

**PROYECTO MISSION MURALS**  
Oral History Audio Transcripts

**DANIEL GALVEZ ORAL HISTORY**  
Oakland, California, June 17, 2021

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This is an oral history of muralist and artist Daniel Galvez for the *Mission Murals Project*. I'm Camilo Garzón. It was recorded on June 17, 2021, in Daniel's home in Oakland, California. The voices you'll hear will be Daniel's and my own.

We were inside of his artist's garage, which was full of maquettes and bozzetti of his work. Before we began the recording, we were joined by Joan, his wife, who is a frequent collaborator of his, due to her work as a business research librarian.

When we sat down to talk I asked to describe what he was wearing—tortoiseshell glasses and a beard that he decided to keep during the pandemic, as he didn't have any public appearances coming up. He got some feedback via social media to keep it. The vote was ten to one for the beard. So he kept it. He was also wearing one of his favorite shirts, a classic Royal Chicano Air Force shirt, which was printed by his friend Rudy. It has the [United] Farm Workers' eagle emblem. And within it are all these wonderful Chicano references, the Aztec with the headdress, a centerpiece from the Mexican calendar, and ancient Mexican pyramids. He was wearing white shorts and black Italian sandals—especially good, he said, for the heatwave that was forecast for that day in the Bay Area and other parts of the West Coast.

This oral history delves into Daniel's personal life and his work as an artist. He shares memories of his upbringing in Calexico and Sacramento [and] the influence of photorealism and Los Tres Grandes [on him] while in college. He reflects on the way he collaborates with the communities that commission his work, knowing that "if it's done well, it's because I listened," he said, incorporating and reflecting their values. We also discuss his current work on a mural that will reside inside the Washington State Supreme Court [building]. In our time together, he [took] us on a journey through the expanse of public art he generated and activism he participated in throughout the years, his role in preserving and amplifying his own Chicano heritage, and carving out his own legacy through the arts.

Here is the oral history.

*Esta es una historia oral del muralista y artista Daniel Galvez para el Mission Murals Project. Soy Camilo Garzón. Se grabó el 17 de junio de 2021, en la casa de Daniel en Oakland (California). Las voces que oirás serán las de Daniel y la mía. Estábamos dentro de su garaje-taller de arte, el cual estaba lleno de maquetas y bocetos de sus obras. Antes de que comenzáramos la grabación, se nos unió Joan, su esposa, quien es una colaboradora frecuente suya, debido al trabajo de ella como bibliotecaria de investigación empresarial. Cuando nos sentamos para charlar le pedí describir lo que él tenía puesto: lentes de armazón de carey y una barba que decidió dejarse durante la pandemia, ya que no tenía*

*ninguna presentación pública próxima. Por redes sociales recibió comentarios de que se la dejara. El voto fue de diez a uno a favor de la barba. Así que se la dejó.*

*También tenía puesta una de sus camisas preferidas, una camisa de la Real Fuerza Aérea Chicana, la cual fue estampada por su amigo Rudy. Tiene el emblema del águila de la Unión de Campesinos. Y dentro de éste hay una serie de referencias chicanas maravillosas: el azteca con el penacho, el centro del calendario mexicano y las pirámides mexicanas antiguas. Tenía puestos unos shorts blancos y sandalias italianas; las cuales, dijo, son especialmente buenas para la ola de calor que se pronosticaba para ese día en el área de la Bahía y otras partes de la Costa Oeste.*

*Esta historia oral ahonda en la vida personal de Daniel y en su trabajo como artista. Comparte recuerdos de su crianza en Calexico y Sacramento, y la influencia que tuvieron en él durante la universidad el fotorrealismo y Los Tres Grandes. Reflexiona sobre cómo colabora con las comunidades que comisionan sus obras, con la certeza de que «si se hace bien, es porque supe escuchar», dijo, al incorporar y reflejar sus valores.*

*También platicamos sobre su trabajo actual en un mural que permanecerá dentro del edificio de la Washington State Supreme Court. Durante el tiempo que pasamos juntos nos hizo un recorrido por la extensión del arte público que generó y el activismo en el que participó a través de los años, su labor en conservar y divulgar su propia herencia chicana y el forjar su propio legado por medio de las artes. Aquí está la historia oral.*

**CAMILO GARZÓN:** I'm ready to roll.

**DANIEL GALVEZ:** All right.

**CG:** I am here with Joan and Daniel. And we might have a cameo from a dog too, called Ziggy. And I will ask both of you your names, just because I want to have that on the record. But also, today happens to be June 17; we're in Oakland, California. And you welcome me not only in your home, but in your studio where we are surrounded by what kinds of things, Daniel?

**DG:** You're surrounded by maquettes, or my master cartoons for murals that I'm going to paint. So I do—all of the master compositions are done in the studio, and then they're discussed with the arts committees that are part of the final decision on whether a mural is going to happen like I want it to happen. So all the work is done here for them. McClymonds High School—I did a mural in here. I did murals for the Department of the Interior in the studio. I did a mural in here for sex offenders that are incarcerated on an island off of Tacoma.

So it doesn't really matter the topic or the size of the scale—I try to make it work so I don't have to leave home. I can just walk down to the studio to do my work.

**CG:** That sounds great. Let's start with the basics, which is, do you mind saying your full name and where you were born?

**DG:** OK. My name is Daniel Galvez. It's Daniel Galvez, but my mother would always say, "Daniel! Get over here!" So I like to use her pronunciation, bless her heart, on how my name is pronounced. And I was born in Calexico, California.

**CG:** All right, and let's begin then with your family background. You just described what your mom used to do, which I think is very common with Latin American moms. Just like, "Daniel! *Venga pa' acá!*"

**DG:** Yes, that's right—usually when we got in trouble. But I grew up as Danny.

**CG:** That was your nickname.

**DG:** Yeah. All my brothers, there's seven of us all together, and Danny was the name I used throughout my entire—up till I graduated high school. Then I said, You know what, I'm going back to what my mom would call me. So when I came to the Bay Area, that's how I tell people how to pronounce my name—like that.

**CG:** That makes sense. Daniel Galvez.

**DG:** Yes.

**CG:** And when you were born in Calexico, how was your upbringing? How was your family background?

**DG:** Well, my father at the time was just an accountant, worked in a bank. He met my mother in Mexicali. My mom had—a lot of her brothers had moved there from Aguascalientes. She was born in Aguascalientes.

And so my father met her in Mexicali, they fell in love, they were married, and basically they were living in Calexico. And that's where five of my siblings were born, in Calexico. So up until I was about maybe four years old, I lived there. And then my father decided to go to Sacramento. His father lived there in Sacramento and said, "Well, we can find you work here."

So at that time, he took the five of us with him to Sacramento, and then later on two more kids came along. And we grew up in Sacramento. And he was a forklift driver for Campbell's Soup. And my mom was pregnant at the time with number seven when my father unexpectedly passed away. So he left my mom—[who had] a second-grade education—with seven kids. An incredible uphill battle for mom to pull it off and she did it. She raised seven kids, solely by herself with incredible strength. And the church was her guidance—devout, devout Catholic.

So after the age of fourteen—my father died right before my fourteenth birthday—I decided, well I got to take it easy. I got to do my best to help my mom out. So I did all of my writings to get into college, and I was one of the first kids in the family to graduate from college. And I thought that was really a proud moment for myself, and my mother was really quite excited about that.

And she went on to get her citizenship; I believe she was about eighty years old, I think. So exciting for her. She wanted to do it in English and she pulled it off. And then she passed on maybe nine, ten years later.

But growing up in Sacramento was where my life was mostly lived. And then I went to Pacific University, up in Oregon, to do the first couple of years in college. I took every art class they had, because that's what I wanted to be. I wanted to be an artist. I don't know—from day one I always enjoyed art, and always enjoyed drawing and painting in high school. But what really turned me on about being an artist was first, I loved photorealism. That was what I really loved immensely. The great photorealists [Robert] Bechtle and [Richard] McLean and [James] Torlakson—and there was quite a bit—Chuck Close. These are my idols at the time.

And simultaneously I learned while in college about Los Tres Grandes. So—and then I said, Whoa, so here's art that covers walls, and tells stories, and lets people know what their history was. And I found that so exciting that art could be so meaningful to people—and it could educate them, it could stimulate them, it could tell them a lot about where they're from or what happened to their country by the Spaniards or the church.

And anyway, it was just the way that I thought art could be used in a way that made it important for people to see, and then make it part of their lives.

**CG:** When you're mentioning these experiences in the Pacific Northwest, like Oregon. Or when you're mentioning even the, oh my God, I am seeing this kind of art, and there's these three—Siqueiros, Orozco, and Rivera—called Los Tres Grandes. When did you realize OK, this is like the moment. This is the kind of art that I want to do.

**DG:** Right then and there. I mean, it must have been in my freshman year in college. And what I wanted to do when I saw that kind of work—I knew fresco is really quite a difficult process in mural making. All the plastering—and you have a certain time frame to work while the plaster is wet. And you had to have a team of people that are prepping. And then you have to have all your ground pigments ready. So I could see that was kind of a difficult process. So I knew that I wanted to be painting on canvas, because that was a joy that I found—when I’m working on my paintings.

So from that point on, I wanted to combine the skills of a photorealist into monumental art, into monumental painting, so that when these gigantic paintings were up there, they were museum quality. They were something that could be sitting in a museum because of the technical fascination about something that looks so realistic.

So that was my dream—to combine my kind of photorealism onto a grand scale. So that’s what I try to do with my murals every time.

**CG:** And I see it. Even by the—as you were saying, your little cartoon drawings or these schemes that you’re drawing, it still feels like a smaller version of what very monumental thing it’s going to be. And when you’re thinking about this large scale, in which this work is going to be presented, why do you think it’s important that it is of the scale—rather than some other art, it’s about a smaller scale, about very specific little details that you have to really look closely [at]. You can still look closely and find a lot of very specific decisions. But why does it have to be that monumental? Why do you think it needs that scale?

**DG:** Well, I think when you take this kind of painting, this quality of painting, the fastidiousness, the incredible detail that’s required to make something three-dimensionally exciting to look at—because it has a presence. So I wanted to gain that skill well, so that when I translated it onto a large scale it would be more visually—make a visual impact that drew you to it. Because the idea is you want people to look at your work. You want to draw them in.

So first, you start with a beautiful painting. People are drawn to something that has wonderful colors, movement, a story behind it. And they’re drawn to it. There’s kind of—I always say there’s nothing worse than a horrible mural. Because when you make a bad mural, it’s a big bad mural. I mean it’s a really bad mistake, that kind of scale.

So I’m very conscientious that when a mural of this scale is going to be done, that I’m doing—it’s going to be hard-core perfected painting-wise so that the public and the viewer can just get past the actual painting and just be absorbed in what I’m talking about or what I’m showing them. Whether it’s a historical piece or whether it’s a celebration of their life, or

whatever the theme, I want to draw the viewer in by creating a painting that's really a joy to look at.

**CG:** And that aspect, I think, has been seen in most of the murals that are still present that you've done, not only in the Mission District, which we will get into, but also just around the nation. And it's not only the beauty, it's the choice of imagery and the choice of who is it that is not only presented but represented in these beautiful murals that you've done.

One thing that has really been, I think, an axis for most of these murals that came out of the Mission and also your work, is not only the imagery but the people. Why have you chosen to represent the people that you have chosen to represent? Which could be a big question or a small question.

**DG:** It's a very good question, because in essence, these things, murals, are large. So murals should be aware [of] the impact of what they're going to do and the images that they're going to present. The people either have to own it or understand it because it's in their neighborhood.

So every mural in my book starts at the library. I research every project, because every site is different. I've done them for Medicare, Medi-Cal, their headquarters. And I learned from them they didn't want a mural that showed a lot of ill health, sickness. They wanted to show the beauty of staying healthy.

So I did a lot of research [on] the people they serve. And I focused on their ideals about how to stay healthy, how to keep healthy. So the mural revolved around imagery like that.

There was a competition for Malcolm X, mural art at the Audubon Ballroom. So I was selected as one of the finalists to make a maquette composition. So I spent the first several months just researching him, reading his autobiography again, reading books about Malcolm X, looking at movies about Malcolm X. So I'm absorbing his life—so when I'm painting all aspects of his life, I understood it so that when I presented it, people would know what I was talking about because they knew his life. So it would vary.

So when I had the first opportunity to do a grand mural like the Carnival mural, I had a simple apartment building I was invited to paint. I was so excited. They said, "Here's \$15,000. Do whatever you want." I was like, Whoa! I'm going to get paid to do a mural—just to paint.

So my aspect, my concern was, OK, what is the Mission about? What's exciting about the Mission? So naturally, a lot of Latinos. And at the time the Carnival parade and celebration was just happening. It had only been around maybe three or four years. I thought, well, there's a socially relevant and exciting celebration of being in the Mission, being a Latino.

So I focused on Carnaval as the main theme. And then I wanted to push it a little more. And I wanted this mural to be planted in the neighborhood, so I decided to paint the neighborhood and the buildings—the wonderful, gorgeous colors that make up the Mission and how they paint homes there, the hot pinks, the turquoise, the purples, the bright yellows. So I knew I could go insane with bright colors.

So I literally went around and photographed buildings in the neighborhood so I could replicate them. I found an artist photographer who did a lot of photography of Carnaval, and his name was Lou Dematteis. So he gave me permission to go through his files and find appropriate images to put into my mural. And I selected all those characters, [who] are straight from the Carnaval parades in the early years.

So it just—it would just vary all the time with every project. And that's the kind of thing that I kind of find exciting, because every mural begins with the research so I can understand my topic, my subject.

And then one of the hardest ones I had to do was for the rehabilitation of sex offenders. They had just finished—the state of Washington built a new prison or incarceration for them. So the 1.5 percent allowed them to have art in that building. So I was invited by the arts commission to do a mural for sex offenders. Now whoa! How do you do that?

So again, I had to read a lot just to get into the mindset of these men and women who were offenders and repeat offenders. So that was a tough one, because you just can't go into a library and pick out a book on pedophiles or rapists. I had to go to specific private files, university libraries. And my wife, being a librarian, was able to go through her channels and get books through their system, on her request, so I could read on my subject, my subject matter. So I could do a mural that was relevant to them, because the mural was right in their reception area, where they would meet their families and visit them, meet their lawyers. They also would have assemblies in there for all the administrators in meetings, and they also hold their prayers there—whatever the religions, they would have their ceremonies in there.

So the mural had to be acceptable to everyday people, to children—some of the offenders would have their children there. So the parameters of what I was going to paint had to be significantly important to why the offenders were there and then not offend, or insult, or freak out visitors or children there. So my mural was meant to be on a positive side of what these men and women could do to change their behavior so they can reenter the world as a giver as opposed to a taker. So that was probably my hardest; it came out well, was quite successful and well-received. But it was important. I mean there was a huge wall right in

there, and it was a perfect place to put a work of art that was important, significant, and a responsible work of art that spoke to who is going to be looking at it and what it said in a positive way.

Pretty much, that's how each of the murals go. You find out who, [and] you get them either by applying for them or you're requested to do a mural.

The Department of the Interior, that was a competition. They wanted to celebrate their 150th anniversary. So I again made the short list. So what do they do? I had to read about all the nine different bureaus that make up the Department of the Interior to make two murals that helped celebrate their achievements, their focuses, their positiv[e impact] on the environment. And in the end, I was selected to do the mural. And then when I went—after I installed it—I went to visit the Department of the Interior in Washington, DC, at their headquarters. And it was a joy to go through all the floors because it is the one federal building [that] has the most murals in all of the United States.

So the last mural there was painted, I believe, in 1935. No, no, no—during the WPA. So they all were very dated, but on the tour—which is kind of exciting. You go on a tour, and they show you all the different murals from all the different places, because all artists were invited to do that from all different places in the United States. And then they end up with mine, and mine is like this technicolor, big old bright thing about contemporary times and what they've been doing for 150 years. But that was really a joy to paint that mural, those pairs of murals.

**CG:** Especially because the Interior Department happens to be so close to the White House in DC. Just geographically in that area, the proximity of them. But also these murals, *Guardians of the Past* and *Stewards of the Future*, they are some of the most significant, especially because of the political power that is represented in the building in which they are painted. And the iconography that you also chose.

So one thing that is interesting, like you mentioned even that Malcolm X mural that you made, the homage to Malcolm X in '97—you won competitions for most of these murals in order to be there, in order to represent the iconography and the life and really get into what it is that makes these people what they are, which if you think of what we're currently doing, we're talking about who you are.

And one of the important things that you mentioned—which I find even when I was just thinking about what I was going to talk to you about or how to even have a conversation with you—is that you often refer to Joan, your wife, as not only a researcher but an integral part of your process. She's a librarian, as you said. That is essential, I think, in your art process, in the collaboration—not only with artists, but also with your wife. How do you think that

collaboration with muralists and your wife has been for you during your decades-long career as an artist?

**DG:** Oh, well, because she's—librarians are very well-rounded individuals in a sense, because they read so much and they need to know a little bit about a lot of stuff when they're looking up topics and stuff.

So my wife was especially a research librarian, actually a business research librarian. So their skills are almost similar [to] mine. People come with topics to them, and then they research or help them find the information that they need.

So when I'm doing a design, I always ask my wife, Well, what do you think about this? Because she has a worldview as well and can input information that maybe you should include—maybe those rights that were in that particular spot. Or maybe you need the history related to interpret an individual, you should portray that.

So I respect her ideas and her contributions because she's been attached and involved with information. And a mural, basically, is a source of information because it's going to be representing issues, politics, or just simply historical references to neighborhoods and what goes on there. So her skills kind of help me, because when I need to research information I used to always just start at the library. It's a little different now, because of the internet. Now all I have to do is just put up a topic in Google and you'll have, I can say, give me fly-fishing or something. And you'll have a thousand pictures of how to fly-fish.

Let's say I was doing a nature mural or something, or I need particular scenes, like [for] my current mural that I'm working on, for the Washington State Arts Commission. It's for a small town, Shelton, in Washington. And not only is it a—there's actually a lot of reservations and Native lands that are preserved for their use only, but at the same time there was a lot of treaties related to fishing. So I'm reading about this. So salmon—that fish is so important historically to Natives as a life-giving food for them to survive. And then later they taught the new inhabitants coming in, taking over, how to fish and how to locate where the salmon run and all that.

So I'm thinking, OK, so I should include—so they told me, in doing this new design, you know, you should reference some of that. So they gave me information that I need to put into the mural. So now salmon will be floating through the bottom of my mural, because I'm beginning with—like I say, this concept where I'm reimagining Diego Rivera's *Man at the Crossroads*. But those were representing the times of 1935. So I need to update it.

So I'm trying to keep a lot of referencing [of] what [in] his murals was a good, fantastic structure, but then altering some of the imagery to make it more up to date. So in this case,

when I get information like that, oh, yeah, OK, I can definitely include that. I can include—they say the cedar tree, a tree of life, is important in Native culture and mythologies. So there's a big, giant cedar tree in the center. So the importance of hearing what people say about what's important to them as well as researching about the history and what's important to that particular area is absolutely vital in what goes into the mural's design.

At the same time, I was enchanted when I was just starting out. Nobody just goes out and hires a muralist. I wanted to be like Diego Rivera. I wanted to travel all over the United States, leaving my mark, doing murals just like him. His Detroit murals are just so outstanding. He would do the same thing; he would just live in that area for a while and walk around. He'd go to the motor plants when he was doing the Detroit [Industry] Murals, studying it, looking at all the machinery, and how they worked and all that. And you see it, all wonderfully painted in his mural.

And then when he did the one in San Francisco—same thing. Him and Frida wandering the streets of San Francisco and then capturing a history, a little bit of that. But then he would pull stuff from his own Mexican mythologies as well as histories, and [he] interwove it with contemporary life in San Francisco. So that kind of approach to making art I found very exciting and what I wanted to do. But to do it, you had to figure out how can I get paid to do that.

And so then, I used to have to write my own grants in the beginning. I remember that corporations would just hand out money in communities to make them look good. So you'd write grants to [*inaudible*] and McKesson, Clorox, Bank of America. And I'll get \$3,000 here, and \$4,000 there, \$2,000 there, and that's how I would make these murals in the beginning. And then later I would learn, OK, well cities have arts commissions, so I should apply to different cities and get into their registries as another approach. So that way I was able to expand my reach simply by being sure that my work is in their registry. So when projects come up, committees review those registries and then that's how your name gets thrown into the hat. And in those cases, the budgets are already there. So I go, wow, that's the way to do it.

So [from] that point on, I developed my work as an artist going from place to place by being in these registries. And then also you would look for announcements—like the General Services Administration, the GSA, would do the same thing. They would send out announcements for projects for their federal courtrooms and courthouses and other administration buildings. And they would finance art all the time. So I got a couple of those. And then another one—jobs were being offered all the time once you realized where to look. Cities, airports—airports were always expanding and being made bigger, so the airports would have tons of money to put art in their airports.

So you have to not only be a creative person, but you've got to be a creative researcher, because art is a business. And if you want to be successful, you'll need to find the ins and outs and processes so that you can participate. Because nobody knocks on your door and says, "Hey, you want to do a mural?" Well, maybe now because I'm older and I've done a lot of murals, and now I'm an established muralist. So you can get the calls that say we have a project for you, are you interested?

And I'm probably at that point, now. I'm going to be seventy pretty soon—a couple of years. And I'm going to start to slow down. Now I'm just going to wait, in essence, for projects to come to me. Because I've done enough work, over forty years of murals, that I'm going to be more selective now and wait for just the right one to come along. And if I have all the freedom to make my own design, then it's even more exciting.

There's always somebody there, though, that will need to put their input into it, because sometimes you may select the wrong image to include in a mural, and then they're going to find out that that can't be included. Which I found out.

Like the Washington State Supreme Court—they're part of the design process. So I had in the original design, in the cartoon I was working on, decisions that they had declared and they were on a national record that these were positive things. Like one was against gays being discriminated against, and they did a decision on this one couple that wanted to buy flowers for their celebration for their marriage. And this florist said, "Well, I can't do that. That means I'm supporting gay marriages, and it's against my religion." So they wouldn't sell the flowers to them. And so they took it to the court and went all the way to the Washington State Supreme Court, and they won that they were being discriminated against.

So it was national—I mean, then it went across nationally, I think. And then the florist wanted to take it to the Supreme Court, and they concurred on what they had said. So I was going to include that decision. But then they pulled back on that because when they saw I had a couple of gay guys in tuxedos that are very celebratory, and had a big bouquet of flowers behind them, to represent that decision. But they told me to take that one out, in essence because it might be misconstrued that the Washington State Supreme Court was in favor of gay marriages. But no, the decision was against discrimination of an individual's freedom to just buy flowers if they want, no matter who they are. So I said, OK.

And then I wanted to do another part in the mural, where these guys are turning off the oil that was going to run through their neighborhoods, because it was going to endanger their life and their flowers and all this stuff. So they ruled in favor that they shouldn't be criminalized for that act. But if I had a guy turning off oil stuff to represent that positive

thing that they had said, but they were literally breaking the law to do that first. So they didn't want to encourage people to be breaking the law to make their point, in essence. So I had to take that out. So it was a fine line, because what this mural was going to do is represent them as well. So you have to be conscientious about that.

And so committees help guide you in a way—because I'm not knowledgeable on every different rules or circumstances in different places. That was why the thing—when I did the Malcolm X, even though I did all my research, Malcolm X's widow, Dr. Betty Shabazz, saw my master cartoon. And in it I had Malcolm X confiding with Elijah Muhammad, the leader at the time. And she walks by and she goes, "What's he doing in there?" And I go, "Well, I thought he was part of the Nation of Islam. It is important to represent that he was." She goes, "Take it out." Because I didn't know, I hadn't researched enough, that he thought, or she thought that the Nation of Islam—some of the people that were part of the assassination—were actually Nation of Islam members. So she had a great distaste for him. So I had to take him out. And then I put something else in its place in that scene.

She's in the scene with her children, pointing [out] on a map Malcolm X's travels through Africa, which was perfectly fine with her. And she goes, "I was pregnant at the time. I only had three girls. How do I represent the unborn child?" So I said, "How about if I just put a little baby bassinet at the feet to represent the baby's coming or something." "OK, that'll work." So she made me—well, didn't make me, but asked if I could somehow represent that. So I did that.

So you can do all the research in the world, but sometimes things won't be exact. And then as long as it's in the design stage, you can correct it. You know, those things happen. I mean, I was even doing another one.

On the sex offenders mural, I was midway; the design had already been OK'd by the administrators. And then I was halfway through the middle of painting it right in this place. So I sent them an update, 50 percent, and then they had a new administrator. And he took out two scenes. He goes, "You have to take out that scene, and you got to take out that scene." And I'm going, "Wait a minute, everybody OK'd it; I've already been painting it." Then the arts committee said, "Well, if you do that, you can make those changes." But to compensate for that, I was able to take something else out that was part of the commission. I was going to do more work for them, so just eliminate that.

But they were concerned, this particular administrator, that a woman is holding a baby. I wanted to represent the love and care and gift of love of children and how you should respect children. But the administrator said, "Well, she's got her hand on the baby's butt." And I go, "OK, yeah." She says that was going to reflect on the men's eyes, and go, Oh, wow,

look at that. [That] woman's lucky she's grabbing the baby's bottom. And it was going to implant negativity, or undo maybe all the research they've been doing on how to respect children and all that. So I had to take that out. Well, what I did was I put a blanket over the baby. And the same pose, but now it wasn't so clear.

And then another part of the mural had these women's heads that I had as part of a sculpture representing women throughout time, that represented power and love. I had a moon goddess, an Aztec goddess. I had an Egyptian princess. Anyway, significant representations of women with positive reference to them. And then the same director said, "Well, you're going to have to take those out." And I go, "Oh, why?" And he said, "Well, because they may view those women's heads as trophies. Like assaulting women and then keeping their heads." I mean, it's kind of warped thinking, but he was telling me how these guys might be thinking. So I couldn't just have heads representing women. So then I said OK. So then I changed all those to symbols that represent positivity. The ankh for life, or the peace symbol. So in a way I was able to translate the information in a different way. But I didn't know that kind of imagery would run afoul in the minds of the men that were incarcerated.

So little things like that happen, and then you make adjustments. You try to do the best you can, even if you do a lot of research and still strike out. There was another incident that just occurred.

Heights—there's this movie called *The Heights*. Brooklyn Heights. It's this dancing movie.

**CG:** *In the Heights*.

**DG:** Yeah, *In the Heights*. And he got complaints that there weren't enough black-skinned people in the dancing crowds. I mean, he had a whole mixture. This is the guy that did the other theatrical play.

**CG:** Yeah, *Hamilton*.

**DG:** *Hamilton*, right. So he was being conscientious that he represented as many people from the Dominican—and the Puerto Ricans, the Colombians. But they were all fair-skinned. And somebody pointed out to him he needed to represent more darker people as an inclusion thing.

So you can do your best, but people will see things that you're missing. So it's kind of tough. You're trying to do a mural and you're trying to cover as many different ethnicities [as possible] because that's important. But if you don't get them all—I mean, it's impossible to try to reach everybody's ideals about what they think is the right composition, elemental

compositions, that they think is important. So you can do your best; you try to do your best to make it as representative of the community as you can, as well as historical references in history.

**CG:** And I think that you've done a great job. I think in just all of these examples you've described I was going to ask you, but to me it is clear, that you have navigated many of these situations in which people have pointed out, hey, in this mural you're talking about someone that I know, or this thing that affects me, can offend me, cannot be just fair. And I think you've taken those as, not necessarily just as a criticism, you've taken that as like, OK, this is feedback. And feedback I need to complement my piece because these are my blind spots.

**DG:** Yeah.

**CG:** And I'll do this. That's an important thing that I feel like is important regarding not only these even contemporary examples you're mentioning, like *In the Heights* that came out last week. But also—you have to also acknowledge that you've been doing the best you can. And also have recognized when people have told you this needs to be better, and you've taken those steps.

When you think of even the way that you've gotten grants and you've gotten fellowships, there's been the Eureka Fellowship, or Eureka.

**DG:** Yeah, Eureka.

**CG:** In painting. The Oakland City landmark status for your *Grand Performance* mural. There's even the competition [in which] you bested 250 other muralists for the [Washington] Supreme Court mural that I'm looking at the sketch [of] right now in front of me. All of these opportunities I think have come to you also because of that navigation, that maneuvering of understanding. I have a vision, but I have to also understand and listen to others. I think that one other thing that you told me, even before we began this conversation, is one of these had just called you recently. Can you describe what happened in that call? And why did you decide to tell her the things you told her?

**DG:** Yeah, OK. Because she's another muralist, has been painting as many years as I have, who I respect immensely. And she had called, asking about how I achieved the funding to do the restoration of the Carnival mural, which had been deteriorating poorly, badly, horribly.

So I told her the process that I went through, applying through a grant through the San Francisco Challenge Grants Organization. So they assist neighborhoods in enhancing their particular communities, be it through gardening, through gardens, or benches, or things that

enhance the living of that neighborhood. And so murals are the most visual contribution to a neighborhood to make it feel inviting and make it feel warm and make it feel beautiful. So they provide funding for murals. So I told her this is how I did it. They're going to require a budget that says how much the project is going to cost, and then they're also going to ask you [for] 25 percent of the cost to do the mural to be from the community, either through community services, having a volunteer artist—documenting their time and spending a hundred hours and then you calculate how much per hour they are getting. And then that would go toward the budget for your project.

And so you need to have that much income outside of the grant. So I was able to receive a grant for \$50,000, but I needed to provide 25 percent of my \$75,000 original budget from community input.

So I was able to find artists that were going to give me volunteer time. I was able to find a painting company that was able to do [volunteer] prep work and that charge, which would have been at such and such a value. So I explained to her how I used this particular grant to make my mural happen, but that it was important that she'll need to get community participation. So that was going to help her tremendously in her fundraising for her project; she wants to do a mural restoration in the Mission.

So I was very happy to tell her that process. And a new thing too was I normally, traditionally, paint on canvas because I like the material. It's rougher material. The brush strokes are coarser. But I was finding out that they're also more difficult to handle, the canvas, when you have one piece. And that you need exceptional help to do the installation.

So my friend John Worley has been doing murals using this stuff called Polytab, which is a nonwoven material [that] comes in five-foot-wide strips. Really light, really easy to handle, but you have to overlap them if the mural is wider than five feet. And duh, of course. So he has this process that he's been doing. So I called him up because I wanted to do that process on my next project. So he goes, "Oh, come on over, dude." And he's going to walk me through the steps of how you paint on—well, not how you paint on Poly—how you prep the material and then how you install it.

So there was another way that, again, where I'm showing an example of how muralists are happy to help each other on either doing the execution, the installation, or how to write, or how to get money as well.

People ask me, "Well, how do you do all these projects in these different cities?" Well, get yourself into their registries; that's a starting point. Because nobody writes grants anymore for murals. You go for the ones that are already established, and there's budgets.

I'm really jealous of spray can artists, because most of the time they want to explore and present their murals in a quick and inexpensive way, but they don't need to write thousands and thousands of dollars of grants to get their work done. They usually get smaller grants or smaller commitments from owners and stuff. And then they can knock out their work in a day, which for me would be impossible. Because I'm known as old school, where I paint with a brush and a canvas and I mix colors.

But that's just what I got into and enjoy the most. But there are other ways that you can make murals large-scale, beautiful, and much more quickly. And in a way you get more bang for your buck. Let's say if they get \$10,000, they could cover a lot of square footage with just that little amount of money and make spectacular work. So I have a lot of respect for those artists that can do that kind of work on a grand scale with a spray can.

**CG:** Yeah, absolutely. And it's the nitty-gritty business side of what the art is, and you've been able to also navigate that. Even with what you were saying. Sometimes corporations, like you were mentioning, some of them have given some money here, some money there, and that has been helpful for you to carry on with these projects.

One thing that I wanted to ask you is, when you think of these institutions and how they've worked with or against you, how do you see your relationship or the art that you've done with them, if they're funding or if they're not funding it—like, have they been helpful to you?

**DG:** Well, in the beginning they were. I mean, those kinds of large corporations wanted to contribute, give money back into the neighborhoods that helped raise their profits because they used their products and stuff. But that kind of money doesn't really exist that way anymore. I don't know of any corporations that are doling out money like that.

I do know that some business organizations kind of do that. They kind of get funding from corporations, [and] then they invite an artist to come to them, and then we'll give you this amount of money to do a project. But there's more controlling from them because they're not totally into—they're into more decorative murals, like murals that don't have really rich social content but more make an area downtown or something, like beautify it but with stuff that won't offend anybody. More decorative, more architectural, and that kind of thing.

So I wouldn't even approach those kinds of organizations to fund a mural that I would do. Because for me, the impact and freedom to do a design that's meaningful and is relevant to neighborhoods and communities is more important to me than having to do a mural that's only going to be decorative.

And then at the same time, along the vein of—I didn't want to be a studio painter. Just the concept of just you make art in your studio, by yourself, and then it gets sold, and then goes into another little place. And like, a lot of people aren't going to really view that particular work. The beauty of murals is that it belongs to everybody. And your art is living day to day in people's lives. So I tend to only do projects where I have the freedom to make my own designs, with input as well. It makes the art more relevant too.

I love Diego's work. All of his Mexico murals, and his ones in the United States. But I also know that when he was doing *Man at the Crossroads*, he wanted to keep Lenin in his design because it was relevant to him and his politics. And of course, this is in the Rockefeller building. And so I think he almost did it to be offensive, like up you! Because he was a communist and getting a lot of feedback from his fellow communists, like, "No, what are you? You're selling out. You're doing this mural for these corporations."

So he really wanted to keep relevant [to] his own politics. So when Rockefeller, when he wouldn't do it, Rockefeller said, "OK, you're out of here." So he paid him in full, even though he was only like maybe 50 percent along, and destroyed his mural. But he went on to go ahead and paint it again in Mexico City how he wanted it, [and that's] why it exists today. This is an outstanding piece.

I learned to be a little more flexible, in a sense, where I wanted a mural that was wanted, that the images in it were essential to the people it's for. And like in the case of Malcolm X, I respected his widow in asking for those kinds of changes. Take out [him] conversing with the Nation of Islam leader. I had his ring flipped because I did this picture of Malcolm X reversed, but I didn't know that the ring, the half-moon with the star, only went in a certain direction. So I didn't know that. She walked by and she goes, "Fix the ring." And so I said, "OK, no problem." And it's just valuable information that—sometimes you don't know everything, and it's helpful to get input to make the mural relevant for everybody.

I mean like, dealing with the Supreme Court—OK, this is going to be about them. So I had to respect that. I had to respect their positions. And at the same time, there was even some feedback from other justices that didn't even want a mural at all back there. They said this is a historic building; it's been up here for a hundred years. You don't want to change it, alter it.

But the committee that was working on funding that to make this thing happen, it was in the original architectural designs that murals were supposed to be in there. They just, naturally—whenever they're doing a project of this scale, they always run out of money and the first thing that gets cut out is embellishments, like art. So the murals never happened.

So I was so conscientious about this, that the building itself is historical. So I needed to respect the building and its history about how long it's been there, the materials that were used to make it so grandiose. So I purposefully painted a mural that was sepia-toned so the colors would integrate with the natural woods that they have in it. So it became part of the building, like it was there on purpose. These browns—I took this dark black in a doorway, and it became part of the colors in here. And then the lightest colors are these silk walls that are kind of cream yellow, so you'll see that color in it as well.

So in this case, the colors were relevant to the mural's placement. It was meant to fit with the architecture as well as the content, which is what happens there at the Supreme Court—making decisions on justice. So—and they were very happy. They saw the drawing and then they saw it fully painted—and they didn't get really excited until I put it into context. And they go, "Whoa!" So it was a unanimous yes [from] the committee members—and [it was] a diverse committee. This was not your everyday committee. It was people—from the curator of the Seattle [Art] Museum; there was this ex-secretary of state [of] Washington. There were ex-directors of the arts commission. So these are all respected professionals in the world of art. So there's no messing around—I had to be accurate in my depictions, of what I'm showing.

They knew that the quality of the painting was going to be what they wanted; that was why I was selected. But they also—what the arts commission knew in helping them decide on me, was that I was an artist that was able to work with committees and feed their ideas and their visions into my own design. So it wasn't something that's going to be, like, forced on them, but it's actually—it's going to reflect their values, and that was my main concern.

**CG:** It's a big concern that is not only in your more recent work, but also just, this Carnival mural that you were describing, [at] 24th and South Van Ness in San Francisco, or the Feeder Roads, or even the *Grand Performance* mural, which you've received prizes for. I would say that when you think of all of these collaborations, you see that. You see that kind of feedback, but you also see the willingness to just listen, as we were talking about earlier.

One thing that I wanted to ask you specifically about San Francisco and the murals that you did in the Mission is why the Mission? Why is it that the Mission is such a special place? And I have my version of the answer. And I've asked this to others. But what is Daniel Galvez's opinion? Like, what is it that makes—the Mission, what is it that makes the Mission special? And what does the Mission mean to you, personally?

**DG:** OK. Well, it's interesting you ask that, because I was an Oakland artist. I was invited from the San Francisco mural resource center to put a mural there. And so I think I was invited because of the realism of my murals that they had seen over here in Oakland.

But when they suggested if I'd like to do one there, I was excited because it was a Latino community—a lot of Mexicans, a lot of people from Central America, a lot of people from South America. So it was an affinity close to my own blood, this neighborhood that was just full of people of color, selling the vegetables. I mean it's a lot different now, but at the time they had the street vendors there, they had the vegetables, everything out on the street. They had the tamale parlor, the pan dulce stores, the Mexican restaurants. So I was thrilled to be invited to do a mural in that neighborhood.

And murals have been—I mean, [are] relevant to Mexicans, somewhat because of Los Tres Grandes, the act of muralism was meant—and if you visually look at those murals in Mexico. It was that they were meant to reflect all the people of color in those particular situations and the things that happened to them in life. And so Los Tres Grandes were able to replicate that in a way that was powerful, beautiful, sensitive. So that's why when I was invited to do a mural there, there was no restrictions. Here's your wall. And it was interesting, because there was no art selection committee. There was no committee I needed to present my design to get OK'd. So it was a kind of a rare thing, that you're invited to do something like that.

So I go, well, I'll just do my research and find out what was the most relevant event that was important to the Mission. And then even just walking through there and just seeing the life of people on the streets—people of color going shopping, and people shining shoes over here—and it had this vibrancy. So I said, Well, that's what this mural is going to be about. It's going to show the vibrancy and the pride and culture of being a Latino. And I thought what better way than this one parade that just started happening that had that celebration of life—with the congas and the costumes. It's really just an exciting feeling about life and being in the Mission.

So the mural was meant not only just to fit, but also be so integral because it included the buildings and colored shapes and also some of the businesses, like Galería de la Raza was just a happening place for young Latino artists of color. And I had met René Yañez—just an incredible, incredible man, like the godfather of the Mission. So I made friends with him. So I wanted to represent that gallery that was so inclusive, to include not only Latinos—but he made the Day of the Dead event an all-community event. All cultures could represent their generations of ancestors that they wanted to honor.

So I wanted to put the Galería in the mural, and then there was the record store down the street, Discolandia. I even liked the sound of that—Discolandia, dancing. And they sold CDs and records, had a beautiful, great sign as their storefront. So that was put into the mural. There was a restaurant down the street—La Guadalajara, I think. Precita Eyes later moved into that building. And then the York Theater was included in there, another that was right on

24th Street. These were all establishments on 24th Street. And then, of course, later on, the York Theater turns into the Brava Theater.

So these buildings, they've been there all the time. They've changed hands, but when I was painting it they were relevant for everyday people's lives and they would recognize them. So it made it important that everything in the mural was kind of recognizable and it belonged to them.

And then, years later, after it became deteriorated and needed to be restored, it was a joy to hear people say it was one of their favorite murals. It was one of the murals that really represented the Mission. And so that warmed my heart because that's what I want my art to be—relevant to people, that they take pride in it, ownership of it. It represents them; it says this is my neighborhood.

And that was my feeling every time that I do a mural—that I really want people to feel attached to it, which makes it separate [from] studio art, which is more a personal statement from the artist about what they envision or what they see. A mural is more an envisioning of what the people see that are looking at it. So it's like looking at it a different way. But it's meant for them, and it's more satisfying for me as an artist to create that.

And then high schools—I've done a few high school murals. And what better place to put a mural to encourage and get kids excited about art and so on. And it should represent them as well. I did one for McClymonds High School, and that was Oakland. That was like, oh my goodness, maybe 92 percent African American in that particular school. They had a lot of Muslim kids there as well. So I wanted to be sure that the mural really exemplified the student body as well as a little variety of other characters, students there. But it really represented their grouping of ideals.

So I put in a lot of McClymonds High School graduates. And there are people like Frank Robinson. And the Celtics basketball player—oh my God I, can't remember his name now. But President Obama is putting the Medal of Honor on him, that's in the mural. The Black Panther Party had their headquarters nearby the school. There was a lot of Muslim girls there, so I put them in there in their normal dress.

So the mural was really meant to show what that particular neighborhood was about, and they loved it. Once it was up, it was all about them.

So every mural has its own identity. And I want to be sure that I'm hitting the mark on where this mural is located, because you don't want to strike out and put, like, a Latino mural in a Black neighborhood and they go, I don't know if I get that mural. But no, I really want them to feed me the ideas about what could be included as well.

**CG:** Yeah, when you're referring to this one in McClymonds High School's Library Innovation Center, this was from 2019, and you're incorporating not only feedback but also the hands of, like, these high schoolers or graduates, like just trying to figure this out. Like, how is it that I can represent you here? And that's something you did also in [the] Carnaval mural. It's representing things that, fortunately, to this day, some of them still remain in the Mission. Like Galería de la Raza.

**DG:** Yeah.

**CG:** So one thing that I want to ask you is—these are the murals and they represent the community and their identities. When you think of your own life, when you think of your own even evolution as a human, how do you think of your identities? How have those identities changed throughout time, and how do you perceive yourself compared to when you were a kid or when you were doing your BFA or et cetera.

**DG:** Well, that's kind of a good question. I mean, it's interesting, because growing up in Sacramento and being in a family where my mom and my father—you never uttered a single racist comment on any culture. So I didn't really understand what it's like to be a racist because I wasn't raised like that.

It took me years to find out that there was racism against Jews because I hadn't had met any Jews. I might have, but I didn't know they were Jews. But little by little I go, oh, there's really hatred happening on where you're from because of your color. And it began to weigh on me. I go, Well, that isn't fair. I wasn't taught like that. I went to a school where everybody kind of respected each other.

So growing up, I didn't really feel that. I wasn't in a neighborhood where they spit on you if you were Mexican or they gave you a hard time if you were Black. I didn't see that. So when the Brown Berets existed, I was just coming out of high school. And they were, I guess, arm in arm with the Black Panther Party too, where it was like you had to identify and say, I am who I am and you have to respect me. It doesn't matter that I'm Mexican; I mean, I'm like everybody else.

But it was a way—those were all important organizations that were happening and springing up, because it was essentially important. Because racism was such an ugly little thing, and it was kind of sneaky. People kind of hid it, hid their racism.

Now it's totally different, activated by Trump and pushing racism against Muslims, against Japanese—I mean against Asians—against people coming over from across the border. He encouraged people to let their racism come out and say it and be free. It angered me.

And so when I do murals, I want to represent people [as] they are, no matter who they are. And represent the best of them, because we all have great activities, and things, and histories in our lives that are so exciting and exuberant, and [that] needs to be displayed.

So I wasn't worried too much, or that kind of active radical in the beginning. But more now—I'm just more understanding that when I do my paintings, that I'm sensitive and reflective of who's going to see these pieces and how people view the people that I'm painting. I don't want to do stereotypes. I don't want to paint stereotypes; that's a negative thing. But if people are excelling in a special costume because it represents them, then I will do that. But not as a way—as a derogatory thing or the stereotypical thing. I'm going to only listen to people and how they describe themselves and things that they want to be shown about themselves.

So I'm just more conscientious, I guess, now, about what it means to represent individuals in my murals. It's all honest and positive. There's other muralists that feel it's important to deal with climate change, and it's important for them to paint images that show dried-up riverbeds, animals that are becoming extinct—like, these are harsh realities. But sometimes you've got to paint a big old mural and remind people that this is real.

And that's the other beauty of murals—you can take a topic and really promote the events around that and why it's happening and why you need to correct it. So there are artists that do that continually, do mostly political art, that that's their thing and their favorite thing. Some people will only do decorative-type murals. But other people, Pancho, good friend of mine, Pescador, he does wonderful spray can art, always on human-related issues. And the people of color that he paints are just so beautiful and daring and exciting. So murals can make that kind of impact on neighborhoods, on what they represent.

**CG:** They do. And when you think of yourself as a person, right—it's an interesting thing because most of the time when you're an artist, you speak through your work, be it visual arts, be it murals, be it anything that you do, art on canvas. Your art represents you, but sometimes it doesn't represent the whole you, or it represents just aspects, moments in time.

And I want to ask you a question that I've been asking others, which deals with your identities or how you perceive who you are. Which is, is there anything that you can tell me that I need to know so that I can better understand you as a person or as a human? Like, who are you?

**DG:** Oh, wow. That's an interesting question. I guess if I was doing personal paintings in a studio, that's where it would come out, I think, the most.

I think my murals, what I try to represent in them, is that I'm a person with responsibility on how I use my voice. Because a mural really is a big painting with a megaphone. And it's large, and it's massive. So if a mural is successful that I've done, it means that I've listened. I've read enough, talked enough, communicated enough with individuals that they help me, guide me in the work that I'm representing, that it's meaningful to them. So if I pull it off, then that means I've listened well. And if the mural is attractive and exciting to look at, it means that I'm an artist that's studied composition to the maximum.

Because a mural—I mean, people don't understand that sometimes. The latest trend was getting big-name artists and then blowing up one of their pieces big and putting it on a building. That's not really a mural. I mean, a muralist studies the shape, size, scale of a building and makes a mural fit to it.

So I studied Diego and Siqueiros's murals, and especially their drawings, because you can see how they work. They have directional lines that are included in it; they work with the windows here and then a door there, so the mural is integrated with the building's structure. So that is a mural. A mural is meant to be part of a structure, not something blown up and then taped to the wall.

So if my mural is successful, it means that I've been consciously trying to make the pieces fit so that it becomes part of the building's architecture in a way that's pleasing and not awkward looking. So, if they're looking at a mural like this one, they'll understand that there's a composition underneath there that actually is meant to work with the construction of the building. I mean, you don't see it in this particular scene, but right in front of it is where the justices sit. It's a curved bench, which is nice. So what I did was I copied that curve and made it part of the mural's integral design element that radiates from the center and goes out. So that was purposeful, so that the structure of the design was meant to fit solidly within those five different panels and then making it one whole unit.

So when people look at the murals, they find beauty and wonder. It's because I've worked hard to make a design that fits. And then the same thing with the McClymonds mural. Beneath that design is all these lines that flow from the center out and then curve through the middle. And then all the images fall into it, and then before you know it, it's this pleasant composition. Not understanding why—but if I showed you the original drawing before I put in all the figures, you'd see the design structure inside of it.

So my idea every time I work on a mural is that it has to have beautiful structure. And it shows a conscious awareness that you're making a work of art that's strong in the elements, in a composition, and then the imagery fit within that composition.

So if you study any good mural by Los Tres Grandes, you'll see it. I mean, even when I dissected Diego Rivera's *Man at the Crossroads*, there is wonderful—it's actually a triptych, three sections. And then he has horizontal format lines that go through the middle of it. So, I mean, it has this beautiful structure underneath it, which is so exciting. So when I take out some of his stuff, I keep the structure and then include relevant images that are related just to that high school, just to that region in the mural's design.

**CG:** That's incredible, just like the way that you've done that for all of the ones that we've been surrounded by. When you think of this one, which is—I want you to describe it. I don't even want to describe it. Why did you paint that one?

**DG:** I was working—that was during my, working on my MFA—

**CG:** What's the title?

**DG:** And painting. The title is *Chicano*.

I would go to car shows—and remember, they had the lowriders. And so people, the Latinos, would show up in their outfits with just a T-shirt and black pants, or they come with the Pendleton. But there was always a severe look to them all the time. So I just asked this gentleman, this young kid, could you stand in front of this classic Chevy lowrider. And he just looked straight at me, put his sweater underneath, and they just took this pose—you know, I'm bad. And so I wanted to capture that. And at the same time, the element of the lowrider is just, like, everything about that says Mexican. So I wanted to capture the shiny chrome, the beautiful paint job on the car, and then to give it that special touch I gave it that license plate—Chicano. Which I always thought was just a wonderful word that represents a Mexican American.

That was always a tough one, you know: Am I Latino? Am I Mexican American? Am I Hispanic? The word Chicano, I don't know how it evolved, but it's a wonderful word when you're describing a Mexican American in California, I guess. Maybe you can use Chicano throughout the United States—I don't know. But I wanted to do a painting that was kind of representing being a Chicano in an element that he's most comfortable in. He's very relaxed; he's at a park.

And I remember the paintings, like Bob Bechtle would paint, of just white neighborhoods, very suburban, with the classic cars and the nice, maintained yards and the beautiful, simply

painted houses. Or Dick McLean would go to horse races—so his thing was beautifully painted horses, and the jockey, and the sawdust, and the hose on the ground. Everything painted so immaculate—beautiful. So I wanted to do something like that, but I wanted it to represent more of my culture. And that's why I did the whole series of paintings before I started doing all my murals. That was my focus—representing my people. I never had a lowrider in my life, but I love them.

**CG:** I think it's just such a beautiful representation of him, when you encounter him. And just even the choice of the plate being Chicano—it's just, I think it's important. Because as you were saying, there's these other artists that were doing similar things in their neighborhoods. And they just happened to be suburban, white.

But having this kind of imagery, it's very special. It's a kid looking at that painting and saying, like, "Oh yeah, I'm Chicano too," or something. I happen to be Colombian American, for example. I didn't tell you. But that's nice to see, like people that you know that might look like him.

**DG:** And people have asked, or other artists have said, "Do you paint Chicano murals?" And I go, "No, I don't paint Chicano murals. I'm a Chicano who paints murals in essence." Because in this particular field, when you're a site-specific artist—I love that term, site-specific. It's the work that's designated for a particular spot. And if it's in a medical building, it's about medical and health, and, well, that's what the mural is going to be about. If the mural's in a Black neighborhood, you're going to speak on issues of that particular neighborhood.

So I am a Chicano, and I do art, I do murals, but it's flexible depending on the site. And that's kind of the beauty that I love about being a muralist—every project is something new and I learn something new.

When I was doing the Department of the Interior, I go, Wow, they do all of this stuff. They had nine different bureaus, all related to either the wilderness, Bureau of Indian Affairs, mapmaking, Endangered Species Act. It was just so much fun to go into a topic and then really learn about it, and then try to make a mural that's representative of those different elements. And if you're successful, then you get the award, you get the commission. And other times you can do pretty much what you want.

**CG:** And I think that's just such a beautiful description of not only you as a person but also just you as an artist, as a person that works trying to understand other people and also bring them in—because that's something that doesn't happen with every single art. Essentially, that you can actually be as impacted by the people that you're trying to represent and the collaborations that you have around you.

And I think as a matter of conclusion—this is very open—but is there anything that in previous conversations you've had, when you've been either in interview, right. This is an oral history, but even when you've been asked about your work or yourself, is there something that you haven't been able to express? Is there anything that you are like, I would have loved to talk about this specific aspect of my work, or just my life, and I haven't been able to say that?

**DG:** No, not really. Because I look back on the murals that I've done and there have been issues, minor issues on things I wanted to include and maybe I couldn't. But then I understood more after why things needed to be taken out and why I should include certain things.

So when I'm finished with a mural and if it's successful—and every one of them has been—I'm proud to say, it means I've met the challenge and I've created a work of art that's going to sustain itself for years to come. And that's the real beauty of murals, at least the ones that are indoors. They are going to be there forever. That's the beauty of an indoor piece. Like nothing is better than going to Detroit and looking at Diego murals. Diego Rivera's Detroit mural that's just so outstanding. And it's still there—and he's been dead for some time. But his legacy continues, because his art is there forever.

So my Department of the Interior building will be there as well. I got to see all the murals that were built during the WPA, and none had been painted [over] since then. So there was this richness of history that I was able to enjoy because those murals are still there. And they have a vision of that muralist looking at America during those times, and the clothes that they wore, and the work that they did. And you get a glimpse of life at that time. So that's what I wanted people to see in my work, as well. They'll see a glimpse of what I saw when I was painting.

Like, even Malcolm X's life was—he already passed away. But there was everything in the world you could find and read about him still existed. So my challenge was to make it visual on his life. So it includes him in childhood, it includes him when he was being a criminal, included him when he was the leader of the Nation of Islam, included him with his change—because I also included his words in the mural, from his early writings to his latter writings. And you could see the change in his wording as he grew and matured and changed.

So the work that I've been doing, I want them to last so that when people look at it they can see a vision of the times as well as what I was looking at when I painted it. And that's just why being a muralist for me is exciting—because it's art that's going to be here for a long time.

A lot of artists whose work has not been documented will be lost and gone forever unless there's been pictures and [it's been] recorded and put in books and stuff like that. And that's the beauty of going to museums, I have to say—that they've kept some of these paintings forever. So, like John Singer Sargent, who I love, is a masterful painter. I can see his work, and it's beautiful. And I'm happy that those paintings that are available to the public weren't locked away in people's homes.

So there is value in that, [that] some museums will keep the heritage of [those] fantastic paintings, prints, photography, sculpture, for others to see. But again, the viewer has to, now, these days, pay to go see that. Museums used to be free. And now you have to go the extra mile if you really want to see that stuff. But the beauty of a mural is it's there at any time you want. I mean, you used to be able to go into the Department of the Interior and just go on that mural tour. But now after bombings and terrorism, you need to make an appointment. You have a guided tour. You can still do it for free, but you have to work at it.

But murals that are in, like, courthouses, you can see all the time. People at the Washington State Supreme Court will be able to walk in and just see the murals. So that's the beauty of murals—and street murals, especially. You just drive by them or walk by them on your way to work and they'll be there for you to enjoy.

They'll take a beating. Weather's a monster on murals, especially. So they have to be maintained—and that's the other part. So I used to do a lot of outdoor murals, and then I have wound up doing rehabilitation on those. And that takes—it's more work than when you originally did it. But it's a hardship to find money to do the restoration. So a lot of friends of mine that were doing large-scale murals are now choosing to do them in tile. So that will last much longer. But I don't like tile; I like painting.

So if I can have an option, I always, when I'm doing these commissions for Washington State, I always say I'll just do indoor murals. I could do an outside one, but it requires bolting up steel and holding up plaques and metal that hold the mural up, and then you have to maintain it. But in the end, if you can do it indoors, that will be my first choice, so that the mural will be around to enjoy.

**CG:** And it's publicly accessible. It's just there; it's [the] fabric of the place.

**DG:** Yeah.

**CG:** And Daniel, thank you so much.

**DG:** You're welcome. Thank you for having me

**CG:** After we finished the oral history, Daniel was elated, and we had this exchange just before I stopped recording. I'll just mention that it really speaks to the value of murals and of oral stories, but I'll let it speak for itself.

**DG:** I love talking about murals, and I'm happy to participate. I'm glad to hear of all this work that's going to be highlighting the work of murals and muralists and what they do, and how they work, and the themes that they select, and the importance. Murals have been so important throughout time.

In fact, I like to always say that muralists were the first artists creating art. The cave paintings—just, I mean, just painting on a palm or scratching it with a stone or rock. We were creating the first public art, out of all the genres of art making, and so I'm proud of that tradition, of being [like] the earliest of cave painters from long ago.

**CG:** And then we're also doing the other one, which is just talking to each other. The storytelling, just oral stories. Both of those things are still in the fabric of who we are.

**DG:** Yeah, they leave stories behind for people to see, correct.

**CG:** This oral history of Daniel Galvez was a collaborative effort, like murals also are. The team behind it was:

**ERICA GANGSEI:** Erica Gangsei

**MYISA PLANCQ-GRAHAM:** Myisa Plancq-Graham

**CG:** Who served as executive producers.

**NATALIA DE LA ROSA:** Natalia de la Rosa

**CG:** Who served as a production assistant.

The rest of the team included:

**JAVIER BRIONES:** Javier Briones

**KEVIN CARR:** Kevin Carr

**CHAD COERVER:** Chad Coerver

**CARY CORDOVA:** Cary Cordova

**STEPHANIE GARCÉS:** Stephanie Garcés

**MELISSA SAN MIGUEL:** Melissa San Miguel

**CG:** And it was produced and mixed by me, Camilo Garzón.

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Thanks for listening.