

RCA's Artist-in-Residence

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Project Summary

The Research Center for the Americas (RCA) at UC Santa Cruz will be commemorating its 30th anniversary during the 2022-23 AY. The goal of this project is to sponsor a professional artist-in-residence, who will co-design with students a new campus mural that draws inspiration from the RCA's institutional archives, which are located in Special Collections at McHenry Library, UC Santa Cruz. The muralist will work with a student committee about the design and creation of the new mural. A new seminar course will be associated with this effort starting in Spring quarter 2023. The project will teach students about UC Santa Cruz's rich history in Chicanx, Latinx, and Latin American studies. The experience of working with a professional muralist with deep ties to Latinx Studies and Latin American history is also a unique opportunity for students to nurture their creativity by imagining the center's history through artistic expression.

The project engaged with students, staff, and faculty with an affiliation to the Dolores Huerta Research Center for the Americas (Huerta Center) as well as the local community. We engaged approximately 50 people in this project, through a combination of a public artist talk regarding inclusive and community-centered artistic practice and several listening sessions about what people want to see represented in this new public mural. We engaged across a range of demographics, from students, to staff to faculty and the local community. Most of the students came from Latinx backgrounds as well as Asian and most identified as women. In terms of the faculty and staff who were part of this project, most identified as Chicana with others as Latina, white, and a few Chicano/Mexican or Latino men. The ages crossed-generations and ranged from 20-60.

Impacts

The project's objectives were met and surpassed. The primary objective of this project was to fund a professional artist who would work well with the students and the broader campus community to co-design a new mural on our building, in honor of the 30th anniversary milestone of the Research Center for the Americas, an academic hub

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that brings together scholars and scholarship in Chicanx/Latinx and Latin American studies.

We found the perfect artist partner named Josue Rojas for this project. Rojas comes with years of experience working in/with the community to create public art that “takes up space” and that lets the presence of under-represented communities be seen, felt, and known. One of the most beneficial aspects of working with Josue was his dedication to mentoring emerging student artists of color. He offered and worked alongside several students, offering sage advice as they created art together. In 2022, the campus named our research center in honor of civil rights icon Dolores Huerta and now, coupled with this beautiful new public mural, the more ambitious campus goals of representation and inclusivity have been met.

Every time anyone from the community walks by this mural, they will feel joy. From its vibrant colors to its inclusion of nature, such as butterflies, hummingbirds, redwoods, and so forth, to prominently representing our center’s medallion designed by students 30 years ago, this public mural will remind people who see it about the power of public art, of inclusion, and that they belong on this campus and/or that they should learn about the research center to become a part of our community. Further, the listening sessions were quite powerful gatherings that will stay with the participants for years to come; those who participated in those sessions will see their words captured artistically in this mural.