

Salvador's Wall

BY JIM CROGAN

One September morning in 1981, 29-year-old Rodolfo Mauricio Aguilar said goodbye to his wife and child, left his San Salvador home and headed north to the University of El Salvador's (UES) extension campus at San Miguel, where he taught a class in logic. That morning, however, Aguilar was not headed to class, but to a meeting at the university to discuss El Salvador's recently instituted land-reform program. He never arrived. Somewhere between San Salvador and San Miguel he disappeared. Aguilar had become yet another victim of the right-wing/military death squads that have haunted El Salvador and littered its landscape with thousands of tortured and mutilated bodies during that country's decadelong civil war.

"His colleagues called me late that afternoon and told me he never got there," said Sara Martinez, his widow. One week later her worst fears were realized. "His friends called me and said they had seen his body lying by the side of the road," she said. "They said he'd been shot. But I never saw his body. It was too dangerous at that point for me and my family to go and claim it." Martinez said that her husband's body lay there rotting by the road for several days.

Today, Aguilar's name is among 10,000 others painted on the Salvadoran memorial wall "In the Name of Peace," which was recently unveiled here in Exposition Park. Martinez, who fled with her daughter to the USA after being jailed in San Salvador for the political work she continued after her first husband's murder

(she has since remarried), is today working with the "Santana Chirino Amaya" Central American Refugee Committee, one of the main organizing groups behind this memorial wall. (El Rescate, Building With the Voiceless of El Salvador, Medical Aid to El Salvador and the Hollywood Women's Political Committee are the other primary organizational and financial sponsors.)

"It was important for me to add his name to the wall, because I want him remembered as a good and caring man who did not take up arms to do what he believed," said Martinez. "He peacefully tried to help other people get their rights, and for that he was killed."



"We don't want to add any more new names" — Sara Martinez. The panel is by Yreina Cervantes.

Inspired by the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C., the wall, say its organizers, is intended to honor the memory of the estimated 75,000 civilians (men, women and children) who have been killed in El Salvador's civil war. Arranged chronologically starting in 1979, the wall speaks of the violence that has now become synonymous with that country.

In addition to thousands of unknown *campesinos*, union members, teachers, workers, students, artists and professionals, the wall also contains the names of several highly publicized assassination victims. They include Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, three U.S. nuns and a North American church worker, all killed in 1980; Herbert Anaya, president of the non-governmental human-rights commission, assassinated in 1987; and the six Jesuit priests, their cook and her daughter, murdered last November at the University of Central America in San Salvador.

Rather than on the slate-black marble of the Vietnam memorial, the names on the Central American memorial are hand-painted on wooden panels. The wall also contains eight separate panels painted by a combination of Latino and North American artists, including two Salvadorans, Ricardo Garcia and Milton Aviles, Francisco Letelier (whose father, Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier, was assassinated in Washington, D.C., by a car bomb), Frank Romero, Yreina Cervantes, Douglas Humble, Matt Wuerker, and the wall's art director, Eva Cockcroft.

The wall will remain on the lawn behind the Museum of Natural History until September, when a number of panels will go out on a nationwide tour. After these panels are returned, the wall will be reassembled at a still undetermined permanent site in the Pico-Union area.

"We Salvadorans are sharing our pain with the people of the United States," says Sara Martinez. "Too many people have died in this war already, and we don't want to add any more new names to this memorial. The best way I can think of to honor my dead husband is not to get revenge on his killers, but to see peace come to El Salvador, and with it a new society that is built on justice." **A**

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