

TENOCHTITLAN: THE WALL THAT TALKS

6029 – 6039 North Figueroa Street

CHC-2022-5945-HCM

ENV-2022-5946-CE

FINDINGS

- Tenochtitlan: The Wall that Talks “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” for its association with the national resurgence of the Chicano movement in the 1990s in response to racial and socioeconomic injustices the Latino community was experiencing. It is also significant for Chicanos's contributions to the prolific period of public art that made Los Angeles a global cultural engine in the 1990s.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Tenochtitlan: The Wall that Talks meets one of the Historic-Cultural Monument criteria: it “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” for its association with the national resurgence of the Chicano movement in the 1990s in response to racial and socioeconomic injustices the Latino community was experiencing. It is also significant for Chicanos's contributions to the prolific period of public art that made Los Angeles a global cultural engine in the 1990s.

From the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, Los Angeles was a hub for global economic activity yet Black, Latino, and other communities of color were living in poverty, overpoliced, and marginalized. When the once booming California aerospace economy trickled to an end in the early 1990s economic unrest set into motion a recession, which collapsed the real estate market in Los Angeles and led to substantial job loss. The economic downturn and high rates of unemployment fueled the racist and anti-immigrant ethos in Los Angeles against Blacks, Latinos, and other people of color. Landmark events capture the racial and social inequalities of the time, such as the 1992 Los Angeles riots and the subsequent arrest and deportation of over 1,000 Latino immigrants by United States Border Patrol agents, as well as the erection of a 10-foot-high, seven-mile-long steel wall in 1991 between San Diego and Tijuana that embodied the antiimmigrant sentiment at the time. Additionally, the gang violence in Los Angeles in the 1990s became endemic with more than 5,100 confirmed gang related deaths in Los Angeles County from 1990 to 1996, of which more than 60% were Chicanos or Latinos. As a response, there was a resurgence of the Chicano movement aimed at giving rise to the political power of working-class Latinos in Los Angeles. Chicano and Latino artists proved to be integral to the political mobilization in the Latino community and together played an important role in the transformation that Los Angeles underwent from the mid to late nineties.

Los Angeles has a rich history of public art, ranging from civic projects and corporate sculpture to folk art, murals, and graffiti. The public art in Los Angeles reflects the city’s vast geography as well as its cultural diversity. Latinos have been integral to the public art of Los Angeles, mostly through murals such as the subject mural. Though most frequently identified with the Chicano movement of the 1960s and its resurgence in the 1990s, murals have been a popular form of Latino art since the early twentieth century. As illustrated by the subject mural, muralism has been a way for Chicanos and Latinos to publicly express their reaction to the social, economic, and

political conditions they were experiencing. In addition, this art form has allowed the Chicano and Latino communities to represent their own cultures, as opposed to having their cultures projected onto them by an outside population. The subject mural depicts empowering images of Meso-American and Chicano historical figures, places, and cultural traditions as a source of empowerment to combat the long history of negative images of Chicanos portrayed in the media.

Further, the 1990s were a defining time in Los Angeles's arts and cultural scene that marked a shift away from the glitz of Hollywood towards being more politically charged and socially conscious. This effort was in large part due to Chicano artists and their focus on social injustices, which manifested in their works across all mediums. Examples of the impact of Chicano artists at the time include the Latinos in hip-hop documentary *Pass the Mic!* which chronicles the success of the Chicano rap groups A Lighter Shade of Brown and Delinquent Habits whose albums and singles went gold in the 1990s; the Edward James Olmos directed movie *American Me* which premiered at the 1992 Cannes Film Festival in France, then opened up as the number four movie in the United States; Luis J Rodriguez's award-winning 1993 classic memoir, *Always Running: La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A.*, which became a bestseller and acclaimed book; socially conscious rap artist, Tupac Shakur's, 1996 album, *The Don Killuminati: The 7 Day Theory*, that went quadruple platinum by 1999; and the temporary display of the previously censored 1981 mural by Chicana artist Barbara Carrasco, "LA History: A Mexican Perspective," at Union Station in 1990. Although Chicano and US born Latino artists and their works remained excluded from mainstream art galleries, museums, and major art institutions in Los Angeles, they reached new heights in the broader mainstream culture of the 1990s as exemplified by the corporate advertisers that copied the style of Chicano murals in Los Angeles for their advertisements on street walls across the city. Mentioned in numerous books and Los Angeles tour guides, Tenochtitlan: The Wall that Talks represents Chicanos's significant contributions to the cultural and social history of Los Angeles during the 1990s and stands as a cultural treasure within the Highland Park community.

While the applicant argues that the subject mural also "is associated with the lives of historic personages important to national, state, city, or local history" for its association with the life and legacy of César Estrada Chávez, the Mexican American child farmworker turned labor leader and union organizer, staff are unable to make this finding. While depicted in the subject mural, Chávez, an historical personage who passed away in 1993 prior to the completion of the mural, did not paint the mural and did not take part in the development of its creation. The subject mural is also not associated with the productive life of Chávez as a labor leader or civil rights activist and does not represent his significant contributions to the improvement of pay and working conditions for farm workers for which he is widely known.

The subject mural has experienced only minor alterations and retains a high level of integrity of location, setting, materials, design, feeling, and association to convey its significance. Many of the Chicano and Latino murals from the 1990s have been whitewashed, and artworks such as the subject mural are increasingly rare.

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT ("CEQA") FINDINGS

State of California CEQA Guidelines, Article 19, Section 15308, Class 8 "*consists of actions taken by regulatory agencies, as authorized by state or local ordinance, to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of the environment where the regulatory process involves procedures for protection of the environment.*"

State of California CEQA Guidelines Article 19, Section 15331, Class 31 "*consists of projects limited to maintenance, repair, stabilization, rehabilitation, restoration, preservation, conservation*

or reconstruction of historical resources in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic buildings."

The designation of Tenochtitlan: The Wall that Talks as an Historic-Cultural Monument in accordance with Chapter 9, Article 1, of The City of Los Angeles Administrative Code ("LAAC") will ensure that future construction activities involving the subject mural are regulated in accordance with Section 22.171.14 of the LAAC. The purpose of the designation is to prevent significant impacts to a Historic-Cultural Monument through the application of the standards set forth in the LAAC. Without the regulation imposed by way of the pending designation, the historic significance and integrity of the subject mural could be lost through incompatible alterations and new construction and the demolition of an irreplaceable historic site. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation are expressly incorporated into the LAAC and provide standards concerning the historically appropriate construction activities which will ensure the continued preservation of the subject mural.

The City of Los Angeles has determined based on the whole of the administrative record, that substantial evidence supports that the Project is exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section Article 19, Section 15308, Class 8 and Class 31, and none of the exceptions to a categorical exemption pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 applies. The project was found to be exempt based on the following:

The use of Categorical Exemption Class 8 in connection with the proposed designation is consistent with the goals of maintaining, restoring, enhancing, and protecting the environment through the imposition of regulations designed to prevent the degradation of Historic-Cultural Monuments.

The use of Categorical Exemption Class 31 in connection with the proposed designation is consistent with the goals relating to the preservation, rehabilitation, restoration and reconstruction of historic buildings and sites in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

Categorical Exemption ENV-2022-5946-CE was prepared on October 21, 2022.