

- Our initial reception and panel commentaries set the tone for our international gathering. We acknowledged by our wide diversity that mural art is indeed a world phenomenon.
- Presentations by Mexican experts Dr. Guadalupe Rivera Marín and Professor José Manuel Springer reminded us of the deep traditions of muralism, and Mexico's special influence on 20<sup>th</sup> Century world culture and practice in the field.
- We considered mural art's evolution beyond paintings on fixed spaces, reflecting on it's evolution into allied forms of expression: sculpture; virtual technologies; landscape architecture; housing; and urban redevelopment – often in mobile and replaceable forms.
- Our deliberations reminded us that mural art is a practice with a purpose: that our tradition is one of social activism and civic engagement in the interests of

promoting humanity and nature over the individual and materialism. We talked about “giving a voice to the voiceless.”

- Our day two opening plenary speakers – Jane Golden, Gilbert Coudene and Juan Bauk – introduced us to the topic: “The Artist’s Relation to the State and the Community.” They helped us to chronicle how the civic power, practice, and reach of muralism is being developed today in places as diverse as Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Lyon, France; Quebec, Canada; and Argentina.
- From their presentations, we saw how mural art is extending its influence in contemporary context to important constituencies of historically-excluded groups: At-risk youth; immigrants; incarcerated prisoners; and other disenfranchised peoples; as well as historically-divided communities conflicted by racial-ethnic, religious, and other tensions.
- We discussed the essential importance of involving community members not merely in the completion of mural projects, but also in decision making about the *content* that such projects ultimately reflect.
- We reminded ourselves, at the same time, about the ethical imperatives of mural artists to *lead* on the major issues of the day and to pursue our work in a consistently-principled way – one that champions democracy, human rights, and social responsibility.
- Juan Bauk shared a list of enumerated ethical and artistic principles that he and his colleagues incorporate in Argentina in order to promote and exercise public leadership through their work. We agreed that this is a concept we may wish to consider developing and adopting at some point at the international level.
- Our discussions expanded on these themes. Eight sub-theme sessions from a range of thoughtful presenters underscored fundamental questions about best practice. Some of the key issues surfaced included:
  1. integrating new voices and forms into the field (e.g., youth and graffiti artists and works with important political points of view);
  2. striking the proper balance between exercising leadership on issues, and listening to and honoring sometimes-differing community perspectives;
  3. addressing the growing influence of large private corporations on mural arts funding and content control; and
  4. reacting appropriately and effectively to recent declines in public support and community engagement relative to our work.
- Fiona Whelen and Cian O’Melia talked about comprehensive efforts to engage youth in Dublin, Ireland through a broad range of public art activities, putting muralism and public sculpture projects at the center, but complementing them with allied work extending to performance art and music.

- Sabine Marschall addressed the recent development in South Africa of a major campaign – the South “C” Mural Project, which has radically shifted practice in that nation from a more grassroots, community-driven model to one that is more artist-centered and commercialized. She raised important questions about the implications of such a shift for that nation’s newly-emerging, black-controlled democracy.
- Dr. Isaka Shamsud-Din spoke from his experiences in Portland on the essential responsibility of modern mural artists to “bear witness” to the historical presence, contributions, and humanity of society’s most forgotten people, their struggles for justice, and their collective vision for a better world.
- Brain Nissen reflected on the value of evolution in the means and imagery that mural and public artists project, and the field’s important role in raising awareness at the most profound levels of consciousness.
- We concluded our second day of sessions with an important conversation on the prospective value of formalizing an international network for mural artists.
- On balance, participants expressed a general agreement that such a development would be timely and could help to advance the field in various ways, by increasing prospects for:
  1. networking/exchange;
  2. knowledge dissemination about our work; and
  3. movement coordination/support.
- Judy Baca of the Social and Public Art Resource Center in Los Angeles spoke about the wisdom of starting with *virtual* community-building strategies that are both economical and easily-implemented, including:
  1. an internet community with common links to all of our respective websites; and
  2. a rapid deployment communications network that, through periodic exchanges and alerts, could help us all to mobilize around important public issues and campaigns.
- Still others felt it also essential to build towards a more-than-virtual association of some kind – one that could help to organize and inform more convenings like this one, and ultimately facilitate field development and sustainability efforts at the global level.
- Most agreed however, that starting small amongst ourselves, step by step, makes most sense.
- London-based Jeanne-Marie Eayrs volunteered to develop a comprehensive contact list of Encuentro participants, to facilitate forward movement on all fronts.

- On our third and final day together, we re-assembled to consider important additional questions:
  1. promotion and financing of cross-cultural projects;
  2. the evolving politics of muralism and artist's rights;
  3. advancements in education and training in the field; and
  4. the conservation and restoration of mural and public art works.
- On the topic of "International Finance and Inter-Cultural Projects" we agreed that financing issues clearly loom large as a challenge for our field.
- While some, selected programs have developed to become significant, well-financed, and well-staffed organizations, most mural art projects and organizations are under-resourced and stretched for sustaining support.
- We acknowledged that a large part of the problem is the progressive political content of much our work, which is inherently discomfiting to people and institutions whose ideological outlooks and material interests are in conflict with our own.
- Klaus Klinger of Düsseldorf, Germany suggested building on Judy Baca's ideas of the previous day to develop a global virtual community; to lift up information-sharing on fund raising ideas and best practices.
- Kathleen Farrell of Chicago recommended increasing our professionalism as a means of expanding prospects for project and organizational financing. She urged efforts to develop a stronger public sense of our work's legitimacy and community value-added by:
  1. developing standards in contracting, fee scales, and employment practices; and
  2. preparing and circulating the highest quality proposals and products possible.
- Like several earlier speakers, Professor Geoff Hogg of Australia underscored that, often, especially when working cross-culturally, allied art forms can complement in important ways the essential messages and purposes of muralism: sculpture, dance, and music.
- Berlin, Germany-based practitioner Don Karl reminded us that progressive mural artists also have a role to play in challenging authority on the far left, in places like Cuba (where he has lived and worked in recent years): in short, underscoring the essential responsibility of mural arts leaders to stand for and with people, rather than institutions and particularized interests.
- On the topic "The Politics of Mural Arts and the Rights of Artists," New Zealand-based practitioner-scholar Dr. Desmond Rochfort, Judy Baca, and San Francisco

attorney Brooke Oliver revealed how political issues and rights are among the most important matters facing public artists today.

- Even when there are laws that ostensibly protect our freedom of speech and even when our government systems claim to be democracies, we find more and more that we must fight for our rightful voice, our rightful space in the public discourse.
- Joe Cotter from Portland spoke to concerns about pending litigation in Oregon related to the large corporate interest Clear Channel.
- The risk of this litigation for mural artists everywhere eventually is to reduce – and possibly eliminate to a mere sliver – the status of public space for the common good, in favor of a highly-corporatized notion of the commons.
- With many of the increasingly contentious issues that inform our times, reaction and even the threat of repression and violence against many of us are becoming very real dangers in more and more places.
- Going forward, we must defend the integrity of our rights, our intellectual freedom, and our physical safety using various means, including:
  1. collective solidarity;
  2. legal defense;
  3. community organizing; and
  4. public engagement.
- We must especially guard against the private forces of censorship that mark our times, through vigilance, awareness, and mutual support.
- As Desmond Rochfort reflected at the outset of his eloquent remarks, we must expand appreciation that, fundamentally, murals are not commodities that can be conventionally understood in the framework of modern economies.
- We cannot forget the inherently *collective* nature of this work, dating back to the earliest cave renderings in recorded human history.
- On the topic of “Education and Field Capacity Building,” Judy Baca revealed important new technical developments and possibilities for muralism worldwide, and their profound emerging impacts on:
  1. application;
  2. imagery;
  3. economy;
  4. transportability;
  5. durability;
  6. information exchange; and
  7. field building.

- These new capabilities raise important questions: How will we utilize them and to what ends? Will increased capacity result in better product? Will it support or diminish the field's democratic and inclusive tendencies? – questions that are remarkably similar to those raised earlier by Sabine Marschall in her recount of recent issues and trends in South Africa.
- Julio Carrasco Bréton of Mexico raised important questions about the continuing traditions of Latin American muralism in the face of shrinking government support and declining status of the field in important quarters, coupled with a growing bureaucratic mentality among country leaders in relation to public art.
- Mexican-based artist and scholar Patricia Quijano and Geoff Hogg surveyed the education and training needs of muralists in the field, revealing a still-fertile ground for much more to be done in this area.
- A key aspect of the need concerns more formal education and training program offerings that can help to educate and develop new practitioners through a combination of theoretical and practical curricula.
- The challenge is to make these programs relevant to both students and the larger community; and also to ensure that they open up meaningful pipelines to application and employment opportunities for participants.
- In group discussion, we agreed that international intellectual and practical exchanges involving mural artists are essential to develop and support.
- We closed our discussions focusing on the important topic: “The Conservation and Restoration of Mural Art.”
- On this important topic, our Mexican colleagues Walter Boelsterly and Margarita López Fernández underscored the importance – indeed the urgency – of prioritizing conservation as a field practice and as a point of advocacy in our work.
- Still far-too-little public and private funding is directed to conservation, with grave impacts on the field by virtue of the actual and prospective loss of highly important mural works.
- Boelsterly and López Fernández urged us to recall that we have a profound responsibility to work towards changing the public mindset that suggests we achieve more by saving our tax dollars verses saving these great works.
- They also spoke to the need to educate public emergency agencies, such as fire departments, to adopt more mural-friendly policies in order to save works that are sometimes unnecessarily lost during fires or earthquakes, largely out of ignorance.

- Finally, in closing, we concurred that we must expand support for mural-related conservation and restoration research (as well as innovation and practitioner education on conservation best practices), drawing especially on proven expertise in the field and artists themselves wherever possible.



Coffee Break: 4:00pm – 4:15pm

**III. Special Events:** 4:15pm – 8:00pm

Coffee Break: 6:15pm – 6:30pm

Dinner on your own: 8:00pm

## May 18

**IV. Plenary: Education and Training: Formal Education and Encouragement** 9:00am – 11:00am

Coordinator: Krishnamurthy Srinivasan (India)

Workshops:

1. Leadership development – Ed Carroll (Ireland)
2. Formal education and training – Patricia Quijano, Master Artist (Mexico)
3. Painting techniques: historical and present – TBD
4. Post-graduate studies in mural art – Geoff Hogg, Ph.D. (Australia)

Coffee Break: 11:00am – 11:15am

**V. Plenary: Conservation Techniques and Diffusion** 11:15am – 1:15pm

Coordinator: Walther Boelsterly Urrutia (México)

Workshops:

1. The relationship between painting techniques and preservation – TBD
2. The influence of pre-hispanic painting techniques in the preservation of mural painting- Haydeé Orea (Mexico)
3. The challenges of restoration in modern mural painting – Isabelle Brajer (Denmark)
4. Art criticism, journalism and printed media– Irene Herner (Mexico)

Lunch: 1:15pm – 2:30pm

**VI. Plenary: Program Sustainability** 2:30pm – 4:00pm

Coordinator: Jane Golden, Ph.D., Philadelphia Mural Arts Program (USA)

Workshops:

1. The development of norms and international standards in mural painting – Jon Pounds (USA)
2. The promotion of mural art and its impact on the economy – Andrew Crummy (Scotland)
3. The creation of an international fund- UNESCO (Mexico)
4. Financing –TBD

**VIII. The Establishment of an International Mural Painting Network** 4:00pm – 5:15pm

Coordinator: Diego López (México)

Coffee Break: 5:15pm – 5:30pm

**Conclusions:** 5:30pm– 7:30pm

Coordinators: Nicolás Kanellos, Ph. D. (USA) and Henry A.J. Ramos (USA)

Closing Remarks 7:45pm – 8:15pm

Guadalupe Rivera Marín, Ph.D. (Mexico)

Farewell

**Fiesta Mexicana** 9:30pm – 12:00midnight

# La Jornada

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Usted está aquí: [sábado 20 de mayo de 2006](#) → [Cultura](#) → El muralismo necesita aprovechar los cambios tecnológicos; "en México pierde presencia"

Terminó encuentro internacional de artistas que practican esa vertiente pictórica

## El muralismo necesita aprovechar los cambios tecnológicos; "en México pierde presencia"

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ERICKA MONTAÑO GARFIAS



En la imagen, uno de los murales que el pintor mexicano Gustavo Chávez Pavón realizó a finales de 2004 en el muro que divide Israel de los territorios palestinos ocupados, una de las zonas más conflictivas de Medio Oriente **Foto: Cortesía del artista**

La reactivación de los movimientos políticos ha dado como resultado el resurgimiento de la pintura mural en todo el mundo; sin embargo, enfrenta nuevos retos como encontrar mecanismos para adaptar esta forma de arte a los cambios que ofrece la tecnología; medios de financiamiento que involucren a la iniciativa privada y al sector público que no representen limitaciones para el artista, y que los creadores tengan acceso a beneficios como un salario y a sistemas de salud, expresaron muralistas de varios países y especialistas que asistieron al encuentro Internacional Pintura Mural en el mundo del siglo XXI: raíces antiguas, nuevos senderos.

Este encuentro, que concluyó hace unos días, fue organizado por la Fundación Diego Rivera para hacer un balance de la situación de la pintura mural y también un primer paso para la convocatoria de un congreso internacional el próximo año. En esta ocasión participaron 120 artistas y expertos de Australia, Nueva Zelanda, Europa, América y África.

### El financiamiento, un problema

El muralismo "siempre se ha relacionado con los movimientos políticos y sociales; lo podemos ver en Chile, Portugal, Alemania, México, pero cuando los movimientos decaen el muralismo también. Actualmente tenemos un nuevo movimiento generado por la globalización, los problemas mundiales de la ecología, de la economía y también en el

arte", señaló el muralista alemán Klaus Klinger.

"Durante muchos años -agregó- el muralismo no fue arte para los directores de museos o galerías; eso ocurrió también en Alemania, pero ha cambiado; así como también se ha modificado la idea de que los murales deben durar 500 años, ahora son más efímeros y me gusta eso, porque no tenemos que apropiarnos de todo el espacio, pues las próximas generaciones deben tener lugares dónde pintar".

La situación está muy dividida: "por un lado tenemos grupos muy fuertes, bien financiados, educados e informados, muy incluyentes con la comunidad, que son los modelos a seguir, pero también la excepción, en la mayoría de los países hay muchos obstáculos: políticos, económicos", señaló a su vez el artista Henry A. J. Ramos, presidente y fundador de la organización filantrópica Mauer Kunst Consulting.

Ramos coincidió en señalar que sí ha habido cambios, y uno de los más visibles es que antes los murales se pintaban sobre paredes, "pero ahora lo que vemos son diferentes formas de expresión, son móviles, se usan las tecnologías".

Sin embargo, pese a esos cambios la pintura mural enfrenta la amenaza de la comercialización, la economía global y la tendencia a homogeneizar culturas.

Para Brian Campbell, asistente ejecutivo del Programa de Arte Mural de Filadelfia, "el muralismo está vivo y saludable en todo el mundo", y señaló como uno de los principales problemas el financiamiento, porque el arte mural muchas veces se ve como algo ajeno a la "alta cultura".

Existe mucho camino por recorrer en cuanto al acceso a los recursos, y uno es la mezcla de inversión pública y privada, que funciona ya en Filadelfia. Otro de los aspectos pendientes es lograr que los artistas tengan buenos salarios y acceso a los sistemas de salud.

Uno de los puntos centrales que no debe soslayarse es que la situación de la pintura mural está completamente interconectada con la realidad mundial, manifestó Judith Baca, directora artística del Social and Public Art Resource Center.

En Los Angeles, por ejemplo, "los artistas chicanos estamos muy conectados con la situación de la militarización de la frontera y la criminalización de los migrantes. No hay artista o mural que no intente dar voz a la comunidad. Como muralista no puedo separar la guerra en Irak, una guerra que no necesitamos, y los problemas de la frontera que nos están afectando". Advirtió sobre el riesgo del financiamiento público o privado, por la posibilidad de que dicte el contenido de la obra, "si eso ocurre, habrá que preguntarse por qué son muralistas. Tenemos que buscar nuevas estrategias para hacer que esto funcione, más patrocinios y formas de hacerlo sin patrocinios, ser más inventivos, creativos y radicales para mantener esta tradición".

## Esfuerzos aislados

Si bien en el mundo se desarrolla este arte, "en nuestro país, aun cuando contamos con una tradición enorme de pintura mural, no hay ningún movimiento organizado, ni siquiera una práctica más o menos regular", manifestó Diego López Rivera, director de la Fundación Diego Rivera.

En México "el muralismo se ha perdido en términos de un movimiento, de una presencia permanente, organizada, articulada, bajo un concepto determinado; hay muchos esfuerzos aislados, tenemos muralistas en Tlatelolco, o Antonio Ortiz, *Gritón*, en comunidades de Oaxaca, pero es una fragmentación, es una falta de valoración de esa pintura, porque hay como una idea muy encasillada de lo que fue el muralismo y cómo vino la ruptura, y ahora las manifestaciones más actuales dentro de las artes plásticas tienden a otros formatos y expresiones, la pintura mural está como relegada".