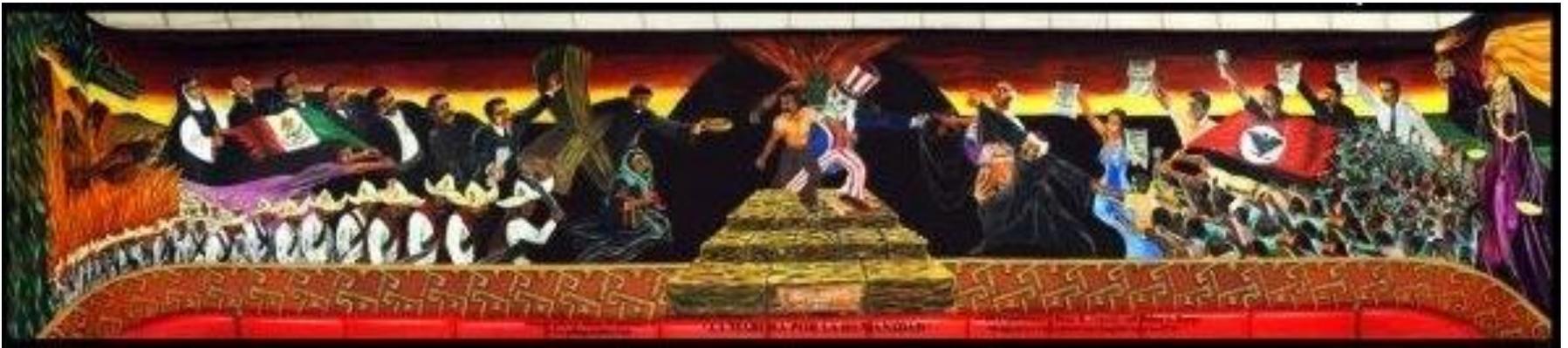


Proposal for the University of Houston System System Wide Arts Acquisition Committee (SWAAC) to accept “La Marcha por la Humanidad” into the Public Art Collection

LA MARCHA POR LA HUMANIDAD

by Mario Gonzalez and Ruben Reyna



9' x 44'

Acrylic on vinyl, completed 1973

UH Cougar Den, University Center

A Brief Background

Painted in the Cougar Den during the summer of 1973 by then University of Houston students and Vietnam War veterans Mario Gonzales and Ruben Reyna, the Chicano Student Mural has been a historical icon for almost forty years. A project of the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), a UH student group at the time, the idea of painting a mural in the Cougar Den was conceived by students who felt that the lack of student diversity in 1973 warranted a project that would symbolize the beginning of a new era of racial and ethnic integration (the Equal Educational Opportunities Act would not be signed for another year.) Mexican American students were only then becoming visible as a small community on the campus. Mexican American and African American students congregated in the Cougar Den and found sanctuary there as minorities in an overwhelmingly Anglo campus. Since Mexican American students gathered in the

Cougar Den, Mario Gonzales felt that one of the walls there would be a great place for a mural. He pointed out its height, length, and its slightly curved edges which he felt would provide an interesting perspective for a colorful mural that would depict the experiences of people of Mexican descent on both sides of the Mexican – United States border. Through the efforts of MAYO members, the Department of Ethnic Affairs, and the University of Houston Student Government, a small amount of money was allocated for the mural project.

In his quest for more knowledge over murals and the techniques of mural painting Mario Gonzales was able to obtain a small amount of money to travel to Mexico to look at the many murals that were painted by that nation's muralists over time. His travels took him to many places including Mexico City where he was able to see the incredible murals painted by Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Jose

Clemente Orozco, Juan O’Gorman, and other accomplished artists. It was by coincidence that he met the nephew of Siqueiros who was up in age but still painting in Mexico City. The opportunity to meet Siqueiros and to be invited into his home was an experience of a lifetime for Mario. The experience left a lasting impression on him as he spent several days with the famous muralist. Upon his return to the University of Houston, Mario was filled with much enthusiasm and recognized the important gift a mural would be for the future generations of University of Houston students.

The early 1970’s was the apex of the Chicano Movement, an important national social movement where people of Mexican descent sought meaningful social change and the elimination of segregated schools, a more democratic political system, their inclusion in the official history books used in the public school system, the end to police brutality, equality for Mexican American women in the home and in the

workplace, the establishment of Mexican American Studies on college campuses, fair representation on juries, the elimination of redlining among financial institutions, and a host of other inequalities that plagued our nation at that time. The mural project, named “La Marcha por la Humanidad” (March for Humanity) by Mario Gonzales as a tribute to David Alfaro Siqueiros, is a direct result of this important social movement that also saw a rebirth in Mexican American culture, history, music, and art. The Chicano Student Mural was also meant to be a tribute to this important historical period in our country and a very important part of the University of Houston’s history.

“La March de la Humanidad” is a tribute to the young Mexican American students of that era who joined African American, disenchanting Anglo students and other young people in challenging the inequalities that had evolved in our society at the time and on the U of H campus.

The UC Transformation Project and the Campaign to Keep the Chicano Mural in the Cougar Den

In 2008, UH students approved a fee increase to renovate the University Center. In the initial plans and up to late 2011, the mural's fate was unknown until UC leadership and related committees decided to not 'digitize' it thanks to the efforts and outrage exhibited by UH students, faculty, staff, and alumni. However, consideration of the option to move the mural to a more 'prominent' location had been announced in December 2011, an art conservator hired by the UC Transformation Project to look into the possibility. A coalition composed of students, faculty, staff, and alumni convened and believed that moving the mural would not only undermine the historical context of the location but also harm the mural due to its unique but effective method of preservation by the artists Mario Gonzalez and Ruben Reyna. A resolution by the coalition called for the following provisions in any future plans of the UC Renovation Project in regards to the mural:

Section 1: The mural entitled "Marcha de la Humanidad" (March of Humanity), aka the Chicano Student Mural, not be moved from its current location.

Section 2: Any future and/or finalization of UC Renovation Plans include that the Chicano Student Mural be its own room; the architects working with the UC Transformation Project look into transforming the area around the mural into an artistic space for students.

Section 3: An art conservator determine the best manner that the mural can be preserved in its current location.

Section 4: The mural always be available to students during the regular operating hours of the UC pending continued discussions and approval by the UC Policy Board and the University Bookstore.

Section 5: That the UC Policy Board seek to declare the mural and its immediate location as an important historical site of the

university's past; that a description and history of the mural be placed in front of it so that future students can understand its origins, importance and meaning with appropriate references to the mural in future UH literature and media.

The resolution was approved by the Student Government Association and the UC Policy Board. What followed was a meeting between UC officials including Keith Kowalka and Dr. Richard Walker and members of the coalition such as Mario Gonzalez, Lorenzo Cano, and Dr. Tatcho Mindiola where it was agreed upon that the UC Renovations would have the University Bookstore built around the mural, maintaining its location and making it a prominent piece of the UC with its own area, space, lighting, and marker within the University Bookstore. There are frequent meetings held between members of the UC Renovation Project and the coalition as to the preservation of the mural during the actual renovations.

(UC Renovation architect renderings of the mural within the Bookstore next page.)



Renderings courtesy of the UC Transformation Project

“La Marcha por la Humanidad” and SWAAC

“I. Charge

This Committee has been formed to select and acquire a notable collection to compliment and reinforce campus buildings and to benefit the University of Houston System and the community at large. It is responsible for artwork acquisition for all campuses of the University of Houston System.

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VIII. Conservation and Maintenance

a. Conservation priorities, conservation schedule and a conservation budget shall be established annually by the Curator of University Collections and approved by the SWAAC. This plan will be reviewed annually for adjustments.”

Currently, there is no official placement of the mural under any conservation or maintenance policy, the only technical language that can approximate its current situation is

the University Center’s private art collection (which as far as to our knowledge and conversations with Keith Kowalka, there is no policy offering conservation or maintenance.) In fact, the mural’s artist Mario Gonzalez has taken it upon himself to stop by every so once in a while to clean the mural over the years.

We hope that by placing it in the Public Art Collection, the mural will receive the conservation, maintenance, and attention it needs and deserves (there is also no media published by the University of Houston that alludes to the mural’s existence.) We also hope that any future renovations of the University Center will require some form of official discussion on the mural’s status that does not require outrage from students, faculty, staff, and alumni for talks to begin.

Hence, this proposal will conclude as follows:

Therefore, be it resolved by the University of Houston System System Wide Arts Acquisition Committee that the mural entitled “La Marcha por la Humanidad” located in the University of Houston’s University Center be accepted into the Public Art Collection.