

106

SUCCESS STORY

A Place to Celebrate Chicano Civil Rights Restored with Federal Funds

San Diego, California



“The murals throughout the park are not only the cornerstones for this park but are a symbol of cultural pride for many who live in the area.”

—MARCIA C. MCLATCHY
City of San Diego
Director of Parks and Recreation



THE STORY

The 1963 construction of Interstate 5 bisected San Diego’s largest Mexican American neighborhood, now known as Barrio Logan. In 1969, the Coronado Bay Bridge opened, further devastating the neighborhood. When the state began construction of a California Highway Patrol (CHP) substation under the bridge where the City had promised residents a neighborhood park, the Chicano community exploded in protest and physically occupied the site forcing construction to stop. As a result of the protest and subsequent negotiations, the CHP station was relocated and “Chicano Park” was created in the space beneath the San Diego–Coronado Bay Bridge approach ramps. Today, the 7.4 acre park contains a rare assemblage of 49 brightly painted murals considered the works of masters of Chicano Movement muralism, painted on the bridge’s columns and abutments in the 1970s and ‘80s. These works of art commemorate the struggle of Chicanos throughout history and the community protest and park takeover on April 22, 1970. Though not yet 50 years in age, the park and its murals are listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a site of exceptional significance.

THE PROJECT

By the late 1990s, the brightly painted murals were deteriorating and in need of attention. Individual artists had been repairing damaged murals, personally paying for most of the costs. Although some local grants were provided, these artists’ efforts to restore and preserve the murals were in need of additional funding. In 1999, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), the agency that owns the bridges, applied for and, in 2002, received a \$1.6 million grant for the restoration of 18 of the murals. Federal funds came from the Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA) Transportation Enhancement (TE) program, a program to improve the transportation experience through grants for activities related to surface transportation.

THE 106 PROCESS

The FHWA, the federal agency funding this project, was responsible for conducting

Photos: Above, Chicano Park Take-Over (photo by Todd Stands, courtesy California SHPO); Right, celebrating Chicano Park Day (photos courtesy Chicano Park Steering Committee)

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Photos: Above, Colossus (photo by Joe Porras, courtesy California SHPO); Right, restoration of a mural (photo by Ricardo Duffy, courtesy Caltrans)

the Section 106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act. Section 106 requires that federal agencies identify historic properties and assess the effects of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit on those properties. Federal agencies also are required to consult with parties that have an interest in the fate of the property when adverse effects are likely to ensue.

To be eligible for TE funding, a historic preservation project must demonstrate a relationship to surface transportation and result in historic preservation consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Preservation Projects. The artists used the bridge columns as the canvas for their works, providing the needed transportation link to qualify for TE funding. FHWA provided the federal grant and delegated responsibility to Caltrans for consulting with the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and other parties to ensure the project preserved the historic character and qualities of the murals. Caltrans staff worked with the artists, community activists, local governments, and the SHPO to develop the project that allowed the mural artists to work on and copyright their intellectual property. A restoration manual was prepared to guide the work, and a contractor was hired to oversee the project.

THE SUCCESS

One of the largest, most important collections of outdoor murals in the country has been restored by the original artists, and Caltrans was able to help a low income, minority community restore a place to celebrate their heritage and enjoy exceptional works of art. The federal funding and Section 106 process provided a framework for the community to develop the project in a historically and culturally sensitive manner and preserve exceptional murals that were threatened by a lack of funding and the ongoing deterioration of outdoor public art. The community has a restored neighborhood park for important holidays, such as "El Grito," and the yearly celebration of Chicano Park Day.

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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Consulting Parties:

- California Department of Transportation
- California State Historic Preservation Officer
- Save Our Heritage Organisation (SOHO)
- City of San Diego
- Chicano Park Steering Committee
- Original Muralists: Salvador Torres, Mario Torero, Victor Ochoa, Sal Barajas
- California Arts Council

For more about Section 106 and the ACHP go to www.achp.gov



Preserving America's Heritage