

Exhibition: *Painting in the River of Angels: Judy Baca and The Great Wall*

Dates: October 26, 2023–June 2, 2024

Location: Resnick Pavilion



(Image captions on page 4)

(Los Angeles, CA—September 26, 2023) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Painting in the River of Angels: Judy Baca and The Great Wall*, the artist's first solo exhibition at the museum. Los Angeles artist Judy Baca (b. 1946) conceived *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* (1975) as a monument to the people of California. Over five summers (1976-83), Baca collaborated with 400 youth, artists, and community members on a mural that told the erased histories of local communities. The artist, alongside members of the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), an organization Baca co-founded, designed the mural and painted it on the walls of the Tujunga Wash, a tributary of the L.A. River in North Hollywood, California. In 2021, SPARC received a grant from the Mellon Foundation to expand the landmark's chronology into the 21st century.

At LACMA, Baca and SPARC artists will paint new sections of *The Great Wall* during the museum's public hours. These new paintings span the 1960s with the first panel depicting moments of the Chicano Movement including the Farmworkers' Movement and the East L.A. Student Walkouts, and the second panel featuring vignettes of the Watts Rebellion, Watts Renaissance, and community organizing by the Black Panthers. After the artists complete the paintings at LACMA, these panels will be added to *The Great Wall*, as part of the expansion that creates a mile of visual history. LACMA's exhibition will also debut *Generation on Fire*, a new section of the wall memorializing activists known as the Freedom Riders. In 1961, they boarded buses traveling from Washington, D.C. to Southern states to challenge segregation on public transit. Baca centers the activists forming a circle in solidarity.

In addition to the paintings, LACMA's exhibition features materials from the artist's archive that have never been exhibited, revealing Baca's process and innovations to muralism. Additionally, the exhibition includes Baca's Augmented Reality Lens, *The River Once Ran* (2022), part of Collection II of LACMA x Snapchat: Monumental Perspectives.

Painting in the River of Angels is co-curated by Dhyandra Lawson, Andy Song Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art, and Deliasofia Zacarias, Executive Assistant and Fellow, Director's Office, LACMA.

"Fifty years ago, Judy Baca began painting in the L.A. River to share communities' unreported perspectives, effectively shouting from the gutter of history," said Dhyandra Lawson. "Her impact in L.A. and on the history of art and muralism are immeasurable. We are honored to work with Judy and SPARC artists on this unprecedented project, illuminating her vision for a people's monument she now expands into the present."

Deliasofia Zacarias added, "Baca is revered for many career-long achievements that have expanded public access to art and art education. At LACMA, she continues this commitment by allowing museum audiences to witness her work in real time, thereby challenging traditional distinctions between public and private space, as well as public and private practice."

"LACMA's galleries will transform into an active art studio, where audiences will be able to witness Judy Baca and her team paint new murals of *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* before they are permanently installed on the banks of the L.A. River," said Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director. "Baca's work re-examines history, monumental painting, and representation of Los Angeles and its communities. *Painting in the River of Angels* is a testament to artistic legacy and the power of visual storytelling in amplifying diverse voices."

About Judy Baca

As one of America's leading visual artists, Dr. Judy Baca has created public art for four decades. In 1974, Baca founded the City of Los Angeles's first mural program, which produced over 400 murals, employed thousands of local participants, and evolved into an arts organization—the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC). She continues to serve as SPARC's artistic director while promoting social justice and participatory public art projects. Her best-known work is *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*. Located in the San Fernando Valley, the mural spans half a mile and is still a work in progress that is engaging another generation of youth. The mural-making process has exemplified community involvement, employing more than 400 youth and their families from diverse social and economic backgrounds, artists, oral

historians, and scholars. In 2017 *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* received national recognition on the National Registry of Historic Places by the U.S. Department of the Interior. Baca is a recipient of the Guggenheim Fellowship, the United States Artist Rockefeller Fellowship, and the Mellon Foundation Grant for the expansion of *The Great Wall*. Most recently, she was honored with the 2021 National Medal of Arts. Baca makes art shaped by an interactive relationship of history, people, and place. Her public artworks focus on revealing and reconciling peoples' struggles for their rights and affirming the community's connections to place. Together, she co-creates "sites of public memory."

On November 4, 2023, Baca will be honored alongside filmmaker David Fincher at the 2023 Art+Film Gala, presented by Gucci.

Background


LACMA has a history of presenting exhibitions highlighting local Latine and Chicane artists dating to the 1970s, when the museum organized *Los Four: Almaraz, de la Rocha, Lujan, Romero* (February 26–April 7, 1974), a history-making exhibition that established LACMA as the first mainstream museum to recognize the importance of Chicano Art as a unique school of American art. In the following decades, LACMA presented exhibitions including *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors* (February 5–April 16, 1989), considered the first major museum exhibition to survey in depth the work of contemporary American artists of Hispanic origin. Over the past 15 years, LACMA has continued its commitment to collecting, exhibiting, and interpreting work by Latine, Chicane, and Latin American artists across generations, mediums, and subjects to better reflect the diverse community it serves. Notable exhibitions include *Phantom Sightings: Art after the Chicano Movement* (2008); *Asco: Elite of the Obscure, A Retrospective, 1972–1987* (2011); *Under the Mexican Sky: Gabriel Figueroa – Art and Film* (2013); *Picasso and Rivera: Conversations Across Time* (2016-2017); *Playing with Fire: Paintings by Carlos Almaraz* (2017); *Alejandro G. Iñárritu: CARNE y ARENA (Virtually present, Physically invisible)* (2017–18); *Rufino Tamayo: Innovation and Experimentation* (2019-2020); *Luchita Hurtado: I Live I Die I Will Be Reborn* (2020); *Carmen Herrera: Estructura Verde* (2021–22); *Mixpantli: Contemporary Echoes* (2021–22), among others.

On view November 12, 2023–August 11, 2024, *Vincent Valdez and Ry Cooder: El Chavez Ravine* will explore Valdez's oil painting on a 1953 Chevrolet ice cream truck portraying the forced removal of a predominantly Mexican American community in preparation for the construction of Dodger Stadium in the late 1950s. Recently acquired by LACMA, the work draws from the style and history of Mexican muralism and Chicano car culture, and serves as a mobile monument to a living chapter in the history of Los Angeles.

Credit

This exhibition is organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

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Painting in the River of Angels: Judy Baca and The Great Wall was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

About LACMA

Located on the Pacific Rim, LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of nearly 152,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. Committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories, LACMA exhibits and interprets works of art from new and unexpected points of view that are informed by the region's rich cultural heritage and diverse population. LACMA's spirit of experimentation is reflected in its work with artists, technologists, and thought leaders as well as in its regional, national, and global partnerships to share collections and programs, create pioneering initiatives, and engage new audiences.

Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 900036. lacma.org

Image captions: (left to right) Judy Baca painting *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, summer of 1983, photo courtesy of the SPARC Archives (SPARCinLA.org); Judy Baca and members of SPARC, 1981, courtesy of Judith F. Baca and the SPARC archives, © SPARC, photo by Gia Roland

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