

Mud and blood:

DIA mural captures flight of emigrants from Mexican Revolution

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Like thousands of others, Teodoro and Francisca Baca made the arduous trek from Mexico to the southwestern United States during the frantic days of the Mexican Revolution. Eighty years later, their granddaughter Judith has used her talent as an artist and skills as a community organizer to put her ancestors on a wall of the terminal at Denver International Airport, in La Memoria de Nuestra Tierra, or Our Land Has Memory.



The Bacas are symbolic of those who fled hardship at home for a new life with new strains -- in their case, in La Junta, which the family left before Judith Baca's birth.

"There was a huge migration through the Ellis Island of the Southwest, El Paso," Baca said recently. "I also recovered the story of my family. My idea was to go back to the beginning."

The mural's central image is "The Walkers" -- a man, woman and child who represent Baca's family and

hundreds like them.

Based in Los Angeles, where she has become a sort of one-woman mural magnate as founder and artistic director of the Social and Public Art Resource Center, Baca was in Denver frequently over the past month overseeing completion of La Memoria. Painted by hand and via computer, the images then were transferred to foil-coated paper by ink jet printers.

Baca and Pro Graphics & Exhibits president Larry Horowitz spent weeks experimenting with surfaces, coatings and colors, eventually setting on a bronze-gold background that makes the mural's layers of images glow and pop. The aluminum foil covering is coated with a solution that serves as an ink receptor, Horowitz said; the "dots" that compose the images are diffused. A laminate adds a UV protectant and a bronze cast to the gold background. In all, 40 panels were printed and cut to provide a seamless look for the 10 foot by 50 foot La Memoria.

Using many layers results in a holographic effect. As a viewer walks back and forth in front of the 4-inch thick mural installed last weekend,



forms move in and out of focus, figures recede, colors shift. All take advantage of the abundant light that streams through the terminal's glass wall.

"I'm not trying to be didactic," Baca said. "I wanted to give a metaphorical and spiritual view of a land that remembers us. The mud and the blood."

La Memoria is one of the last pieces to be installed as part of the DIA public art program, in this case as the second of two community mural projects administered by local arts groups. Marcus Akinlana's Mile High and Rising, managed by the ULOZI organization, was completed last March.

Baca's La Memoria was commissioned by the Chicano Humanities and Arts Council, or CHAC, which oversaw the \$110,000 project. The artist was paid \$87,000, which included creating a Web site as well as fabrication and installation of the panels. Baca also used about \$10,000 from a senior fellowship at the Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue at Harvard University.



CHAC spokeswoman Michelann Sweeney said the group wanted to install a computer at the mural so viewers could tap into Baca's narrative. They're still trying to work out details. A dedication date had not yet been set for the mural, Sweeney noted.

Founder of the first City of Los Angeles Mural Program more than 25 years ago, Baca has developed more than 80 pieces there, while organizing and promoting the World Wall project around the globe. She also is vice chairwoman of the Cesar Chavez Center at UCLA, and a professor in that school's world arts and culture department.

bringing them out -- was her goal for La Memoria.

"I took the concept of all the things that had happened on the land, and that could be embodied in space." Thus the layering, as decades of events seem to float over the mountains and valleys of Baca's landscape.

She wanted "to create an artwork that would give dignity to the Mestizo's story and the stories of the countless others who toiled in the mines, fields and railroads of Colorado. Not only to tell the forgotten stories of people who, like birds or water, traveled back and forth across the land freely, before there was a line that distinguished which side you were from, but to speak to our shared human condition as temporary residents of the earth."

Finding the stories in the land -- and



She also sees the work as a way to "keep murals alive, so they're not staid, not stuck in the 1970s." (*Click on mural above to go to SPARC official mural site where you can see more details and the stories behind the images*)

Baca visited schools and community groups in Colorado, talking to residents about their family histories and drawing from historic photos.

Though her family left the La Junta area before World War II, their ties are still there. A few years ago, Baca's mother was successful in forcing the state to maintain all graves in the segregated cemetery in which Teodoro Baca is buried -- not just those of people of Anglo heritage.

Visits to the La Junta area and a week's residency at the University of Colorado helped inform the piece. "I can't believe how generous people were who sent photographs. This is like Chicano History 101." She said she was aware that her selection for the project caused some consternation "because I didn't live in Colorado. But my family was here. And people were interested in seeing that story told."

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