

# STYLE

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## Murals make it off the street

*Art team to display canvases in a gallery*

By Hunter Drohojowska

The obvious choice for creating freeway murals during the Olympic Arts Festival was rejected by the selection committee: East Los Streetscapers, a team of Hispanic artists who have been decorating the walls of the local *barrio* since 1975.

These talented individuals — the group was founded by Wayne Healy and David Botello, working with George Yepes, Paul Botello and David Morin — are widely respected for their political commitment as well as their facility as artists. Usually, you have to drive all over Los Angeles to catch examples of their public art, but tomorrow, eight large-scale canvases — portable murals — go on view in the gallery of Cal State Northridge.

Explained Healy during a telephone interview: "We still work on the street. But we started to be invited to festivals to demonstrate our craft. Where the street murals are positive and uplifting, the canvas murals tend to be more journalistic, a comment on the times, whatever happens to be newsworthy."

A particularly explicit example is featured on the announcement. "Cara a Cara en Centroamerica" ("Face-off in Central America") depicts an exotic, wildly colored scene of women and children running from the turmoil in their homeland, while a guerrilla armed with a machine gun hides in ambush behind a tree. A Hispanic gardener

whips the scene into windy confusion with a sinister-looking leaf blower while U.S. helicopters and the American eagle hover overhead. A strong Indian woman looks on in disapproval.

All this bloodshed and symbolism would appear to be a strong indictment of U.S. intervention in Central America, but Healy claims the mural has been interpreted favorably by the right and left wings. "The right wing thinks it's about going down there and cleaning out the commies. We don't come out and preach, just put in imagery we see every day in news media to give people something to think about."

Since the street murals are permanent — "thrust on people,"

Healy says — the themes are generally pleasant, beautifying the environment. The East Los Streetscapers' next project is scheduled to be a mural on the north wall of

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Victor's Clothing Company at Second and Broadway, downtown.

The artists began making political public art individually in 1972, inspired by the violent death of L.A. Times reporter Rubin Salazar. David Botello and Healy had gone to grade school together and actually made their first mural in 1954: drawings of dinosaurs done with crayons on butcher paper. After a 20-year separation, the childhood friends discovered they both were working on public mural projects and joined forces in 1975.

Among the other works in the Northridge show, some measuring more than 8 by 10 feet, are a picture of "Fernando Valenzuela stepping over a barbed wire fence while his less talented compatriots are being led under the fence by a coyote," said Healy. "Watt's Next America," he continued, "shows a puma in the Santa Monica Mountains, screaming indignantly at a figure in the bay, while trying to eat a bird covered with oil. Watt, dressed in a forest ranger outfit, is that figure, planting oil derricks in Santa Monica Bay. A cowboy who looks like Reagan is getting ready to shoot the puma."

The artists are not art school graduates, and all have full-time jobs: Healy works as a mechanical engineer at Hughes Aircraft; David Botello is advertising director for a furniture company; Yepes works in tax shelters; Morin is a math professor at East L.A. College; Paul Botello is a student.

Their show will open tomorrow with a *tardeada* (a Mexican-style reception) from 3 to 6 p.m., with beer, food and music by Gilbert Chavez of the Califas group. In true East L.A. tradition, everyone is invited. The exhibit is free and will be open through Nov. 7. For infor-