

The Department of **Latina/Latino Studies**
& La Casa Cultural Latina Murals

HISTORY

The murals located at 510 East Chalmers (formerly the home of The Department of Latina/Latino Studies and La Casa Cultural Latina) were created in two separate periods under the direction of artist Oscar Martinez and symbolize the struggle of Latino/Latina students.

The original mural was painted by Martinez together with the assistance of other students in 1974 to prevent the new Latino Cultural Center from being closed. Drawing upon organizational strategies developed in home communities, students defined their claim to the space by painting a mural to cover the house's front room.

Sixteen years later when La Casa Cultural Latina moved into a new facility students organized demonstrations and signed petitions to save the murals. The facility would ultimately become the home to the Department of Latina/Latino Studies from 1995 until 2013.

The Murals

The murals are located in Room 103, stretching from the wood floor base to ceiling trim of each wall. The murals are painted onto wall paper (18" wide) which is directly on top of a plaster system on wood lath. Surface irregularities found on the plaster walls have become a part of the murals as repairs and additions have left an uneven finish.

Three areas of the murals appear to be the central vignettes of the greater work:

- La Victoria – Northeast corner
- The Graduate – East wall
- El Trabajo - North wall, west section

Ceiling Mural

In 2004, Martinez was invited to restore the murals and finish a ceiling mural that was not completed in 1974. The ceiling mural, made possible through funding from the Office of the Chancellor, was



La Victoria (left)



The Graduate



El Trabajo (The Work)

done on canvas so it could be easily removed and transported if necessary. The ceiling panel (10'3" x 12'4") is covered by two separate canvases side-by-side, stretched across the ceiling surface, and

held in place by the wood molding at its edge. The mural was completed by Martinez and his daughter, Zulian Tooney Martinez.

(over)

FEASIBILITY STUDY

Johnson Lasky Architects, the Department of Latina/Latino Studies, La Casa Cultural Latina, and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign administrative units worked together on a feasibility study and recommendations for associated conservation work.

Conservation Recommendations:

1. Site Preparation and Photography

The recommendation is for the murals to be documented with high resolution photography. The digital files would be stored in the University Archives and could be used to create reproductions of the artwork at full-scale or at other scales, or to produce smaller painting-sized canvases of a particular vignette of the mural.

*Alternate Option: 3D Digital Modeling

Performing a 3D virtual reconstruction of the murals would record the original as built artwork with high resolution photography, prior to dismantling, and provide similar documentation as described above. This process would also allow viewers to explore the mural in interactive 3D space from remote locations, provide for an augmented reality overlay, pop-up display, or prints of the original space.

2. Mural Extraction, Transport, and Storage

After the murals and room have been completely documented, all parts of the mural would be removed from the house and conserved. The canvas-backed ceiling mural and the window panel would be removed. The wall mural and the plaster that supports it would be removed from the house in sections that would be delivered to a conservation laboratory for restoration and conservation treatments. The paper on which the paint is adhered to would be transferred to a new canvas backing, which will allow the work to be moved and displayed. Once the murals have been affixed to the canvas backing they can be stored, moved, and mounted like a painting.



Above: excerpts from ceiling mural

Meaning

In many Latin American communities, communally produced murals serve as markers and acts to claim ownership of contested space. The murals represent the processes of activism and community building of Latina/Latino students beginning in the 1960s, while also celebrating Latino culture and education as a vehicle for prosperity and knowledge.

About the Artist

Oscar Martínez resides in Chicago, Illinois. Through the study of science and art at the University of Illinois in 1977, he received a Bachelor of Science in Medical Art from the University of Illinois Medical Center. Mr. Martínez is an accomplished artist who has had numerous group and solo exhibitions throughout the Caribbean, Mexico, and the southeastern and midwest regions of the United States.

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IMAGES AT

<https://uofi.box.com/murals>