

new citywide mural program, Neighborhood Pride). She was also contacted in 1974 by the Army Corps of Engineers and asked to design a mural for a segment of the Tujunga Wash drainage channel in the San Fernando Valley. That was the beginning of *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, a 2,435-foot mural painted over five summers between 1976 and 1983, which involved a number of professional artists and hundreds of youths—all working under Baca's direction.

Baca wanted *The Great Wall* to be an alternative history of California, one that acknowledged the presence of ethnic peoples, racial and class conflict, sexism, and homophobia, and that gave a public voice to those who had been silenced. In organizing the production of the mural, she enlisted the help of scientists, historians, politicians, and members of local community groups. The young people who worked on the mural were black, white, Chicano/a, Jewish, and Asian-American, and brought with them a lifetime of experiences of interracial struggle. Through their work on the mural, they began to understand the roots of racial conflict and to break down some of the barriers that existed between them. To facilitate the organization and execution of the mural, Baca, filmmaker Donna Deitch, and artist Christina Schlesinger founded the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) in 1976. Located in the old Venice City Jail, SPARC has served over the years as a multicultural arts center devoted to the production, exhibition, distribution, and preservation of public art works.

In 1977, Baca traveled to Cuernavaca, Mexico, to study the art of mural painting at the Taller Siqueiros and in 1979 completed her

M.F.A. at Cal State Northridge. This training resulted in a body of work that shows an increasing sophistication in its compositional arrangements and use of materials. While at the Taller Siqueiros, Baca designed the portable mural *Uprising of the Mujeres* (1979). According to her own account, the students in her class (she was the only female) "had decided that they wanted to do something about women's issues and then...proceeded to do an image of a woman spread-eagled with a funnel in her mouth...[to represent] how women were fed all this consumerism and were buyers of everything. Yet this was a giant rape image that they used. I started the *Uprising* as a counter to that—[the image was] a fierce Indian...they could never get a funnel into this girl's mouth." In *Uprising of the Mujeres*, women are shown not as passive consumers, but as active workers protesting the diversion of profits from their labor into the defense industry.

### **Breaking Barriers**

Baca promotes active engagement and the breaking of barriers in a number of works produced in the 1980s. As part of the preparations for the 1984 Olympic games in Los Angeles, a series of murals were painted on the retaining walls of the downtown freeway system. The Olympic Mural Commission assigned Baca the 3rd Street offramp of the Harbor Freeway for her mural *Hitting the Wall*. The 1984 Games marked the first time in Olympics history that women competed in the marathon. Baca celebrated this event with a powerful figure of a female runner whose explosive victory signals more than the entrance of women into a single event; it symbolizes the breaking apart of an old order that prevented women from coming

forward to claim their equal and full place in the world.

A year later, in two 9-feet-by-20-feet billboards titled *Be Skeptical of the Spectacle* (1985) and *Respect Your Perspective* (1985), Baca calls upon the viewer to be aware of the propagandistic nature of media images and to have greater faith in a perspective based on personal experience. *The Street Speaks* (1986) maps L.A.'s Skid Row area and provides the homeless people who live there with information on neighborhood food, shelter, and medical care. In a series of four murals created for the town of Guadalupe, California (1990), Baca treats not only the specific history of this farmworkers' community, but also the exploitative system of migrant labor in the United States. And in another of her recent works, a portable mural project titled *The World Wall: A Vision of the Future without Fear* (1987-), she explores the material and spiritual transformation of an international society seeking peace. During the early stages of this mural, Baca read Jonathan Schell's *Fate of the Earth*, which argues that we must imagine the eventuality of nuclear war before we can change our destiny. She realized, however, that in addition to being able to imagine nuclear destruction, we must also be able to imagine peace, particularly as an active rather than passive concept. The seven 10-feet-by-30-feet panels arranged in a circle that will make up *The World Wall* [four are now completed] attempt such imagining.

Baca has been active over the past 20 years not only as an artist and organizer, but also as a teacher and public spokesperson for artists of color. A member of the art faculty at the University of California, Irvine since 1981, she has served on the boards of directors of the American

Council of the Arts and the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, and has helped shape an L.A. public art program that is defined by multiethnic cooperation. This program has given both the artists and the communities in which their murals are located a greater sense of pride in the cultural achievements and traditions of the many different peoples of southern California. Baca hopes that *The World Wall* will bring a similar message concerning the benefits of global cooperation to an international audience.

In creating public art, Baca has not attempted to impose on specific sites works that are alien to the traditions and beliefs of the people who occupy those sites. Rather, she has attempted to work with residents to formulate artistic visions and insights that will have meaning for both the people who view the work daily and for those from the art world who are concerned with the direction public art is taking. This dialogue between the artist and the community is captured in a statement Baca made in 1989 regarding her intentions in creating the four Guadalupe murals: *I want to convey the beauty of the farm workers...while at the same time revealing the harsh conditions that this surface beauty belies—the low wages, health problems, substandard living conditions. Caught up in the immediacy of their material crisis, it is often difficult for these farm workers to articulate the issues that are of concern to them, to make connections that will allow them to organize their thoughts. I am hoping that the murals will help them to do this.*

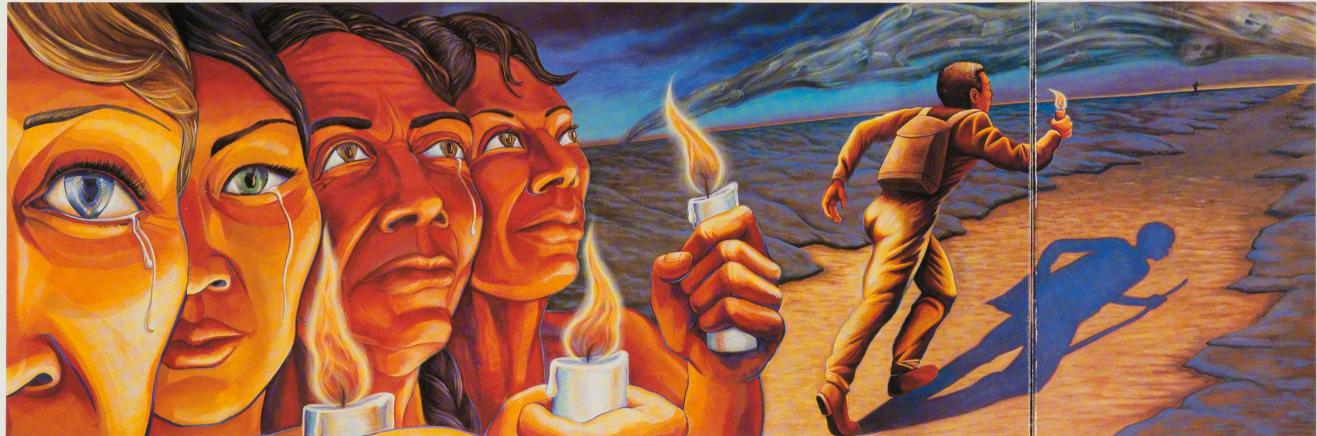
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An associate professor of art history and member of the Pomona faculty since 1985, Pohl is the author of Ben Shahn: New Deal Artist in a Cold War Climate, 1947-1954.

**Below:**  
*Triumph of the Heart*, 1987-1989  
acrylic on canvas  
one of four 10' x 30' panels  
constituting *The World Wall*,  
*A Vision of the Future Without Fear*  
Social and Public Art  
Resource Center  
Photo: Gia Roland

**Right:**  
*Segment of The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, 1976-1983  
acrylic on concrete  
14' x 2,435'  
Tujunga Wash drainage canal,  
San Fernando Valley  
This segment of the mural depicts  
the birth of rock and roll and the  
rise of the civil rights movement  
in the U.S.

**Bottom right:**  
*Hitting the Wall*, 1983-1984  
acrylic on concrete  
3rd Street off-ramp, Harbor Freeway  
Los Angeles  
Photo: Gia Roland



about European and Euro-American art and culture but very little about the art and culture of peoples of color. She became convinced that survival for peoples of color in the United States meant not only the preservation of their cultures, but the presence of these cultures within the educational system. Upon completing her undergraduate degree in 1969, she began teaching at Alemany High School in Los Angeles (her alma mater). There she organized her

first mural project in an attempt to bring together students from different neighborhoods. The following summer, while working for the L.A. Recreation and Parks Department, she organized another mural team of 20 youths from four different neighborhoods. In the process of teaching them how to make art, she also taught them how to uncover the histories of the ethnic communities of Los Angeles and how to make connections between the present and the past.

**Empowerment Via Education**  
Being able to adapt and grow in the multicultural environment that is Los Angeles requires, above all, dialogue and openness to learning. Baca's commitment to empowerment through education has led her to develop an artistic process that relies on team effort, on the sharing of ideas and energies, on confronting difference, and on establishing a common set of goals. This process is



an outgrowth of her experience as director of a major mural program in Los Angeles and of her work on *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, the longest mural in the world.

In 1974, Baca submitted a proposal to the Los Angeles City Council for a citywide mural program. It was funded, and during the program's 10-year existence, 250 murals were produced by more than 1,000 crew members (in 1988, Mayor Tom Bradley appointed Baca director of a

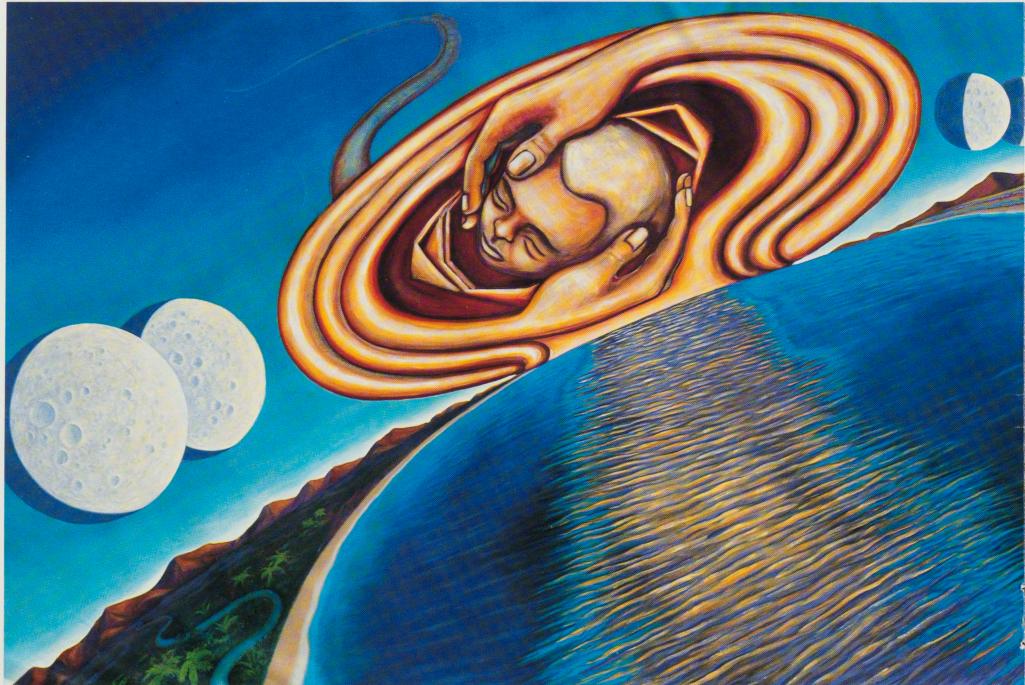
bom and educated in this sprawling metropolis, she continues to live and work in L.A. Her work and the city are inextricably linked—both caught up in the radical political, cultural, and demographic changes that mark the end of the 20th century in this country and the world at large.

Baca's life has been one of coalition building and crossing borders, a life guided by a moral and political vision of a more just world. She has been described as the voice

of the street-level community that is often absent from the establishment art world. For Baca, the survival of peoples of color means the preservation of their various cultures. Toward that end, she has organized multi-ethnic mural programs and co-founded the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) in Venice, California. Her substantial successes have been recognized by a wide range of organizations, including the AFL-CIO, the National

Association of Women of Color, and the National Endowment for the Arts. The effectiveness of Baca's organizing efforts and art work has been due, in large part, to her awareness of her own identity as a Chicana, or, in the words of Chicano journalist Ruben Salazar, as "a Mexican-American with a non-Anglo image of herself."

As a studio art major at California State University, Northridge in the 1960s, Baca learned a great deal



**Above:**  
*Balance*, 1987-1990  
acrylic on canvas  
one of four 10' x 30' panels  
constituting *The World Wall: A Vision of the Future Without Fear*  
Social and Public Art Resource Center  
Photo: Gia Roland

**Right:**  
*The World Wall: A Vision of the Future Without Fear*, 1987-1992  
acrylic on canvas  
Santa Barbara County Courthouse, 1992  
In addition to the four central panels by Baca (*Triumph of the Hands, Balance, Triumph of the Heart, and Nonviolent Resistance*), this installation included Russian

artist Alexi Begov's panel *The End of the Twentieth Century* (1990, acrylic on canvas, 10' x 30') on the far left, and *Dialogue of Alternatives*, by Finnish artists Juha Sassi, Sirks-Liisa Lonka, and Arro Matinlauri (1990, acrylic on canvas, 10' x 30') on the far right.  
Photo: Lillya Vorobey



**Top:**  
*Segment of The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, 1976-1983  
acrylic on concrete  
14' x 2,435'  
Tujunga Wash drainage canal,  
San Fernando Valley

This segment of the mural depicts the granting of citizenship and property rights to Asian Americans and people of color who had become Olympic champions between 1948 and 1964.

A major goal of Montgomery Gallery exhibitions is to relate them significantly to Pomona's curricula and, whenever possible, to involve faculty and students of The Claremont Colleges in their organization.

The exhibition "Judith F. Baca: Sites and Insights," scheduled for March 7 to April 4, is an example of such integration. Both the exhibition and the related essay that follows are the work of Frances Pohl, associate professor of art history. And because Judith Baca's work is community based and collaborative in nature, it was appropriate to involve students and faculty in the exhibition. To this end, Phyllis McGibbon, assistant professor of art, led a group of students through the complicated process of creating a collaborative mural. Documentation of their project will be shown in the west gallery during the exhibition. We are grateful to Professors Pohl and McGibbon and to the students for their excellent work. Judith Baca deserves special thanks, both for making her work available and for conducting the mural workshop on campus that served as the starting point for the students' project. Widespread interest in this project is reflected by the variety of its supporters, whose participation has been crucial and is gratefully acknowledged: the Pomona College Public Events Committee, Art Department, American Studies, and Women's Studies Program, and the five-college Women's Studies Program and Chicano Studies Department.

—Marjorie Harth,  
Director of the Galleries of  
Pomona and Scripps  
colleges and associate  
professor of art



Previous page:  
*The Future*, 1988-1990  
acrylic on wood  
one of four 8' x 7' panels on the  
history and future of Guadalupe, CA.  
Municipality of Guadalupe  
Photo: Gia Roland

Above:  
*Triumph of the Hands*, 1987-1990  
acrylic on canvas  
one of four 10' x 30' panels  
constituting *The World Wall*,  
*A Vision of the Future Without Fear*  
Social and Public Art  
Resource Center  
Photo: Gia Roland

I have been called a Spanish-speaking artist, a Spanish-surname artist, a Mexican artist (in the early '60s), a Mexican-American artist, a cultural worker (in the late '60s), a Chicano artist, a Chicana artist (during the discovery of gender), a Latino artist, a Latina artist (during the discovery of women in Latin America), an 'other' (as in check one), an ethnic artist, a folk artist, a Hispanic artist, a barrio artist, a primitive artist, a neighborhood artist, a street artist, an urban artist, a multicultural artist....All these terms have been coined, in essence, to define my relationship to a border my grandparents came across during the revolution in Mexico.—Judith Baca

The Mexican Border has, indeed, played a key role in the art and life of artist, educator, and political activist Judith F. Baca. Not content to let others speak for her, she has worked over the past twenty years to define the meaning of this border in her own life and in the larger cultural life of southern California. In the process she has created bridges between different peoples and cultures, bridges that are essential if peaceful coexist-

ence based on mutual understanding and respect is to be achieved, not only in southern California, but in the nation as a whole.

For many individuals, from sociologists and urban planners to filmmakers and science fiction writers, Los Angeles represents the city of the 21st century. Not only does it display the effects of unregulated urban sprawl and profit-driven city politics, but it is also home to

more peoples and languages (104 at last count) than any other place in the world, with white non-Hispanics making up less than 40 percent of the population.

Living in Los Angeles, therefore, means living not only with white, mainstream culture, but also with the many cultures of peoples of color. Baca has devoted her career to making these multiple cultures public and visible. A mural artist who was

*By Frances Pohl*

# Judith F. Baca: Sites and Insights, 1974-1992



MONTGOMERY GALLERY

MARCH 7 - APRIL 4, 1993