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Pilar Tompkins Discusses the Exhibition *Mapping Another L.A.: The Chicano Art Movement* at the Fowler Museum

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Throughout [Pacific Standard Time](#), ForYourArt is asking curators of the more than 60 exhibitions for insight into their shows. Leading off with why their lead image is important, they will give us topics to discuss as you go through the exhibition and where you can learn more afterward. Visit [Mapping Another L.A.: The Chicano Art Movement](#) at the [Fowler Museum](#) through February 26th.



How does the image *The Great Wall of Los Angeles, Work in Progress* represent your exhibition?

The emergence of Chicano art in Los Angeles, as in many other urban centers, was sparked by the desire to reclaim public space in the wake of urban renewal and postwar policies that fractured the artists' communities and limited mobility within the urban core. Chicano artists created a sense of place through works that provided "cognitive mapping" of Los Angeles. Rather than produce a literal representation of streets and freeways, artists mapped the city's hidden culture, history, and social relations. This sense of place was designed to move people not through cartographic space, but through the societal barriers to education, civic participation, equal opportunity, and social mobility.

In the 1970s the primary visual forms that emerged—murals, posters, and photography—were also those that could reach the largest number of people, forming the cornerstone of community making through art. But the nine art groups considered in this exhibition did more than just provide a cognitive map, they also changed social space itself by converting abandoned buildings into community-based art centers, painting murals on walls, and establishing educational programs in parks, on the streets, and in the classroom. By early 1975, Chicano artists had produced nearly 300 murals and wall decorations across East Los Angeles. The result was a shared, collective Chicano experience.

The [Social and Public Art Resource Center \(SPARC\)](#) led by artist Judy Baca provided workshops and exhibitions in its facility and sponsored major mural projects including *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, executed by more than 400 young people and artists over the course of several summers beginning in 1976. Here, as with other educational efforts by Chicano art groups, mural production was a critical part of establishing a collaborative dialogue with Chicano youth. By working on the mural, they developed a personal stake in public art as a form of cultural capital.



What do you hope visitors will think about or consider while they are at the exhibition? What are some discussion topics?

Mapping Another L.A.: The Chicano Art Movement looks at how nine artist groups and art spaces employed art to increase social equity and cultural visibility for Chicanos. These groups are: Goetz Art Studios and Gallery (1969–), Mechicano Art Center (1969–1978), Plaza de la Raza (1969–), Self Help Graphics & Art (1971–), Asco (1971–1987), Los Four (1973–1977), Los Dos Streetscapers (1975–1980, renamed East Los Streetscapers in 1980), Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC, 1976–), and Centro de Arte Público/Public Art Center (1977–1980).

The artists associated with these organizations began a collective and ambitious reimagining of the urban landscape through photography, graphic arts, murals, and large-scale architectural plans, as well as painting, sculpture, drawing, installation, and performance art. Their work drew on their experiences in the barrio, but it was also global in orientation and often experimental in form, exploring the uncharted spaces among Mexican traditions, Chicano vernacular, and American modernism. Produced during the 1970s, the artworks in this exhibition are selected and organized to “map” the diverse ways in which these groups created cultural visibility, first through the reclaimed use of public space, then through a broad range of aesthetic principles, public exhibitions, and statements on the role of the artist. The exhibition then explores the intersections between artist groups, their use of “style” as a political and artistic strategy, and the new beginnings as the artists and art groups entered the 1980s. In the gallery space, viewers will encounter many large scale and graphic works that redefined social space during the 1970s. The goal of the exhibition is to be immersive, visually, rather than present a chronology or focus on individual objects.

