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**THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY ACQUIRES
BARBARA CARRASCO'S LANDMARK MURAL *L.A. HISTORY: A MEXICAN PERSPECTIVE***

80-foot Mural Will Be Installed in New Free Welcome Center of "NHM Commons"



Los Angeles, March 31, 2020 — The Natural History Museums of Los Angeles County (NHMLAC) today announced the acquisition of Chicana artist Barbara Carrasco’s landmark 1981 mural, *L.A. History: A Mexican Perspective*, which portrays the city’s history through a series of vignettes woven into the flowing hair of *la Reina de Los Angeles* (the queen of Los Angeles). The Natural History Museum (NHM) in Exposition Park was the first museum to show the full length of the once-censored mural in a gallery setting, bringing visitors eye-level with the panoramic work across three walls of an intimate gallery in the exhibition *Sin Censura: A Mural Remembers L.A.*, from March 2018 through August 2019. The acquisition of Carrasco’s mural from the artist was made possible by a grant from the Vera R. Campbell Foundation and the mounting and presentation of the mural was supported by Nancy and John Edwards.

“Barbara is a strong woman, activist, and artist who recognizes the importance of depicting an unvarnished view of Los Angeles’ history from the perspective of a Mexican. Her fierce commitment in defending the truthful content in her poignant mural despite repeated attempts by many to censor its powerful message is one of her greatest legacies,” said Los Angeles County Supervisor Hilda L. Solis. “Through her mural, Barbara has helped raise our social consciousness to more thoughtfully appreciate and understand the struggles of Mexicans and Mexican Americans living in the City of Los Angeles. I look forward to all Angelenos recognizing themselves in Barbara’s portrayal of Los Angeles. All LA County residents will benefit from visiting the mural while it remains on public view at the Natural History Museum.”

The acquisition announcement comes with the Museum’s shared plans for a new renovation and construction project at the NHM campus in Exposition Park, called NHM Commons, that will create

space for the 80-foot artwork to be permanently displayed in a new, free Welcome Center open to the public without admission. The installation of *L.A. History: A Mexican Perspective* will include a 70" digital touchscreen, offering visitors the opportunity to closely explore the mural's individual vignettes, as well as historical reference materials used by the artist (some of which is from the Museum's own collections) and behind-the-scenes footage and photos from the making of the mural. All of the content will be bilingual, in English and Spanish.

"As museums of, for and with L.A., we are honored to be stewards of Barbara's moving work, which highlights moments of cultural contact, struggle, innovation and the changing landscape of the city over time," said Dr. Lori Bettison-Varga, NHMLAC President and Director. "We witnessed the powerful ways our visitors responded to the mural while it was on view at our museum last year in *Sin Censura* and we are grateful to the Vera R. Campbell Foundation and the Edwards family for enabling us to share *L.A. History: A Mexican Perspective* with the community and wider audiences in our new NHM Commons Welcome Center."

NHM Commons will serve as a new "front porch" on the west end of the Museum. The project will provide greater community access to NHM's collections and research, along with new amenities that include a café and state-of-the-art theater and multipurpose space for events. NHM Commons will open up the south side of the Museum with vibrant indoor-outdoor gathering spaces, replacing opaque exterior walls with a glass façade to give views into the Museum and its collections—including the mural—from the park.

"The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County is a wonderful place for my mural *L.A. History: A Mexican Perspective* to be viewed as a permanent visual testament to the struggles and successes that the diverse communities of Los Angeles have experienced," said Barbara Carrasco. "I have been looking for a home for this mural for many years. The Natural History Museum of LA, where I came as a little girl and later spent time conducting research for the mural, is the perfect home for it."

Sin Censura was developed by NHM's exhibitions team and History Department Chair Dr. William Estrada with Barbara Carrasco, who loaned *L.A. History: A Mexican Perspective's* forty-three acrylic on wood and Masonite panels to the Museum for the exhibition. The exhibition title refers to the mural's censorship by the former Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), who originally commissioned Carrasco to create the mural for the city's 1981 bicentennial. The CRA halted the project when the artist refused to remove 14 vignettes that the Agency deemed too controversial. These scenes included the 1871 Chinese massacre, internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943 and, ironically, the whitewashing of David Alfaro Siqueiros's outdoor mural *América Tropical* (1932) overlooking Olvera Street.

Carrasco spent months researching Los Angeles history—much of which she accessed through NHM's History Department— and carefully chose the moments, places and historical figures in the mural, which was designed and created with the help of students from the Summer Youth Employment Program. Scenes range from prehistoric La Brea Tar Pits to the founding of the city in 1781, and the 1847 Treaty of Cahuenga ending the California phase of the United States–Mexico war of 1846–1848. The mural features landmarks Angelenos will recognize—the Wilshire Boulevard Temple, City Hall, Angel's Flight, Union Station and the Hollywood sign—and parts of the city that are no longer visible, such as Bunker Hill homes before urban redevelopment. Portraits of the Gabrieleño/Tongva people, Mexican folk hero Tiburcio Vásquez, former slave and entrepreneur Biddy Mason, Pío Pico, Chinese railroad workers, Latino film stars Leo Carrillo and Dolores del Río, *Los Angeles Times* journalist Ruben

Salazar, Dodger pitcher Sandy Koufax, Mayor Tom Bradley, labor leader Dolores Huerta and playwright Luis Valdez are also commemorated in the mural.



Artist Barbara Carrasco in front of *L.A. History: A Mexican Perspective* with a commendation from Los Angeles County presented by County Supervisor Hilda Solis at the opening of the temporary exhibition *Sin Censura: A Mural Remembers LA* at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, which was on view from March 9, 2018 through August 11, 2019. Photo Courtesy of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.

L.A. History: A Mexican Perspective joins NHMLAC's renown collection of more than 35 million objects.

"The first time I visited the *Becoming Los Angeles* exhibition I was inspired by Barbara's mural and its long journey to public recognition," shared Vera Campbell of the Vera R. Campbell Foundation, which provided a grant for the acquisition. "It was so powerful and meaningful to the history of Los Angeles, and I just couldn't get it out of my mind – the cultural impact, the story behind it, the colors. Months later I had the opportunity to meet Barbara and learn the history of this cultural project, and I knew then that this had to be a permanent part of the Natural History Museum collection where it will finally be open and accessible to everyone in our city."

Carrasco's mural was featured in the exhibition *¡Murales Rebeldes! L.A. Chicana/o Murals under Siege* organized by the California Historical Society and LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes as part of the Getty-led initiative *Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA*. In conjunction with the Los Angeles presentation of *¡Murales Rebeldes!*, the mural was installed for several weeks in the fall of 2017 at Los Angeles Union Station through a special partnership with LA Metro and with the support from the Mike Kelley Foundation. The mural was partially displayed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology List Visual Arts Center in *L.A. Hot and Cool: The Eighties* (1987); at the Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design (now Otis College of Art and Design) in *Agit Pop* (1988); and at the Autry National Center of the American West, outside the exhibition *Siqueiros in Los Angeles: Censorship Defied* (2010).

About the Artist

Barbara Carrasco is an artist and muralist who has exhibited throughout the United States, Europe, and Latin America – most recently as part of *¡Murales Rebeldes!* at LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes and *Radical Women: Latin American Art 1960 - 1985* at the Hammer Museum. Her works are in the collections of the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian, and Stanford University. She also worked with the United Farm Workers of America for many years, and even stored the mural at UFW's headquarters for a period of time.

About the Natural History Museums of Los Angeles County

The Natural History Museums of Los Angeles County (NHMLAC) include the Natural History Museum, La Brea Tar Pits, and the William S. Hart Museum. They operate under the collective vision to inspire wonder, discovery, and responsibility for our natural and cultural worlds. The museums hold one of the world's most extensive and valuable collections of natural and cultural history—more than 35 million objects. Using these collections for groundbreaking scientific and historic research, the museums also incorporate them into on- and offsite nature and culture exploration in L.A. neighborhoods, and a slate of community science programs—creating indoor-outdoor visitor experience that explore the past, present, and future.

Header Image Caption:

L.A. History: A Mexican Perspective. Los Angeles, California, 1981. Artist: Barbara Carrasco (b.1955). Acrylic and wood on Masonite panels. Courtesy California Historical Society/LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes; photo: Sean Meredith, 2017.