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## A Year-End List for Los Angeles Murals

<http://www.kcet.org/socal/departures/landofsunshine/arts/murals/a-year-end-list-for-los-angeles-murals.html>

by [Ed Fuentes \(http://www.kcet.org/user/profile/efuentes\)](http://www.kcet.org/user/profile/efuentes)

on December 22, 2011 2:30 PM



Saber tags the sky over Downtown Los Angeles | Courtesy of Birdman Photos

For a city with a moratorium on murals, the art form managed to be in the public eye in 2011. Street art took its place alongside traditional works, vintage works were restored, policy and enforcement were being questioned--all while ordinances that stopped new mural works from going up on private walls were being reviewed.

If you are not saddled with year-end list fatigue, here's a timeline of some mural stories from the year.

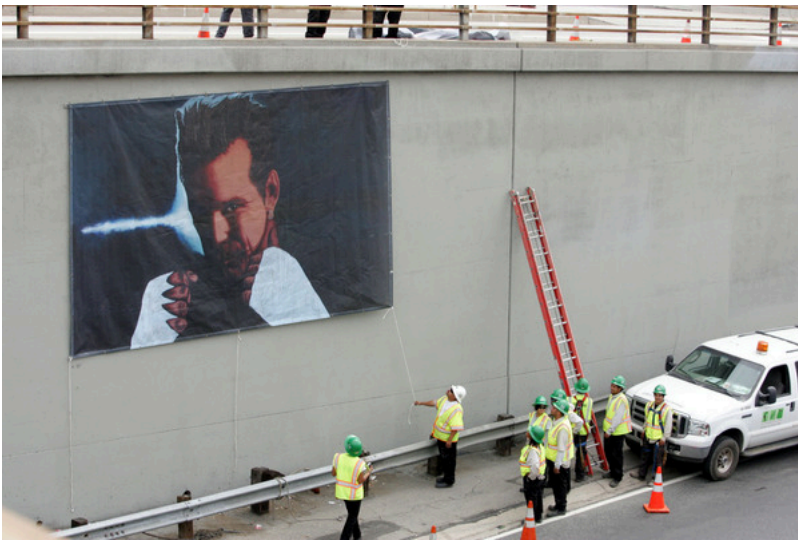
**The Rally from the Valley Alley:** It was the citation heard around the Los Angeles mural grapevine. When [Valley Village resident Barbara Black \(http://www.kcet.org/updaily/socal\\_focus/departures/the-politics-of-murals-has-las-legacy-fading-32162.html\)](#) received a \$360 citation by the Department of Building and Safety on February 22nd, it illustrated the conflicted relationship between murals, private property owners, aerosol art and the city.

Media covered the story about the piece not commissioned by a gallery or a Latino-based business or residence, but a retiree with a limited income who hired local high school kids to paint her alley wall. It was happening elsewhere in Los Angeles for years, but there was something about being outside the innercity that made a different subtext, prompting more media attention.

The Valley Village whitewash is still brought up during public comment as an example of what muralists and their benefactors have had to face under the city's sign ordinances. As for the mural, it was painted over in April and Black received a donation from her church to pay the \$360 fine.

**Writer in the Sky:** It was a blatant, bold and direct message to City Hall. Street artist [Saber's hiring of a crew to skywrite messages \(http://www.kcet.org/socal/departures/landofsunshine/arts/murals/saber-tags-sky-for-sake-of-street-art.html\)](#) like "end mural moratorium" and "art is not a crime" over downtown Los Angeles was social marketing for a cause. Some credit the September 19th air raid as the push that had the city redraft ordinances. It wasn't. That process was already in the early stages. Still, the message for the benefit of street art and graffiti brought more attention to the overall plight of murals in the city. The supportive response to the sky tweet showed policymakers that people were willing to pay closer attention, and it may have cooled the heels of law enforcement ready to call anything painted on wall vandalism.

**The Great Restoration:** [The Great Wall of Los Angeles \(http://www.kcet.org/socal/departures/lariver/convergence/the-great-wall-of-los-angeles-1.html\)](#) was restored, and rededicated September 17th. Just as David Siqueiros' "America Tropical" is a benchmark for murals in Los Angeles--there were those made before and after 1932--The Great Wall of Los Angeles' years of production, 1974 to 1983, marks a time when murals went from being neighborhood art projects to a component of the Los Angeles Olympic Arts Festival in 1984.



Replica of Ruben Soto's I Know Who I Am being installed on the 101 | Caltrans

**Not A Banner Year:** With constant tagging and no surplus, it is no surprise that Caltrans is seeking ways to maintain murals on freeways without repeated restoration. The beleaguered state agency's idea, sponsored by Wells Fargo, was to showcase previous works by installing them as banners near their original locations along the 101 Freeway. Not only was scale lost, some pieces were stolen the night before its August 22nd dedication. Yet, it was something, at least. The project managers may want to consider displaying the temporary pieces in a public space accessible to foot traffic. It gives a chance to look at details of the works up close, something you can't do traveling 60 to 65 miles per hour.

**Code on Hold:** Since a council motion in June--one of many that have been filed in the last few years--the city summoned City Planning to work out an enforceable ordinance that allows murals to be painted on private property. The working draft introduced December 7th is now in public comment period. A public hearing is scheduled for January 10th, and the Planning Commission may consider a new draft in March. For the first time, momentum is on the side of artists. If it is passed, the new mural ordinance will be in the number one position for any possible 2012 list of mural news. A spot is reserved.



[Irish Headliners | Photo Courtesy of Man One](#)

[http://www.kcet.org/socal/departures/landofsunshine/derry\\_air.jpg](http://www.kcet.org/socal/departures/landofsunshine/derry_air.jpg) **Irish Beat:** Alex Poli, aka Man One, quietly served as an international street artist ambassador representing Los Angeles style. He traveled to Derry, Ireland, where he was joined with other international artists to lead graffiti/mural workshops. He also led workshops in Panama that came from an invitation by the State Department.

It made no headlines here, but in Ireland multiple stories by regional papers and outlets covered the invasion of artists. You may think that in the political groundwater of Northern Ireland, murals with scathing content would fit right in. "I made it a point to not bring in politics," said Poli. "It was art for art's sake." He goes on to say the 14- to 15-year-olds in the workshops "loved it," while some adults did not always like how political content was de-emphasized.

That is part of style found in murals around Los Angeles; find a rule to break and make someone bristle. Poli was invited back a few months later.



[Heartship in the Arts District by How & Nosm | Photo courtesy L.A. Freewalls Project / Jet Set Graffiti](#)

[http://www.kcet.org/socal/departures/landofsunshine/IMG\\_0890.jpg](http://www.kcet.org/socal/departures/landofsunshine/IMG_0890.jpg)

**LA Freewalls Project:** MOCA's Art in the Streets showed how large-scale street art infiltrated the mural tradition in an exhibition that attracted 201,352 visitors. Meanwhile, LA Freewalls Project literally showed what [was around the corner](http://www.kcet.org/socal/checklist/on-the-street/empire-and-heartship.html). A block from MOCA, the Arts District became an outdoor gallery that demonstrated what the museum was documenting, complimenting the two projects. MOCA's plan to take the show to the Brooklyn Museum fell through. Economic reasons, explained the museum, while some speculate it was the increase in tagging seen around MOCA. [LA Freewalls](http://www.jetsetgraffiti.com/tag/la-freewalls-project/) is still creating street art murals in the Arts District, continuing the incidental synergy.

**Pacific Standard Time:** Easily, a list within a list can be culled from [Pacific Standard Time's](http://www.kcet.org/socal/checklist/exhibition/pacific-standard-time-explained.html) slate of

exhibitions. "Carlos Almaraz" at Craig Krull Gallery, ["Art Along the Hyphen"](http://www.pacificstandardtime.org/exhibitions?id=art-along-the-hyphen-the-mexican-american-generation) (<http://www.pacificstandardtime.org/exhibitions?id=art-along-the-hyphen-the-mexican-american-generation>) at The Autry, and the [ASCO retrospective at LACMA](http://www.kcet.org/updaily/social_focus/commentary/movie-miento/1970s-la-chicano-conceptual-art-group-gets-its-due.html) ([http://www.kcet.org/updaily/social\\_focus/commentary/movie-miento/1970s-la-chicano-conceptual-art-group-gets-its-due.html](http://www.kcet.org/updaily/social_focus/commentary/movie-miento/1970s-la-chicano-conceptual-art-group-gets-its-due.html)) are showing how Chicano Art may not be in the form of a mural, but certainly has its calling card. Also on view was Millard Sheets' large-scale work for Home Savings and Loans, a tour by Autry National Center's "Art Along the Valley." Within all that is a multimedia mash-up executed by Sandra de la Loza at UCLA in [Mapping Another L.A.](http://www.fowler.ucla.edu/exhibitions/mapping-another-la-chicano-art-movement) (<http://www.fowler.ucla.edu/exhibitions/mapping-another-la-chicano-art-movement>), which hints that the [Mexican-American mural](http://www.kcet.org/social/departures/highland-park/painting-the-walls/) (<http://www.kcet.org/social/departures/highland-park/painting-the-walls/>) is ready to take on new forms.



[Freeway Lady waiting in studio | Courtesy of Kent Twitchell](#)

[http://www.kcet.org/social/departures/landofsunshine/lady\\_kt\\_kcet.jpg](http://www.kcet.org/social/departures/landofsunshine/lady_kt_kcet.jpg) **Ongoing Legacy:**

Before he became an institution, Kent Twitchell, and collectives like LA Art Squad, did the first batch of murals in Venice back in 1969. This year, some of Twitchell's portfolio through the years has been undergoing restoration and celebration, including ["Jim Morphesis Monument"](http://www.kcet.org/social/departures/landofsunshine/arts/murals/restoration-of-twitchells-jim-morphesis-monument-begins.html) (<http://www.kcet.org/social/departures/landofsunshine/arts/murals/restoration-of-twitchells-jim-morphesis-monument-begins.html>) on Grand under the 101 Freeway, ["Steve McQueen Monument"](http://www.houzz.com/photos/326008/Steve-McQueen-Monument-modern-exterior-los-angeles) (<http://www.houzz.com/photos/326008/Steve-McQueen-Monument-modern-exterior-los-angeles>) at 12th and Union, and "Jesus" on the campus of Boila University. Recently, Twitchell received word that the restoration of the "Freeway Lady" Project is about to restart, moving her to L.A. Valley College.

Plus, his 20-year-old masterpiece, "Harbor Freeway Overture" was just feted by its subject, the LA Chamber Orchestra, as reported [in the Los Angeles Times](http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2011/12/kent-twitchells-la-chamber-orchestra-mural-turns-20.html). (<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2011/12/kent-twitchells-la-chamber-orchestra-mural-turns-20.html>)

Currently, he is working on the restoration of "Freedom of Assembly" in main lobby of Bob Hope Patriotic Hall in downtown Los Angeles.

That is only a partial list of a body of work that coincides with Pacific Standard Time's timeline, yet the artist is not included in the regional survey. [Coagula's Mat Gleason](http://coagula.com/2011/12/kent-twitchell-pacific-standard-time-getty/) (<http://coagula.com/2011/12/kent-twitchell-pacific-standard-time-getty/>) takes umbrage, saying the oversight is "unconscionable" and that "This is an oversight that kills the credibility of the Getty's efforts, curatorially self-promoting as they were, mask of scholarship and veneer of academic objectivity be damned."

**Decision On Hold:** African-American artists Charles Alston and Hale Woodruff's two site-specific murals in the lobby of the Golden State Mutual Life building is still in litigation. They are waiting to be defined either as part of the holdings of an African Art collection, or the important part of the building's architecture that defines its historic character, says Cindy Olnick of the LA Conservancy.

Preservationists feel they should [remain with the building](http://www.laconservancy.org/issues/issues_goldenstatemutual.php4). ([http://www.laconservancy.org/issues/issues\\_goldenstatemutual.php4](http://www.laconservancy.org/issues/issues_goldenstatemutual.php4)) and prevented them to be taken away with other art holdings.

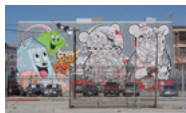
"The Negro in California History" depicts black history in California from 1527 to 1949, and believed to be the only public art in the city by Alston and Hale. [Alston's "Exploration and Colonization" and Woodruff's "Settlement & Development"](http://www.gsmlife.com/artcollection%205.htm) (<http://www.gsmlife.com/artcollection%205.htm>) were designed for this public space, framed by environment and defining the location's relationship with those who entered the building.

Woodruff spent the summer of 1936 in Mexico studying with Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, later lecturing on the comparisons between art by Mexicans and African-Americans.

The mural, commissioned to mark the 100th anniversary of the 1849 California Gold Rush, speaks directly to the California African-American as an economic demographic, an equality not often seen in commissioned public art circa 1949. The Golden State building is the 1,000th to granted historic landmark status by the city, said Olnick.

[Ed Fuentes](http://www.kcet.org/user/profile/efuentes) (<http://www.kcet.org/user/profile/efuentes>) has extensively covered mural policy in Los Angeles for KCET's Departures. Read previous mural posts [here](#) (<http://www.kcet.org/social/departures/landofsunshine/arts/murals/>).

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