

DAILY BRUIN ONLINE - Monday, August 27, 2001

Professor honored for work

CEREMONY: Baca extols value of using art as an education tool



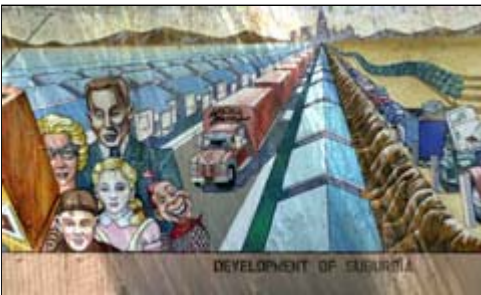
Photo courtesy of SPARC

Renowned muralist and UCLA Professor **Judith F. Baca** was named "Educator of the Year" at the Hispanic Heritage Awards Saturday. She explained that teaching through art is a powerful way of educating others.

educating others through the arts a way of life. She serves as the vice-chair of the César Chávez Center for Chicana/o Studies and is a professor of world arts and cultures.

Since making her first contribution to the more than 80-year-old Mexican tradition of muralizing in 1969, Baca has involved thousands in the creation of murals.

Among her students are first-graders, college students, Barrio residents, those who live in affluent neighborhoods, juvenile offenders, scholars, artists and historians from many walks of life.



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"Development of Suburbia" is part of "The Great Wall of Los Angeles," the longest mural in the world.

created through collaboration between Israelis and Palestinians to the one where gang members agreed to a truce to work with her on a project.

By **Michaele Turnage**
Daily Bruin Senior Staff

The Hispanic Heritage Awards Foundation named UCLA Professor Judith F. Baca Educator of the Year Saturday, commemorating her lifelong dedication to showing others how to discover and convey the untold histories of oppressed people through murals.

"(This award is) a wonderful acknowledgement for the arts because the arts are a significant way of educating," Baca said in a phone interview from Washington, D.C., after the awards ceremony, which will be televised on NBC Sept. 22.

The award celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month and, according to the Social and Public Art Resource Center, seeks to promote greater understanding of the contributions of Hispanic America.

Baca, who has been called a "one-woman mural magnate" by the Los Angeles Times, has made



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Professor Judith Baca headed the creation of "The Great Wall of Los Angeles," named a Los Angeles monument. The half-mile long work chronicles the history of California's ethnic communities. It was completed in 1984, after five summers of work by 700 people.

Though she is best known for the Great Wall of Los Angeles – a half-mile mural named by the Guinness Book of World Records as the longest artwork in existence – Baca's work adorns many parts of Los Angeles and can be seen at the National Museum of American Art at the Smithsonian, with one mural currently traveling the world.

"The biggest impact (her work) has had has been giving voice to previously silenced communities," said Rachel Estrella, a UCLA doctoral student who worked as Baca's teaching assistant last school year.

Baca's art has captured the historical experiences of marginalized people all over – from the mural

"She fundamentally creates an atmosphere of trust, and she really works on creating a safe space," Estrella said.

"Judy really makes a space for the students' voices, and she puts the students' voices first and foremost," she added.

Baca, who placed couches in the UCLA César Chávez Digital Mural Lab to make the site of last year's class more inviting, is known to bring coffee to students deep in concentration.

"There was sort of a rhythm going on between her and the students and this kind of mutual respect," Estrella said.



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This section of "The Great Wall of Los Angeles" depicts the Civil Rights struggles of the 1940s and 1950s.



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This is just one of hundreds of murals Judith Baca has been involved with.

Baca's students conduct archival research, interview community members, collect photos from family picture books, and consult historians and scholars before envisioning a mural.

"I've learned that imagination and dreaming is the beginning step in any kind of change. If you can't imagine it, it doesn't happen," Baca said, noting that if she weren't a muralist and professor, she would be a poet.

She said that art is a powerful educational tool because students must use their imagination and become intimately involved with their

project, forcing the student in the end to take possession of the knowledge and to change because of the experience.

Creators of the murals also solicit the public's input. Most recently, they have used the Internet as a means to showcase up and coming art and to ask for feedback.

"Judy just insists on the importance of serving the community as part of the educational custom," Estrella said. "She really embodies the kind of work that she espouses or tries to teach."

Baca said she would like to divide her time between writing and working in the studio on her craft. She would also like to produce two books – an autobiographical piece and a guide for those who seek to do meaningful work in the community.

"Her time has come," said Toney Dixon, Baca's administrative assistant at SPARC. "She is a woman of great virtue – she sees into the soul of what she is doing."

For additional photos of Baca's work, visit the Daily Bruin at www.dailybruin.ucla.edu.

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