

THE GREAT WALL OF LOS ANGELES AT 40

A Conversation with

JUDY BACA

and Screening of *Mur Murs*

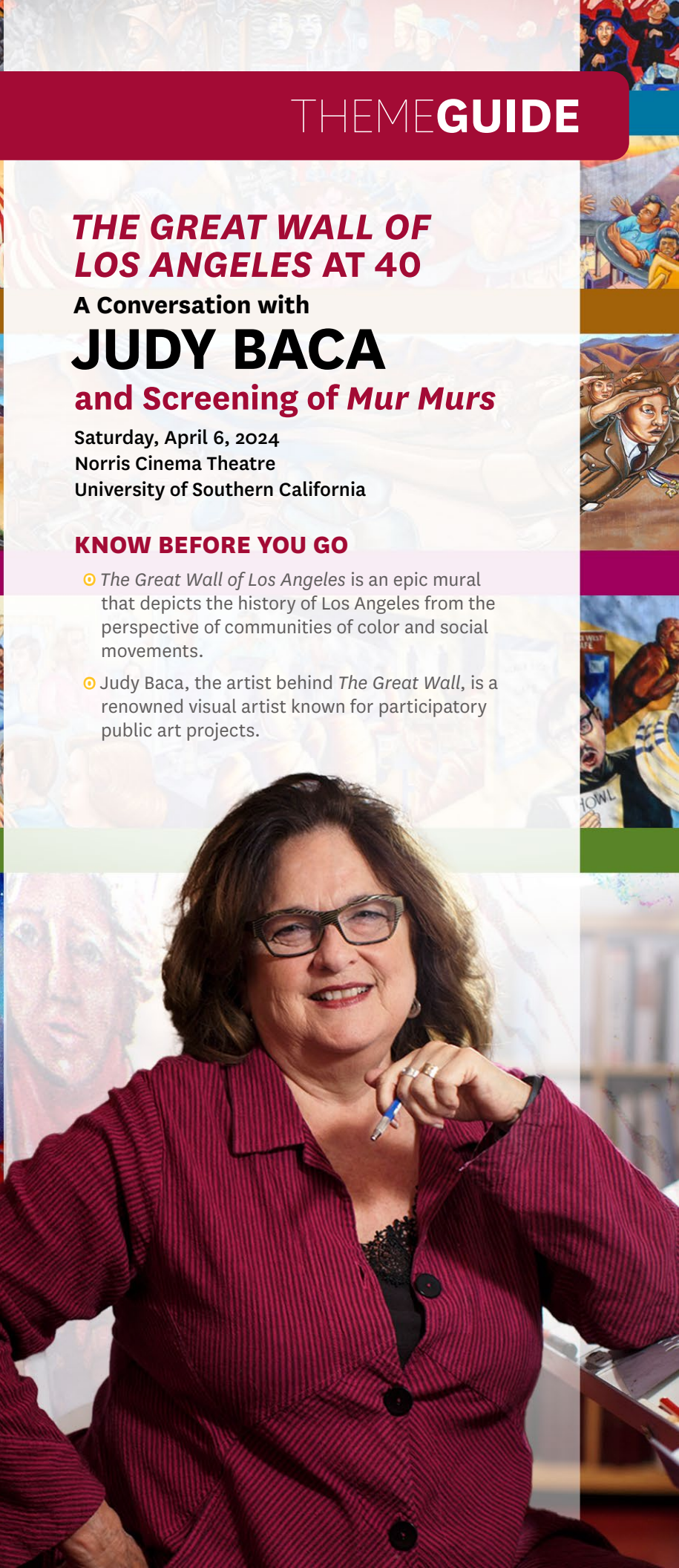
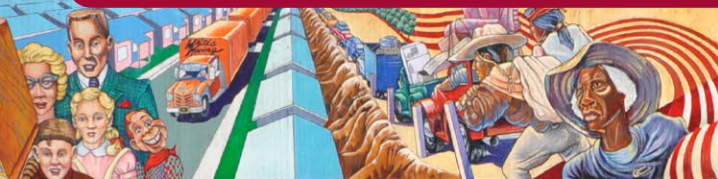
Saturday, April 6, 2024

Norris Cinema Theatre

University of Southern California

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* is an epic mural that depicts the history of Los Angeles from the perspective of communities of color and social movements.
- Judy Baca, the artist behind *The Great Wall*, is a renowned visual artist known for participatory public art projects.



- 🕒 This event will feature a screening of the documentary *Mur Murs* by Agnès Varda and a conversation with Judy Baca, moderated by Stacy Williams of the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA.

THE GREAT WALL OF LOS ANGELES

The Great Wall of Los Angeles is a mural painted on the west wall of the Tujunga Flood Control Channel in North Hollywood. It depicts a multicultural history of California from pre-history through the 1950s, highlighting the experiences of communities of color and social movements for LGBTQ rights, immigrant and racial justice, and more.

At more than half a mile long, *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* is one of the largest murals in the world. Formally, it reflects the style of the 1970s Chicano/a mural movement, as well as influences and symbols from Indigenous Mesoamerican art, European figurative art, and the Mexican muralists and Works Progress Administration art of the 1930s.

Judy Baca provided the artistic vision for the mural, including creating it as a collaborative project with the community. More than 400 youth and their families have been involved in creating *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, working with artists, oral historians, ethnologists, and scholars.

In 2017, *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* received recognition on the National Registry of Historic Places by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

The original work on the mural happened between 1974 and 1983. The mural is still in progress, with plans underway for its next four decades of evolution.

Sources: judybaca.com, The Great Wall Institute at SPARC, National Park Service

JUDY BACA

Judy Baca (b. 1946) is a renowned visual artist who has been creating public art for four decades. In 1974, Baca founded the first mural program of the City of Los Angeles, which produced over 400 murals and employed thousands of local participants. It evolved into an arts organization known as the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC). Baca's most well-known works are part of *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*.

Baca continues to serve as SPARC's artistic director and focuses her creative energy in the UCLA@SPARC Digital/Mural Lab, employing digital technology to promote social justice and participatory public arts projects. An emeritus professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, where she was a senior professor in the Chicana/o Studies and World Art and Cultures Departments from 1980 to 2018, Baca is a recipient of the Guggenheim Fellowship, the United States Artist Rockefeller Fellowship, and over 50 awards from various community groups.

"I want to produce artwork that has meaning beyond simple decorative values. I hope to use public space to create public voice, and consciousness about the presence of people who are often the majority of the population but who may not be represented in any visual way. By telling their stories we are giving voice to the voiceless and visualizing the whole of the American story while creating sites of public memory."—Judy Baca



Judy Baca at *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*



Judy Baca



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LOS ANGELES'S SOCIAL MOVEMENT MURALS

From a 2001 article by Judy Baca:

"Murals in Los Angeles were the first artistic medium to support and then shape a movement toward identity and justice that reached a mass population. This artistic occupation of public space forged a strong visual presence of a people who at that time (late '60s, early '70s) lacked representation in public life, with neither voice in elections, nor elected representatives. No person of Latino descent served on the City Council or on the School Board, despite the fact that in actual numbers we were fast becoming the majority of the population. Parallel to and perhaps growing from this new visual strength, many citizens of emerging Latino communities organized, with very little money and freely given labor, toward the mutual goal of improving the conditions of their communities....

African American, Thai, Chinese, Jewish, and women's murals began to appear on the streets of Los Angeles. Before long, community murals began to attract media attention and documentation. Murals began to tackle larger issues of police brutality, border crossings, drug addiction, gang warfare, and other difficulties of a life of poverty and exclusion. Early in the movement space was freely available and uncontested ..."

Read more at sparcinla.org/brief-history

MUR MURS

Mur Murs (Mural Murals) is a 1981 documentary by French filmmaker Agnès Varda (1928–2019). The film features murals by various artists across Los Angeles, with a soundtrack including performances by Chicano punk band Los Illegals.

Agnès Varda made both documentary and fictional films, often pushing at the boundaries of genre and form. She was one of the most important filmmakers of the 20th century, sometimes called the grandmother of French New Wave.

MURAL PRESERVATION AND DESTRUCTION

Murals need to be taken care of to be preserved, and are vulnerable to neglect, impacts of weather, and intentional destruction. At one point there were about 5,000 murals in Los Angeles, and only about half of them remain, Judy Baca said in a discussion presented by Getty.

Iconic L.A. murals by artists including David Alfaro Siqueiros, Kent Twitchell, Frank Romero, and Judy Baca have been painted over, or whitewashed. This has also happened to murals that may have been less widely known but that were beloved parts of the community. In recent years, for example, several murals have been whitewashed in the midst of rapid gentrification in Highland Park. Sometimes a mural is painted over by a new property owner literally overnight, before the community has any chance to speak up and try to protect and preserve the public art.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- 🕒 Judy Baca has said, "I am beginning to believe I am a political landscape painter." What do you think she means by this?
- 🕒 Did you learn anything new about Los Angeles history from what is depicted on *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*?
- 🕒 Is there public art in the community you're from? Who made it? Who or what is represented in it?
- 🕒 How was the participatory, collaborative process part of the artistic vision for the *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*?



Judy Baca, *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*. "David Gonzales, Pacoima, CA."



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IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- 🕒 **4/10:** [*A Momentous Moment in Time of Passage and Landing: A Conversation with Muralist Dave Young Kim*](#)
- 🕒 **4/13:** [*The Great Wall of Los Angeles at 40 Walking Tour*](#)
- 🕒 **4/27:** [Rhythms + Visions / Expanded + Live 4](#)
- 🕒 The Great Wall of Los Angeles [\[MAP\]](#)
In the Tujunga Flood Control Channel between Oxnard Street, Coldwater Canyon Boulevard, Burbank Boulevard, and the Coldwater Canyon Extension road (aka Lancer Lane)
- 🕒 [10 Monumental Murals of Los Angeles](#)
- 🕒 [Judy Baca online](#)
- 🕒 [SPARC](#)
- 🕒 [Classes and events at the USC Roski School of Art and Design](#)

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

ADAM SEXTON of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this event. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

BOOKS

- 🕒 Eric Avila, [*The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City*](#) (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2014).
- 🕒 Cameron Cartiere, [*The Everyday Practice of Public Art: Art, Space, and Social Inclusion*](#) (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).
- 🕒 Robin Dunitz, [*Street Gallery: Guide to 1000 Los Angeles Murals*](#) (Los Angeles: RJD Enterprises, 1998).
- 🕒 Pamela Harris Lawton et al., [*Community-Based Art Education Across the Lifespan: Finding Common Ground*](#) (New York: Teachers College Press, 2019).
- 🕒 Mario Ontiveros, [*Baca: Art, Collaboration & Mural Making*](#) (Santa Monica: Angel City Press, 2017).
- 🕒 Johanna Taylor, [*The Art Museum Redefined: Power, Opportunity, and Community Engagement*](#) (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019).

DATABASES

- 🕒 [Public Art Archive](#)
- 🕒 [LA as Subject](#)

JOURNAL

- 🕒 [Public Art Review](#)

STREAMING MEDIA

- 🕒 [60 Minutes: Andy Rooney on Public Art](#)

WEBSITE

- 🕒 [Painting in the River of Angels: Judy Baca and The Great Wall](#)

