

**PROYECTO MISSION MURALS**  
Oral History Audio Transcripts

**SUSAN KELK CERVANTES ORAL HISTORY**  
San Francisco, July 24, 2021

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This is an oral history of muralist, artist, and cofounder of Precita Eyes Muralists Susan Kelk Cervantes for the *Mission Murals Project*. I'm Stephanie Garcés. It was recorded on July 24, 2021, at Precita Eyes Mural Arts and Visitors Center on 24th Street in the Mission District of San Francisco. The voices you'll hear [are] those of Susan Cervantes, filmmaker Javier Briones, oral historian Camilo Garzón, and me.

When we sat down to talk, Susan was wearing turquoise rings on her fingers and what she described as her cool-weather Peruvian hat, given to her by her oldest son. Susan had a gentle, welcoming presence when we arrived that morning, and the space was filled with soft, gray light. There were circular racks filled with postcards of murals created by Precita Eyes and shelves of their signature acrylic paint with names like playa yellow and turtle green.

For our conversation, Susan led us into the large back room that was bursting with remnants of creativity—works by youth artists hung on the walls, images of murals in progress, and smudges of dried paint on the chairs.

This oral history covers aspects of Susan's personal life as well as her work as an artist and muralist in San Francisco. She shares what it was like growing up in Texas surrounded by nature and a creative family, and how the Mujeres Muralistas inspired her to paint murals and fulfill her desire to "paint big" in a new way. We discuss how Precita Eyes came to be and their process for creating murals in collaboration with communities. Susan also provided a glimpse into how her personal creative practice has evolved, and her collaboration with her late husband, artist Luis Cervantes. This oral history shows her role in countless murals throughout the Mission and the world and her dedication to sharing mural making with current and future generations.

Here is the oral history.

*Esta es una historia oral para el Mission Murals Project de la muralista, artista y cofundadora de Precita Eyes Muralists, Susan Kelk Cervantes. Soy Stephanie Garcés. Se grabó el 24 de julio de 2021, en el Precita Eyes Mural Arts and Visitors Center en la 24th Street del barrio de la Mission de San Francisco. Las voces que oirás son las de Susan Cervantes, del cineasta Javier Briones, del historiador oral Camilo Garzón y la mía.*

*Cuando nos sentamos para charlar, Susan tenía en los dedos anillos de turquesa y lo que ella describió como su sombrero peruano para el clima frío, el cual fue un obsequio de su hijo mayor. Susan tenía una presencia apacible y hospitalaria cuando llegamos esa mañana, y el espacio estaba repleto con luz suave y grisácea. Había estantes circulares llenos de postales de murales creados por Precita Eyes y repisas con su pintura de acrílico*

*exclusiva con nombres como «playa yellow» (amarillo playa) y «turtle green» (verde tortuga).*

*Para nuestra conversación, Susan nos condujo al cuarto grande trasero el cual estallaba con remanentes de creatividad: obras de jóvenes artistas colgaban en la pared, imágenes de murales en proceso y manchas de pintura seca en las sillas.*

*Esta historia oral abarca aspectos de la vida personal de Susan así como su trabajo como artista y muralista en San Francisco. Ella comparte cómo fue el crecer en Texas rodeada por la naturaleza y una familia creativa, y cómo es que Las Mujeres Muralistas la inspiró a pintar murales y cumplir su deseo de «pintar a lo grande» de manera novedosa. Hablamos de cómo llegó a formarse Precita Eyes y su proceso para crear murales en colaboración con las comunidades. Susan también nos permitió un vistazo a la forma en que su labor creativa personal ha evolucionado y a su colaboración con su difunto esposo, el artista Luis Cervantes. Esta historia oral muestra su papel en incontables murales por toda la Mission y el mundo y su dedicación a compartir la creación de murales con las generaciones actuales y futuras.*

*Aquí está la historia oral.*

**STEPHANIE GARCÉS:** OK, so today is July 24, 2021, and I'm here with Susan K. Cervantes at Precita Eyes Muralists. And I'm talking to her on behalf of the *Mission Murals Project*. My name is Stephanie Garcés, and I will be guiding the oral history. And I'm here with Camilo Garzón, Javier Briones, Natalia de la Rosa, and Kristen Kincaid.

So, if you could please tell us your full name and where you were born.

**SUSAN CERVANTES:** My name is Susan Kelk Cervantes, and I was born in Dallas, Texas.

**SG:** And so can you tell me what it was like growing up in Dallas and a little bit about your family background?

**SC:** Well, let's see. I was in Dallas. I was born and raised in Dallas all my life until I moved to San Francisco. So that was about sixteen years. And [I'd] say it was a nice life. My mother and father, mainly they were floral designers. They were practicing—they had a nursery that my grandmother had. So we kinda grew up around the nursery. So we had a love for plants and for flowers and learned how to make bouquets and flower arrangements, and that was all fun stuff. But it was a struggle because the nursery business is not easy to maintain or sustain because of the, you know—you'd get a freeze come along, and it just wipes out all of your stock.

And so, there was always that struggle to stay afloat. And my mother took a different kind of a job to supplement that, as an accountant, because my grandfather was an accountant. So she learned that from him and did some of that. My father continued to try to have his own business, his own nursery, but we lost the family nursery to the highway when it was brought in. It took away the land in front of it to broaden the highway, and they lost their business because they didn't have anywhere for people to come to them.

So they sold it to the grocery store next door so they could make their property into a parking lot. And so with that, my grandmother and grandfather purchased a farm in East Texas, where we used to hang out a lot during the summer. And whenever we had an opportunity, we'd go to the farm to visit. And they had a nursery; they had a greenhouse. They were always involved with that. And it was a farm with lots of pine trees. It was like a wooded area, about twenty acres.

And my father was working for other nurserymen. So that was the kind of occupations they had. But we grew up in Dallas and [went] to school [there]. And I graduated from high school when I was sixteen. I graduated early because I went to summer schools to get out of high school early, 'cause I really didn't want to be there.

And I had the opportunity—I was involved with art. I think when I started high school, I started taking art classes, and my teacher thought that I was interested in art. And so she asked me if I would be interested in going to the Museum School, 'cause they choose one senior, actually when I was a senior, to go to the Museum School. So I used to go every Saturday to the Museum School for painting. And then there was—I think in the evenings, the weeknights, my parents would allow me to go to the teacher's studio where they had live drawing classes.

So, what happened is that they gave me a scholarship—the museum gave me a scholarship to go to any art school I wanted to go [to]. But in my last, senior, year, I also had, because I had made up all of my academics in summer school, I had three hours of art classes in my senior year every day and got to explore a lot of art and lots of mediums. When I was given the award, my teacher said, my art teacher in high school, said not to go to any art school in Texas because they weren't any good.

So I went to the library in the museum and I found two art schools, one the California School of Fine Arts here in San Francisco, and the other one, which my teacher at the museum had come from, which was the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art. And between the two I thought that I preferred the California School of Fine Arts—to come out here to school. In

Pennsylvania you had to go for five years to get a degree. But the California one, only four years. So that appealed to me much more.

And also when you go to Pennsylvania, you had to do more—you almost didn't have any studio work until the second year. So, I decided, I said to my parents, I said I'd like to go to California—to San Francisco—when I was sixteen.

So, my mother brought me out here and I found a place. They didn't have dorms or anything. So she found a place for me to rent. And I started school. I was so excited. I was doing a painting every day inside of my little room. And then the first day of school, I took it to my teacher. And he says, "What are you doing here? You already know what you wanna do." Oh, great. I'll just keep doing that.

So, I went through, but back in back home in Dallas—it was, I really had it. My family was good. I have sisters. I have two sisters younger than I. And one has already passed on. And the other is—we're still in contact with each other. She's two years younger. She still lives in Dallas and has her home there. She's a master quilt maker—incredible artist, making quilts. Incredible. I just—she just blows my mind.

But there is no more family. My parents have passed away. My grandparents have passed away, of course. And my sister, who is still alive—she never had a family. So it's just me and my sister. And that's all the family that I have left on my side. But I love the way we grew up with nature with the family, the farm, with the trees.

My grandfather would never cut a tree. That was a real no-no for him. It had to be dead or sick or something like that before he would cut it down. And I remember my—when we first got the farm, we didn't have any house on it. My grandmother would make a hammock out of the wood. So that would be lifted up and then tied to the trees. So it would be lifted up off the ground. So we wouldn't be—there wouldn't be any creatures getting on us in the night. But I remember seeing wolves coming by with their shining eyes. There was armadillos. There was all kinds of snakes.

And when they finally did get the house built, they got some animals. We had cows and horses. We were in the rodeo a little bit doing barrel racing.

So I had a horse named Lightning. But it was just very small. My grandmother had her own garden. So it was a huge garden with all her vegetables. And she could make anything. And she had a greenhouse. Of course she still loved that. We made a huge iris garden around the pond—hundreds of species, hybrids of irises. And so that was really beautiful. We made a little gazebo out of the pine trees right at the front of the iris garden. But it was nice. The

trees were beautiful—old, ancient pine forest. And so those are my best memories of living at home.

**SG:** And so, when you were still in Dallas and you're surrounded by nature and this—it seems like there was a lot of creativity in your family, as well. What would you say was your first connection to art or attraction to art?

**SC:** Well, I think my—I think it's. I don't know. It's just the creativity in, I think, everything. You see it in nature. But you appreciate the flowers. You appreciate the art of flower arranging that my grandmother and mother knew, and what they contributed to that. They had lots of different events, where a lot of people in the same industry were gathering throughout events or festivals and things.

And you would see all kinds of things that were really amazing that people would create. My grandmother and my mother, I mean, basically had hobbies. They didn't think of themselves as artists at all. My grandmother liked that—she liked to work with ceramics. She would usually just buy premade ceramic plates. And she did, I don't know, the forty-nine states and painted the birds and the flowers of that state on each plate. And that was pretty amazing. And then she took some clay. She used to collect driftwood all the time. And I thought that this was unique. She would collect the driftwood. And then she would form the clay around to make kind of planters that you could plant something into. But it was held up by the driftwood. But it had a very unique shape to it. And I thought that was really unique and special that she could actually make that and place it—have it fired. And it would be part of this piece of wood.

I've not seen anything like it since. And I keep thinking, Well, I'm going to this clay class down the street here and try to replicate that. But I have to find a good piece of driftwood.

And so, I was inspired by that. And my mother used to—she used to dry plants and make arrangements with dried plants and then frame them. They all knew how to sew. My mother also did a lot of sewing, stitchery, embroidery. They all knew how to sew their own clothes. So you see those kinds of things, which I think are special.

And I think that's where my sister got her ability to sew. She sews all her own clothes. And she's a master quilt maker. So that kind of—I guess when you're around that kind of activity, you feel that it's part of you. It's not outside of who you are. It's part of who you are, where you come from. And you don't realize it at the time. But I think, in perspective, I can see that it was bringing us into who we are as human beings.

**SG:** And what drew you to painting specifically?

**SC:** I just like the medium. And that was just the most natural. I worked in other—I mean, I worked in clay even in high school. And I got awards for my clay, slab clay work. But I was really drawn to painting with—at that time, it was with oil paint. And my teacher, of course, was an oil painter too. So it was going to a painting class.

Interesting—I got the scholarship from a piece that I displayed that was not a painting. I displayed a big, large piece that was a composition, a landscape. But it was made of all natural elements that I got from the farm—just twigs and leaves and pebbles and I don't know. The work, it had different colors and textures. And it created a landscape.

And out of all the students that were exhibiting, I received the award for the scholarship for that. But I was a painter. [*laughs*] So it's interesting. I just was attracted to the different textures in nature. And I created this piece. And I think it was because I saw the different materials that my mother and my grandmother used in their work. And I was inspired by that to create a picture.

And the painting has been my passion ever since then. And that's what I continue to do and what I continue to share with other people—my skills and knowledge about painting. And so that's—and I still practice doing that.

**SG:** And then can you share how you began painting murals?

**SC:** Well, that was—I never expected to paint murals. It wasn't even something that we studied. It was something that came very organically. I had already practiced painting for twelve years before I became a muralist. I always like painting really big. And my husband, Luis, of course, being Mexican American, Chicano, he was very interested in his Indigenous roots and his roots as a Mexican. His mother and father [*were*] from Mexico.

So we went to Mexico to visit the pyramids and to try to find his original home in Mexico. And so, that was—and then, of course, we see the great Mexican muralists' work in Mexico City. And so it all made sense. When you see a group of women muralists, the *Mujeres Muralistas*, painting a large, painting murals on the walls, it of course—I did a mural in 1965, [*when*] no one knows what a mural was. But I painted one in the restaurant next door to where we lived on Valencia and 22nd Street.

We lived on Valencia and 22nd for nine years. And it was a restaurant there. And they asked—they knew I was a painter. So they asked [*me*] to paint a mural. But I didn't think that it was going to be turned into a community mural movement or anything like that. That's not what we were doing then.

It was like, I'll do this mural on your wall in exchange for some food, right? And I was still a student too. So it just made sense to do that. But later on, in the seventies, you start seeing the murals on the walls that are done by the Mujeres Muralistas. And that was very inspiring. And that is what really had an impact on me or influenced me.

I knew Graciela Carrillo well. And she invited me to also paint on the Paco's Tacos mural, which is part of El Mercado. And that was a real thrill too. And I ended up finishing it for her because she went to Mexico to get married, [*laughs*] all of a sudden. And then I thought, well, this is something that I'd really like to share in our neighborhood and our community at Precita Park.

Because that's where we lived. That's where Luis and I and our family, our first son, lived. It was like 1969 when my first son was born. And in 1971, you saw the first little bit of murals in Balmy Alley. I worked with Mia Gonzalez at the—it was called the 24th Street Place. It was a tutorial center for kids.

And she got permission from all the people in Balmy Alley to put kids' artwork up on the walls. And so we put these—cut these plywood pieces out. And the kids would paint them. There were some abstract; some were like animals. Oh, it just reminds me that I think I have some of those stored under the back of the studio on Precita Park. I forgot that they were there.

But just now talking about it, I remembered that I saved some of those that were done in like 1971. [*laughs*] And that's when, I think about—so you saw a couple of other things happen in Balmy Alley at that time maybe. But very little going on. And then, not until about '73, '74, then the Mujeres Muralistas did their first piece, the *Los Americas* mural on mission at the Mission Hiring Hall, which was great.

But right after that, that's when they invited me to be part of [the] Paco's Tacos mural. And then I thought we should have this over at Precita Valley Community Center. And that's where Luis and I lived with our family. And so Graciela and Patricia Rodriguez said, "Oh, yeah, we could help you get that started over there."

So we started a mural workshop at Precita Valley Community Center. And we were doing it on panels to be installed on the front of the building. And we had about seventeen participants—very diverse group of people. And the themes were around the activities in the center, people's experiences in the neighborhood, and so forth. It was called *A Day in the Life of Precita Valley*. That was the first multicultural mural that we did.



And the Mission Neighborhood Centers was very supportive of that. And we just covered the bottom of the façade. And, of course, I finished painting the Paco's Tacos mural just before that. And then while we worked on that mural at the center, there was a program that was opening up that was hiring artists. It was kind of like another WPA program, where you're hiring jobless artists to do art and for community and public spaces. And it was called the CETA Arts Program. And also at that time, Luis was being laid off from his work. He was a union furniture worker. And for the, I think, maybe the second time in his career as a furniture worker, he, they, went on strike.

So he was on strike. And I was taking care of our, at that time—let's see. When was that? [Our son] was like four or five years old. So I thought, Well, maybe I should apply for a job. [*laughs*]

And so Patricia Rodriguez told me about it. And she said, "Susan, you should try. See if you can get a job as a muralist through this program that was actually going to be administered by the neighborhood arts program of the Arts Commission."

So I thought, I don't know. I'll think about it. But there apparently had been about a thousand people that had gone down there [and] stood in line, down at city hall, and had already applied or had already left. By the time I got there, it was all done. And I went in. And I said, "I heard that there was some job opportunities for artists." And she says, "Oh, well. Here. Here, you can fill this out. And we'll put your application in."

It was just a card with some information about who I was and how to get in touch with me and what I did. And then they called me up. And they gave me an interview. I was interviewed. And they said that I was overqualified because I had a master's degree at that time. And I said, "OK." But then I got a call that said, "You're hired." And said, "You're hired for this with a CETA Arts program as a muralist."

So that was really a surprise. And then the Precita Valley Community Center director said, "Well, we"—because I had been volunteering my time there since 1971 as a volunteer arts and crafts supervisor at the community center doing preschool art, after-school art with kids and doing painting classes for adults at night. And then, of course, then we did the mural.

But she said, "Maybe you could—part of your job could still be here. And you'd get paid for it." I say, "OK, well, let's see what they think." So they allowed me to continue being an arts and crafts supervisor at the Precita Valley Community Center and also be an artist. I'd be a muralist. Because I had done a couple of community murals with the Mujeres Muralistas.

And the Mission Neighborhood Centers had made me muralize their building, which was where, right here on the corner, where they just made this new senior housing. So I had

painted murals all the way around it, in 1975, '76, somewhere in there. But we also—I was painting murals at the school, at what used to be LeConte Elementary School, right on Precita Park. Because the principal of the school saw the mural that we did on the community center and wanted murals in the school. And so I went over and I did like a master plan, looked at all the walls. And in 1975, I did the first mural there on that school with 150 students—five classes—around the four elements.

And then the Precita Valley sponsored a new program, called a neighborhood beautification program, which gave grants to communities that wanted to have new parks, create new community gardens. And they also included murals because, even though there was just a handful of murals, the mayor saw the murals that he experienced as part of the environment. So there was grant money now for murals.

So the community center sponsored the first grant for the mural that's on the Flynn school now, what's [now known as the Leonard R.] Flynn [Elementary] School—used to be LeConte School. So then I'm doing a neighborhood community mural project on that one. So long story, but that's how I got started doing murals.

**JAVIER BRIONES:** I have a quick follow-up question for you, Susan. I want to touch on something that I think is really important that you mentioned just now, which is you said that you got inspired by the Mujeres Muralistas. Can you tell us what was inspiring for you about seeing them painting?

**SC:** Oh, sure. Yeah, the Mujeres Muralistas, when they were doing the *Latino América* mural, I was just in awe that they would paint so huge. And I would go there every day and watch them painting. I would take them refreshments. I would give them all kinds of support, as another sister painter.

And then, they, Graciela and Consuelo, were commissioned to do [the] Paco's Tacos mural. And they invited me. Well, they'd already started it. They'd started drawing it. And I was passing by watching them. I say, "Oh, my God. They're going to do another one." You know? And so Graciela stopped me. And she says, "Susan, can you come and help me paint?" I said, "Sure, I'd love to."

Right then and there, they had just drawn out the design. And she says, "Could you paint his face?" And she just gave me a brush. And I just painted the face. And she says, "Oh, can you come back again and do some more?" And I said, "Sure." And I just was thrilled that she would ask me.

But what was really special and what influenced me the most about the Mujeres Muralistas is the way that they collaborated with each other. And that they respected each other's efforts and ideas and created a design that unified all of their ideas into one composite mural concept. And I thought that that was really wonderful, the way that they shared each other's work in making a whole mural. And I in my mind, I thought that this is something that could be shared with all groups of people, all ages of people.

And that's what inspired me to do the community mural workshop at the Precita Valley Community Center, the first one, was that process. So when we invited—and so it wasn't like a group of artists, like the Mujeres Muralistas, [who] all knew each other. They were a group of artists, but to see they were collaborating with each other. This was a collaboration with a community.

And that's what made the difference. And I don't think that they had experienced that before. Something that—I just sort of emerged as a director of that project because I really wanted that to be shared with our neighborhood. And I can see how beautifully it worked and how rewarding it was to the people, how meaningful it was, how empowering it was to the people who participated.

That just sold me on the idea that this is something that I want to continue to do. And the people that worked on that, I mean, worked on the school—it was the same, the big one on the school was another group of, it was a neighborhood project. It wasn't just a school project. It was a community process that inspired the design that's on the school.

And so the people that participated in that, they wanted to continue to practice community muralism. And so I started having regular classes at the community center. Changed my painting classes to mural workshops. And even though we didn't have a wall, we were planning and designing murals that would be, that were portable. Then we would find places to hang them in the community.

And that's how the Precita Eyes Muralists kind of got started, as well. Yeah, the Mujeres Muralistas were a great influence on that process. And that's the process that I continue to practice today. And we call it the Precita Eyes Way. But it was inspired by the Mujeres Muralistas.

**SG:** Can you tell us more about the Precita Eyes way of making a community mural?

**SC:** Yes, that was very similar. I mean, when we, everything that Precita Eyes has done—we've probably done about over 650 or 700. I keep losing count of how many murals we've done. I'd say 70 percent of them or more are community driven. And they're all done by—we get

requests. They're all requested. We don't initiate any projects. And that's what's kept us going for over forty years. Because we get requests from a school or health center, a homeless shelter or a school somewhere, and they ask us if we can come and work with their community to develop and paint a mural. And so sure, let's go and see it. We go to the site. And we see what their expectations are, whether they have the means to even support the project financially.

And they want their community to be a part of the designing and planning of the mural. And a lot of the communities that we serve have never—maybe they've never painted or drawn before. But they want to—they see this as an opportunity to build something with their community, to create something beautiful for their space. And they want to claim their space with something unique. And we're just there to guide them through the process. And the process is that once we have secured the site and funding and they're ready, we call out to all the people that would be interested in participating, have them come to a meeting. And in about an hour and a half to three hours at the max, we go through a theme development process.

We have them draw out their ideas based on the themes that they want to see in the mural. Each one discusses what it is that they've drawn, why it's important to be in the mural, what it means to them. And so everybody goes around and talks about what it is that they've drawn [and] their ideas. Then we sort of put those aside, and we start listing all the images that everyone has drawn that people can remember. And then, from that list of images, we see how they're all interrelated to each other—nature, places, people, things.

And then they will—once we've done that process, then we put all the drawings away. We share them, put them away. And we have a big, huge piece of butcher paper on the wall with the format of the wall. And we ask people where they want to put—where they want all these images that we have listed, where they want to put them. How they want to tell their story with all these different images, which we've discussed in detail, what they mean, how they're all interrelated, and keeping the integrity of each of their ideas.

And then they decide how they want to tell the story. They can read it from left to right, right to left, top to bottom, middle out. And they can have something that's a larger element that everything else revolves around or many different focuses in the mural. So it's really up to the group to make that decision. And so they start telling us where they want things to go. And they create the composition.

And it's all done. It's like a giant thumbnail sketch is what we do. And then from there, if we're working with a group of students who have the capability and we have the schedule, the time, we will have them develop their drawings and they'll do research on their subject to

put them in scale. So then we make a master drawing, which is in scale. We move all the images around to where people wanted them to be.

And [we are] responsible for that—the lead artists, the lead muralist. And then what we'll do is have the composition completed once everything is put in. We usually do that on a piece of vellum because everyone's sketches can be moved around under the vellum until their placement is where people want them. And then we do a pencil drawing. And then we share that with everyone.

And if everybody is happy with that, then we ink it in. We start coloring it. It's presented to the community—and to whoever else is a stakeholder of the project—for approval. And then, once that's done, then we start preparing the wall and transferring the design. Then we have community painting days, where people come out and they help to paint in all the images to completion. So that's kind of what—I mean, that's, in general—what the process involves.

The Precita Eyes way is where we meet with the community to see the wall that they want to work on and see who they would like to have participating. And then we plan a workshop with them. And we do theme development. We sketch out ideas. And then we discuss all the ideas that the participants want to see in the wall. And then we develop a large thumbnail sketch for that.

Then after that phase, then we work on a scale drawing, developing and researching all the elements. The lead artists will then share that with the community and then have it all fully colored and with a narrative. And then it's presented to them for final approval. And then it's ready to start painting.

**SG:** And why is doing this process important in this way?

**SC:** Well, it's important because you're, well, because it's important to the community. And we're also inspired by what the community would like to see. We learn a lot from them, learn a lot about their experiences in history and what is important, what their values are. But they also see it in each other. People get together that have never gotten together before. And there's a bond that happens. And it's like that mural magic happens. And it's an unforgettable transformation that occurs in the process that no one's expecting, but just happens. And it gives it a great intrinsic value beyond words, beyond your imagination, that lasts forever.

And I know I don't think about that when we're in the process. But over years, you get feedback from people who have experienced it; they come back and say how it transformed

them, how it saved their lives, or all these different—how it impacted so many people that have had this experience with us.

And so that's what inspires us to continue to do it. And it inspires other communities to want to share that same thing that they see other communities enjoying.

So it's a tool to build community. They can build things together, beautiful things together, that reflect who they are and what's important to them, and their dreams and their hopes. Oh, it can go as deep as people want it to.

**SG:** And you mentioned community. And why is community so important to you?

**SC:** Well, because they—first of all, I think that it's a community. They're people. And you want—I think it's important to help people. And it doesn't matter who you are, whether you're an artist or not an artist. But I think this is a way an artist can help other people transform their lives or see other possibilities. And that's what art does.

I think community is important in that you are reaching out. They're asking you, first of all. Like I said, it's all by request. They're reaching out to you to help. And it's important as a human being for us to be here to help other people that are seeking help, seeking other possibilities in life. And you don't have to be an artist to do that. Whenever people ask for help, you help.

I think that's what our potential is. So I find that community is important in that way. And you share that; you share your knowledge with other people. You share your resources with other people. And you treat them like human beings. It's going to carry on. That's going to make them want to do the same thing for other people. And that's just what we need more of, I think.

**SG:** And so, you kind of told us a little bit about the community process of making a mural. Can you talk to us a little bit about what is the technical process of making mural?

**SC:** The technical process? Well, there's the development of the design. I mean, you get all the input from your community. And you have their ideas. And you're putting them together where they want to see them. And you're researching and learning so much about what information they've given to you. So you're putting that all into scale. Like I said, we do that on vellum, which is a very tough kind of tracing paper. And so we have their original drawings. We can move them around. We can sketch them out to a higher level and move them around and put them in place in the scale drawing. And then we color.

We make copies. We make copies so that we can have copies of the original drawing for gridding—because we use a grid method for transferring the design. So we make copies of our line drawing for that purpose. And then we make copies to do full color. And we develop the color. And then, at that point, we—and also we do a narrative.

We also ask people to—when they're letting us know where it is that they've drawn, we had them also write it on the back of their drawing so that we can reflect on that when we're doing the design. And also, when we do the narrative, that tells the story. So we had their voices in the narrative exactly the way that they see it.

And so, we have the full-scale design, which is done in color. We use Prismacolors. And we write the narrative. So those are some of the technical things in terms of the design process. Once it's approved and we have the permission to go forward, we do all the wall preparation. And that could be most of the walls around. And we've done, I'd say, probably 90 percent of the walls that we do, or on stucco. And they're all in different kinds of condition. They might have cracks. They might have old paint. So it's all scraping and cleaning and trisodium phosphate to take off old flaky paint, scraping it down to try to get to the original surface. And then we seal it with a primer, a white acrylic primer. And then, what we do after that is we've already prepared a grid on the original line drawing.

So we use that to transfer the design. And we use charcoal first. We use a snap line to make all the lines, measure it all out, put the grid up. Then we draw with charcoal. And there's a lot of freedom in that. I mean, the guide—the grid is really just a guideline. So everybody, particularly when you're working with a lot of people, everybody has their space.

If you go one foot over, you might be in someone else's element. So it helps to do it just as a guideline. But once you're in that space, you can pretty much be free with your drawing and put as much detail into it when you put it on the wall as possible. And then what we do after that is we seal each line with varnish—with a clear varnish, acrylic varnish. And that seals it to the wall.

Then after that, we can wash all the excess charcoal and all the grid lines and everything off. So it's just like a pure cartoon on the wall. And then we prepare all the materials. The paint—we use a very highly pigmented acrylic paint, the best that we know of. And so we're painting with the best acrylic on the wall.

And usually we start with the background and work toward the foreground. Lots of people that we work with in the community, they like to just start with their element that they've contributed. And they don't really think about the background too much. So that's fine too. Start wherever you're comfortable.

And so, we paint until it's completed. And then we seal it with a protective coating. And then often we'll have a celebration of the completed mural.

**SG:** And so what are some of the technical challenges about painting murals that some people don't know about, just kind of the complexities of painting and architecture and having to navigate perspective and all these other things? Can you tell us a little bit about that?

**SC:** Well, the thing is that, when we're doing a design, we're thinking about the architecture. We're thinking about the function of the building and who's going to be looking at it. And so, all that goes into the designing. So you have to be aware of all the architectural elements and try to take as accurate a measurement as possible.

But say you can't. And so, when you get up there, sometimes things shift around. One of the things on the grid is that we make sure that we start our grid from the middle going out. So our center line is always in the middle of the wall. Maybe we'll, depending on the architecture, different segments of the wall might be treated as an individual wall, finding the center of that particular space.

Because if you start from left to right, everything is going to shift. Nothing is going to be where you want it to be. So you start from the middle horizontal and vertical center. And you do all your measurements going out toward the edges or toward the corners. And then you do your grid that way. So you don't—so your focus, your center, is never moving.

If you miss a measurement, it goes [off] the edge. Or maybe if you've got more room, you can extend it. But it is always on the edge.

So those are some tips in terms of technical processes that one learns, one can learn, as you go along. For the painting, it's just using the best material that you can because you want it to last a long time. We feel like we have a public responsibility. So we try to use the best materials possible that's within our budget.

And so it will last many, many years. I'd say if you prepare it the way I've mentioned, where you're scraping and cleaning, you're getting it down to the original surface. And if you're sealing it and you're starting from there, it should last a good twenty, thirty years or more. And if it's maintained, it could last a lifetime.

So those are the—if you're a painter, you should be able to do, you can make any kind of an effect you want. If you're someone that hasn't done much painting—I mean, we have people



that ask to help. We'll give them suggestions of how to make it better and/or how to do the shading or something like that or to do some kind of detail that they want to work out. We'll give them suggestions of how to make it better. But if they get frustrated, then we'll help them a little bit more. We'll pick up the brush and help them do that. But mostly, we want [them] to be their hand. We don't want to do that for them.

And I think, if you look at a lot of the community murals that we've done with a lot of people, you'll see a lot of diversity in the different styles. If you look into the mural and all the different parts of it, you'll see different styles. You won't just see one. It looks unified. It looks like one person. But when you look closely, it's a lot of different people. And that's what I love about it, is seeing all the different styles that the community brings to the mural.

**SG:** And so we've kind of talked about the community process, the technical process. Can you tell us a little bit of just the physicality of making a mural, just in terms of—it's a huge space, and you kind of touched on it, like working with other people in that space or having to paint an element that's up high, those kinds of pieces.

And then, also the piece of physicality of perhaps being a woman in [a] public space doing your artwork and how that may or may not affect [you].

**SC:** Well, it just depends on the wall. I've worked on several huge projects that are challenging, physically. Basically, mural painting is a very physical art form. You have to enjoy that. And I really feel healthiest when I'm doing that because it is physical. You're climbing up scaffolding. You have to have a lot of upper body strength.

I've worked mostly with women. In fact, the Bay Area has more active women muralists than any other place in the country probably.

But it depends on the wall, how high it is, how big it is, what the scope of work is, the details. And you're also sharing with the people who are participating. And sometimes we have a lot of volunteers too that have all different levels of experience.

And so, it's learning how to be safe on a scaffolding or any climbing apparatus. Children can't get on scaffolding. But youth or fifteen years and older, they can get on scaffolding. And it's legal for them to do that. But you have to be very careful. You have to be wearing the right shoes. We don't wear hard hats or harnesses or anything like that.

But we've never had an accident on any of our projects because I'm very mindful about the safety and make sure everybody is. They know one way going up. They know one way going down. We learned how to—when we're on scaffolding and you have what we call elevator

buckets. Well, the elevator bucket stays in the center. It's on a rope. You pull anything that you need up on that in that one place. It's a five-gallon bucket.

But then all of our water goes up on a rope. All of our paints go up on a rope. So you have to learn some rope tricks. And you have to know how to pull things up on a rope or lower things down with a rope. So those are things that you learn when you're working on larger projects that require scaffolding.

And I've worked on several of those myself. Not everybody feels good working high. So we have to train people how to feel comfortable, even if it's on a second level or second tier of scaffold. Some people just—that's the highest they've ever been. They don't want to go any higher. And some people had to go high, like maybe six levels up. And they've never been up that high.

We have to show them how to go up and be safe. And once you're settled, then you don't have to think about that anymore. You're set up. You're ready to start painting. And just how to walk around each other on the site to make sure you're not running into things or dropping things and always be mindful of what's above you [and] what's around you.

So safety is really probably one of the most important things on a mural site, depending on how complex or risky it is. When we're working on—when we're doing community days, when you have four hundred people coming out to paint and you have sixty volunteers doing station monitors, you have to keep your eyes on a lot of different things.

And people have to be careful with each other, next to each other. Watch out when you step back, that you're not knocking over a paint bucket or some water or backing up into somebody else behind you or moving over too quickly and running into the person that's painting and causing some incident. So all those things are discussed when people come to work at a site.

**JB:** I was wondering if you—I think one of the things that I think that we were discussing yesterday, we're all curious about, is that many people don't really understand the level of technique and physicality that's involved in making a mural. And what I mean by that is that some people can walk by and be like, "Oh, that's just painting on a wall." But there is like fire hydrants and things that stick out and cameras and uneven walls and things on a slope. And make your perspective work in a way where there is like a column that sticks out.

I'm wondering if you could just talk about some of the difficulties of having to paint that so that we can tell viewers in the future of this that this is not just actual technique painting on

a flat wall. It's very, extremely three dimensional. I'm wondering if you could talk about some of the challenges and difficulties that you and other muralists have found in painting.

**SC:** Well, we have to paint around a lot of obstacles sometimes. We try to avoid them or even paint over them so that you don't see them anymore. But in terms of—when you do a design for a mural, you know that it's going to fit that wall. You know when you're doing it in scale, it's going to fit that wall.

If you're thinking about the architecture, you want a certain effect, and you want a certain kind of perspective or something like that; you think about the architecture when you're doing that. You're thinking about all the windows that you're going around. I mean, like the Women's Building, for instance, was all windows. So how do you work on the spaces in between so that it was—and still make it read really clearly. We're thinking about that when we're doing the design work. And then when you actually get up there to the real wall and how much bigger it is—we know that when we transfer this onto the wall, that it's going to look great because we thought of those things.

Some of it is you put all your detailed work that you can get up close to on the bottom. You put all the larger, bolder things up closer to the top, for instance. And you look at everything from the ground. And also there's a center. You look—there's like a center of the mural. So from our perspective, how we draw it is from the center of that wall out. And so when you're standing on the street, you're looking at it from that vantage point and seeing the whole thing at once. And then, as you move from one side of it to the other, you will see other things happening. But it all seems to come together. It all seems to work. When we have scaffolding in front of the wall, you can't see what you're doing.

So what we have to do a lot of the times is we have to move the platforms. We have to move them out of the way so we can see it from the ground what we've done. And that's always a lot of physical work, to move those platforms and then move them back so that we can continue to work on it. And being careful—I mean, I remember on the Women's Building, just the scaffolding, being too close to a PG&E—what do you call it? Those big things on the PG&E poles?

But it's dangerous. And you don't want to get close to it. But the scaffold is right up against it, practically. And we have to walk around it. And we want to make sure that everybody's aware of it and no one is touching it. And there's some parts, sometimes we have to lean outside of the scaffolding to paint the edges of things. There's not too many people that will do that. I was one of the few that was working up at the top that would do something like that or be lowered down from the roof to a balcony to paint inside of this balcony that there was no other way to get into. So I had to be lowered down with a harness into this space.

But I think more often is—when we're working on something that's high and the scaffold is covering it, and just having to move those boards, move the platform over so that when you're on the ground you can see through it and see what it looks like. Because you're always looking at it from the ground. What you see up there is not what people are going to see down below.

And a lot of painters will—they'll put all kinds of time into this little square foot area that's way up there. And you can't see [it]. They'll spend an hour on the detail. You go down [to] the street, and you can't see anything that's happened.

And so, the thing is to be really bold, to exaggerate everything. If you have something up at the top, don't indulge in detail on it because you're not going to see it from the ground. You have to look up.

And so, you always have to look at it from the ground. You can't think about it when you're face-to-face with it. Because that's not what people are going to see.

It's going to be somewhat distorted a little bit too. I mean, it's amazing when I think about it, looking at the Goddess of Light up at the top of the Women's Building, and she's sitting down and she's over fifty feet high.

You look at her from the ground. And she looks like she's only six feet or something. [*laughs*] What you can see [up high] is very different.

And so, people who've done a lot of muraling know not to indulge in a lot of detail in things that are up high. We put a lot more detail into things that are closer to the ground that people have access to, face-to-face with it.

So there aren't any—it's mostly, it's really much easier than it sounds. The technical challenges, physical challenges, you don't think about them. You just keep a pace, just keep moving. Once you are in a space where you're going to be painting, you don't think about anything else. And you're kind of in a zone. And that's wonderful too, when everybody's like that in the project, everybody on your crew. And everybody—we're there maybe a couple of hours. We've set up; we're settled. Everybody's working at the same time. And it's wonderful because there's this harmony. You just feel the harmony that surrounds the whole project at that moment. That's really beautiful.

**CAMILO GARZÓN:** Let me ask a follow-up, because when you mentioned the Mujeres Muralistas, which you just referenced, and this eclectic group that you were a part of, we've

heard it before very recently that one of the main reasons that that harmony worked was because of you. And the way that it happened is that—and correct me if this story is wrong—it seems like you were in charge of actually managing the pace and making sure that everyone had the same colors or that everything was coalescing that way.

Because, as you were saying earlier, there's a lot of images, a diversity of styles, a diversity of approaches. And one of the things that it seems like you've done, not only [on] the [Women's Building's] *MaestraPeace* but in many ways, is creating that kind of connective tissue for things to still look like part of the same whole, even if it's different styles. Can you speak a little bit more about that connective tissue that you have created with paint, where you just [have] leadership? It seems like it has been a very interesting approach.

**SC:** Well, I think it's, yeah—just yeah. You see, like I said, in the design part of the process, you see where everyone has a part in that. And I can remember. I did all the gridding. Usually that's what I do. But in terms of the paints, yes, it's important to me. I love putting paints together.

I love putting palettes together. We have paint stations with about thirty colors—warm, cool, earth colors. And I don't know how many we made for the Women's Building. But we had to make at least two or three per level—maybe a dozen stations. Lots and lots of paint that had to be prepared and ready to take up to the scaffolding.

So, yeah, I managed the paints and have a system. Of course, we have a system here because we work with large groups of people. So it was easy for me to put that together and to offer my service to everyone to do that. And I think they all saw the importance of that. And I think they still probably use that in their own work today.

Brushes and having all the materials make the work a lot more efficient. And if we didn't have that kind of a system and just did it, just, “Oh, well, I'm just going to take this up there.” And then you're going to find you don't have what you need. It takes more time. And you're more frustrated. And [it] takes more energy.

So if everybody has what they need from the very get-go, you can have fun. You're going to enjoy it. And that's the whole purpose of it—to bring things together so that people can enjoy the work that they have a passion for. And also we're working with a lot of volunteers who've never worked with us before or [are] just getting started as painters. They can see something that works. They can see how it's comfortable, that it's a way of sharing with each other, the materials as well as your process.

And I think that those are—yeah, I just naturally lean toward doing those things because that’s what I do. [*laughs*] And everyone appreciates that too. I get their support and help as well.

Yeah, even here, all the projects that I manage, I make sure that every lead artist has all of those things in place to make the work that they’re doing as efficient and timely as possible, that they always have everything that they need. It’s just like when you’re working in your own studio. You have everything ready. It’s cleaned up. You have it all organized so that you can just pick up the paint and just start painting. You don’t have to think about it. So you want to have your mural site prepared in the same way. And everybody has to carry what they need. And it’s there for them to use.

Even like making color copies of everything, making binders of all the references, making the studies, mounting all the studies so that you have them in hand right in front of you on the part that you’re working on is another thing that we do. We make copies, color copies, of the section, of every section of the mural. So that if you’re up on the third floor, you’ve got the detail of that section that you’re going to be working on. It’s right there for you to take with you. And it just makes it a lot easier. And we do that for the gridding. We do that for all of our projects—make studies that we use on-site. And then we have the master drawings that we show people on-site.

We have the narrative so people can understand what we’re doing. I just think it makes it a lot easier for everybody to have that kind of preparation.

**SG:** And since we’ve been talking a bit about *MaestraPeace*, can you tell us a little bit more about the process of creating that work? And also maybe some of the idiosyncrasies about making it? Any kind of special details that were specific to that one?

**SC:** Well, the *MaestraPeace* mural was created in the same process that I’ve been describing. It was a collaborative process with seven women artists. And I knew most of them before we were selected to work together, except for Yvonne Littleton. I had not worked with her. And I hadn’t worked with Edy [Boone]. But I knew of Edy a lot.

Irene [Pérez] was one of the Mujeres Muralistas, so it reunited us after twenty years on a project. Juana [Alicia], I’d collaborated with her on other projects. And Miranda [Bergman] I knew because she was part of the original Haight-Ashbury workshop, mural workshop. And I knew of her work really well and knew her. It was a great collaboration with over a hundred years of experience before we even started the mural project.

And we got—we were given this survey by the Women’s Building that they had received from all their constituents of what they wanted to see in the mural [and] what they didn’t want to see in the mural. So we just reviewed that. And each one of us had an idea of what that was like. And we did workshops amongst ourselves, of mural workshops, of course, to come and design and plan this mural.

And the Women’s Building thought we were just going to do the bottom on the Lapidge Street side because that’s all the funding that they had—for just that one small wall. And when we got together and we looked at each other, we said, “Hmm, I think we want to do the whole building because this is a unique group of women artists. And we’re not just going to do this little, tiny thing on the side of the building here.”

And so, let’s design the whole thing and then present it to them, see what happens. That’s kind of how it was. And so, after surveying what the—reviewing the survey—we each went home and designed a mural as if we were going to do it ourselves, what we would design.

And so we had these architectural renderings of both sides of the building. And so I designed what I thought would be great on both sides. And everybody else did there theirs too. And some of them just didn’t know what to—couldn’t fill up the whole space. But I filled up the whole space.

And then we all brought back our ideas. And [in] the same kind of way, we talk[ed] about them. And then everybody sa[id] what they like about each of our ideas and elements. And we came to finally decide on what we were going to keep of each other’s ideas and where and all that.

So it took us a couple of months to finally get it all together. And we presented a full-color rendering to the Women’s Building board. And they were blown away. But they said, “Well, how are we going to fund this?” So they had to do more fundraising because they really liked it.

And we weren’t going to do anything less, really. So they supported that. And so, with the small amount of funding that they had, we were able to just start with one side of the building and get the scaffolding for that and some materials. They were doing some fundraising. They never did fully fund the mural.

But it was enough to get both sides of the building done and for this unique collaboration that we all involved ourselves with. And it took over a year. But we became really, really close to each other. And we were meeting—well, then we were probably meeting every week. But after the mural was done, we were meeting every month.

And we still do. We meet every month and check in with each other, mainly to check in on our lives now—not so much any business or anything like that. But there were a couple of occasions where we actually did restore the mural. We actually got to do that, which was great to do after—I think it was after twenty years or something we restored the mural. Because the Women’s Building had raised a lot of money for the maintenance of the exterior where they had to redo—for the roof and for the windows and the balconies and everything—which were all corroding and affecting the mural as well. So it was great that they added a budget for the mural restoration and that we got to actually do that ourselves.

And we chose a team. There was about ten other women artists who we chose to assist us on that. And they actually continue to be muralists. And so it’s just kind of carrying on the tradition of women mural art through these younger generations of women. So we got to do that. And we’re still in touch with each other. And we’re, I think, just older and wiser. [*laughs*]

Of course we all have—I think one just had a grandchild just born. And I just had one born three months ago. So we’re keeping up with our families and the growth of our families and how everybody is doing. And we’re keeping up with our health issues. And Edy is our oldest member. She’s in her eighties now. And she hasn’t been able to come to the last couple of meetings because of her ill health. Yvonne can’t come because of her ill health. So there’s usually about four or five of us that meet on a regular monthly basis. And we weren’t meeting during the pandemic, of course. But we’ve started [*again*]; I think the last two meetings we had were in person. The last one was at my house, actually. So that was great. And we all bring a lot of food. We have a brunch.

The *MaestraPeace* mural was a great adventure. Also, we did the book. A lot of your questions about *MaestraPeace* [*are answered*] in the book. And we’re glad that we were able to get that published because it really is a great book about the whole process and about everything that’s in the mural.

We had some great authors to dedicate their—Angela Davis did the introduction. And we had Alice Walker do this great poem. So it was this wonderful, wonderful process. Yeah.

**SG:** And what was the importance for you collaborating with these women artists on this project?

**SC:** Oh, well, it’s just—first of all, they were all women. They were all women artists. [*It was*] giving women voices and empowering other women and girls to see their power and uniqueness and give them a voice, give them a space, a cultural space, that reflects all the contributions that women have made all over the world. That’s so important.



And this gave us that unique opportunity to express that. And I don't think there's any other [mural like] it anywhere in the world. So we're very proud of it. [We] didn't know what we were doing at the time. But we knew it was an important moment in our lives for all of us to be together. And we did the best that we could with that.

**SG:** And how did you meet Juana Alicia?

**SC:** I was riding my bicycle. I used to ride a bicycle all the time. And I was going down 24th Street. And I saw a new mural going up on the corner of York and 24th Street. And I saw this woman bent down over the painting. And so I rode up to her, and I said, "Hi, I'm Susan. Who are you?" And she introduced herself. She's Juana Alicia.

And this is the new mural she's going to be doing here. I said, "Wow, this is incredible. Great." And so we just kept in touch from that point on and started collaborating, basically, on other mural projects. We worked on the Mission Playground murals together. There were two murals there. And then we worked on the one on the Cesar Chavez School, which [was called] Hawthorne Elementary School when we started that mural. And then we did the Women's Building after that, pretty much. So I knew Juana much better. It's like we were almost married. [*laughs*] She always thinks of us as being married. Yeah, she always used to introduce me as her wife or something like that, which is funny.

So our families knew each other. And we used to visit a lot. And I knew her family, her brother, really well and knew her son, Dino, and Emmanuel and Tirso and her daughter, Maya, who was born just when we were starting the Women's Building. So we've just shared a lot of our life experiences with each other over the years and respect each other a lot.

**SG:** And so can you tell me a little bit about some of the common themes and recurring imagery that you use in your work?

**SC:** The recurring themes? In the mural work, it's—well, of course, it depends on the communities you're serving too. We were asked to do an AIDS mural, so I was working with seventeen artists who are affected with AIDS and wanted to do a mural. So that was, of course, all around their experiences with AIDS and how they felt.

And, of course, with that—or it might be something around the violence or tolerance of other people. Might be around—well, some of it is, like when you go down around the Rose Hotel, we did a mural; it was just the people who were going through depression, drug abuse, and all that stuff.

So it's kind of showing what's possible. People showing the hope and representing the experiences that are positive in their life [as a way] to shove away the negative things that are in their life, like drug abuse and homelessness and things like that; [these things] are reflected in that mural. It could be, where, I think, people—they want, they value family.

It's always something about family, about nature and preserving nature, education for their children, preserving traditions in Native cultures. Just those seem to be the top of the list for most of our communities. And so I don't know what else there. Don't know what other ones to point out at this time.

**SG:** I think I'd also be interested to—how you were talking about before—where everyone gets a section of the mural and they can do their thing. What are some of the qualities that you find characteristic and your personal artistic contributions to the collective? I'm thinking also [about] the way you paint hands or use spirals or circles. Yeah, I would love to hear from you.

**SC:** Well, I don't know. For myself, I'm focused a lot on the light, on the elements, on the beauty of our human—being human. And so, I think, if it's something about—I mean, it could be all of those things. But I also share that with other people, that they are always trying to make people conscious of the light.

Where is the light coming from? You don't think about it. Where is the light coming from? But I'm always conscious of the light. And, of course, you can have many different sources of light. You can have—so once they start to think about that, you can start seeing a change in the way the composition might feel with the color and where the light's coming from. If the sun's over here, what direction is the sun? Where is the light hitting? Or if it's a night sky, how does the light transfer into the dark?

So I like sharing that idea because it's more about learning how to see and the way we see things in light and shadow. And I think it's important for people to be aware of it.

And if you're—you don't have to use that if you don't want to. That's OK because it can be something else. But I think it—I can see people light up when they start to understand it. And they can apply it whatever way they want to. But I like sharing that. And I like to help with the composition. Like they might be struggling—like how does this fit in here?

And I say, “Oh, well, you can just do it this way or that way or whatever.” And they say, “Oh, yeah.” Yeah, it works. It fits. And it flows. The thing is to get a flow. And I mean, if you want something to be bumping into something else, there's a purpose for that, then that's cool.

But otherwise, if you want things to be integrated and move into one another, then you think about that.

**SG:** And so, what is the story behind Precita Eyes?

**SC:** The story behind Precita Eyes?

**SG:** Yeah.

**SC:** You mean like how we started?

**SG:** Yeah, how you started. Where does the name come from? What were the early days like?

**SC:** Well, like I said, we—after I did the Flynn School mural, or the LeConte School mural, which was in 1977, there was a group of artists who worked with me on that that wanted to continue to practice community mural art. So I had a painting class at the community center. And I just said, Well, I might change it to a mural workshop, and invited them all over to start planning and designing murals, even though we didn't even have a wall. And I [said], "Well this—what would people like to do a mural about?" And so they were thinking about different masks from all around the world. So everybody chose a mask to do. And we built some panels.

We framed some plywood panels that were eight feet by sixteen or twenty feet, something like that. And there was about eight people, I guess—eight people. And so we designed a mural with these masks, some imaginary. I think in the center I did an Olmec head, you know, because I really loved the Olmec large stone heads.

And then everyone had these totems of other masks from different parts of the world. And then we had a border that one of the artists did, a border of profiles, which kept moving around. There was like, I think, forty-two of them or something around the border, different masks around the border. So we called it *Masks of God/Soul of Man*.

And when we finished, we didn't—there was no one person that—we were going to sign it. But we didn't know how to sign it. And so we decided to sign it as Precita Eyes Muralists because: Precita, where we come from; eyes, what we visualize with; and muralists, what we do. So our first signature was on this one portable mural called—it was Precita Eyes Muralists is how we signed it.

And it was displayed on the front of the Bernal Heights Library for quite a long time. And we moved it around to different sites after that, to the Mexican museum and to a bank—to

different places where [it] was displayed. But that was the first mural that Precita Eyes did as a group. And the name just stuck.

After we did another one together—I think the second one that we did was actually a commission[ed] work by China Books and Periodicals Company, which was here on 24th Street. And so we worked on that one collaboratively but inspired by the Chinese peasant paintings that were being displayed [for] the first time. It was the first time the Chinese government actually had a display here. I forget. Was it at the Chinese Cultural Center? But we went to go see it. And we thought it was very beautiful and inspiring because it was mostly agricultural. It was peasant paintings. And so the whole mural was a collage of all the different agricultural elements that we saw in the paintings.

And we put a Chinese bridge with all these different international people on it, looking to see how the communal life sustained itself. And we called it *Bountiful Harvest*. And even in the fields you see, the wheat fields, there was an international group of people planting the wheat. That was our first real commission, I think.

And it's still up there. It was done in 1978, '79—'78. And it was the first—China Books was there as the only contact with mainland China over more than seventy years, since the Cultural Revolution. And they had a book about these peasant paintings. And so that was nice to have that as a reference as well.

And [we] got to know that family who started China Books. And in 1979, right after my second son was born, there was the first Chinese delegation to come to San Francisco after they opened up and stopped being an isolated country. And the first place they came to was China Books. And they had a banquet inside China Books.

And I brought my son Suaro, who was just, wasn't even a year old. And I remember they were all carrying him, holding him. And it was even photographed. And it was put in the newspaper. I'm holding my son at this China Books. So those are fond memories of the beginning of Precita Eyes.

And so, little by little, people would see our work. And they would ask us to do other murals in other community spaces. But that's how it got started.

**SG:** And so you also mentioned your husband, Luis, earlier, and you both are partners on so many different levels. Can you speak a little bit [about] what it was like having a creative collaborative partnership?

**SC:** You mean with Luis?

**SG:** Mm-hmm.

**SG:** Oh, yeah. Well, he was a painter and sculptor. I met him at the Art Institute in my first year. And so we started living together then. And up until he passed away—it was more than forty-four years that we were married and [had] three sons. And so we always shared our studio. I mean, [the] studio we always had, for nine years; we only moved once.

We were nine years on Valencia Street. And then we moved—yeah, we were evicted in 1969, '70, because the BART had moved in. And it doubled and tripled all the rents. People thought gentrification just happened, [but] it was happening as early as that. And so we were homeless and couldn't find any place at all. We found this old—someone knew our—'cause we were having to move out in thirty days. And someone saw our situation. And they owned this building, on Precita Park, which was a vacant storefront. And they said, "Do you want to take this?" And it was just a little bit more than what we could afford. But it was the best that we could find. And it wasn't a living space. It was just an old dirty storefront. It didn't have anything.

So we had to build it out. We took it. And I think we camped in there for six months before we even had a place to lay down or something like that. We lay down. But we didn't have a stove. I was camping out [with] a camp stove inside the storefront and with our first son. And I remember Luis building a loft for us to have a room.

And then it was just an open space. There was a couple of walls. But we took them out because we wanted it to be all open. So we never had like an enclosed space—no compartments or rooms. We saw one space. And so Luis had his studio, but near the front door. And mine was next to the kitchen. So we lived and worked in the same space on Precita Park for over thirty-five years.

And that was a beautiful place. We were very happy there. And that's where I did all my painting. And Luis did his painting and his sculpture. He was a laborer. He worked in a mattress factory. He was a union furniture worker. He custom-made mattresses for the Airflex Mattress Company. He did that for over forty years.

And so, whenever he had some extra time, he would do his painting and sculpture. And when I first met him at the Art Institute, he was into doing—he was pretty well known for his ceramic sculpture, gigantic ceramic sculpture work. We couldn't do that because he didn't have a kiln. We couldn't have a space with a kiln. So he turned to wood and doing sculpture out of wood.

And, of course, he continued his painting too. And so he was always creating something. And I was always painting. And, of course, when I got involved in the mural movement, Luis was always there to help whenever. Oh, he was a carpenter. So he built panels. Of course, he was always building my frames for my canvases.

And so the children grew up with the art around them, watching us create. And that was the kind of environment that they grew up in. And being right in front of Precita Park—Precita Park was like our front yard. That's where everything happened in their lives too, because we must have spent thousands of hours in the sandbox [*laughs*] in the park.

Of course, Luis was working; like I said earlier, there was that moment when he was on strike. And so he wasn't working. We didn't know when he would be going back to work. So then I got this job.

Of course, it was cool that that job actually lasted five years. But it was like right next to home. So, it was very convenient for me to go down and still do arts and crafts, supervising at the center. And then, the other half of the time, I was painting murals in the community. And I just would take my children with me. If I was doing—and then, of course, at the same time, I was starting Precita Eyes in 1977. I was doing toddler art in our little center that we ended up having on Precita Park.

We were very connected to our community in the neighborhood. And then, of course, when we got the center on Precita Park, that was just a block from where we lived. So the children were always around that. And so it was good. I could have them at work, basically. So I was like an artist working mother. [*laughs*]

And Luis was working at the factory. He basically was the one that was making enough money for us to live on, because Precita Eyes, I never received any income from that until just recently, actually. Yeah, so Luis was a great partner, a very great visionary artist.

So I just think that there was a lot of experiences we would share with each other. It was always good to bounce off of each other. And, of course, I think our colors and our way of seeing things were kind of integrated with each other. And we were very, very close and never left, never were away from each other ever.

I think the first time I was ever separated from Luis was when I was invited to go to Yosemite with the Russian artists that were visiting. And he couldn't go with us at that time. But he ended up going to Russia with us. At the end, well, I'm not going to go there because they wanted us to go to Russia to paint murals. OK, but Luis is going to come with us.

But they all loved Luis too. So he got to go with me too. And so we had a really great wonderful love relationship. It was wonderful and great. And yeah, he shared a whole lot with the family. He mentored a lot of people too in the community. And he shared lots of stories with them. And he read a lot. He would always tell me the stories he was reading.

Or if there was some kind of like an issue or something, we would discuss that. We could make some kind of decision about those issues. Problem-solving—really easy when there's two minds. Now I have to think, What would Luis say? What would he do? But it's all there. And, of course, my children remember all that too.

They're all a part of him and who he was. And they're all good human beings too. And I can be grateful for that. So, yeah, life with Luis was wonderful.

**SG:** And just also, that was so beautiful and just thinking about all the levels and layers of influence you had on each other.

I'm wondering if there's maybe something specific, where it's maybe a specific example of that influence, or also thinking about how you're also coming from these different experiences and how it might open up other experiences to the other person. So thinking about, for Luis working with you and seeing everything you do, maybe [he was] connected or aware of issues or complications that women face or women muralists kind of had to navigate. And I'm wondering if, vice versa, you, as a white woman with a Latinx person, if that was a way to increase awareness or become just more in touch with different experiences?

**SC:** Well, I guess, we weren't thinking about those differences, of course. When you're in love with a person, you don't think about those things. But I know that other people were looking at us in a different way—not only because he was older or because he was Latin and I was white. So you had these—can't remember the word.

But I remember he was driving. He was driving one night. And we were stopped by the police because they saw him with a young white woman. And that's all. So you get those kinds of experiences with that. And then, later on, I hear that people were thinking about that even at the Art Institute. They were thinking that we shouldn't be together because we were—I was younger and he was older. And he was Latin, or whatever. But we weren't even thinking about it. We didn't care what other people thought about our relationship.

And even our parents, because my parents, and of course, his mother—it is what it is. And I got to know his mom. She was incredible. And Frances Cervantes, we would visit her all the time in Santa Barbara. And she was wonderful. She accepted me completely and was very, very generous and kind. And I can see where he got those kinds of qualities. She was a great

cook. He knew how to cook. But she knew how to cook. She taught me how to cook. All those great things that she knew, enchiladas. And, well, we had the Cervantes salsa.

So we shared our culture with each other. And so I just immersed myself in his and his in mine. And we never thought of it as being different. It never—and nothing ever came between us about that because we were just one. We accepted each other as we really were. And not any different.

In terms of our sharing our art, I think, like I said, it's all in the color and the light. I know that he started out with painting abstract. And he was always having trouble with muddy colors. And so, I guess, he saw my palette, and said, "Oh, this is how you do it. This is how you do it. This is how you keep them separate [*laughs*] so you don't get muddy colors."

And he started painting brighter and brighter and using more color. And I think it also had to do with his Indigenous heritage as well, and seeing the bright colors that his culture uses. And also, that's where the paint originated from. The paint that we used was innovated by a Mexican chemist. So once he saw that, he was the one that introduced Polytec paint to us.

And then I mentioned it to the Mujeres Muralistas. "Have you used this?" "No." And so they started purchasing it. And they found it was fantastic. So then it started to be manufactured here in San Francisco for a little bit. And so we all had access to this great paint. And so, once we had that, everyone was starting to use brighter colors.

And then, I think his work—of course, I know the last painting, last painting that he finished, was really based on the four directions and the pyramid, looking at the top of a pyramid and then the four sides, four directions. And then, the one that he didn't finish was about the Earth and the sun and the moon and how they influence us here in the rest of the cosmos.

So those are some of the things that he was interested in and seemed to be—and I felt those things too in my work. Just, I think, in my own personal work, it was for over twelve years or more, and even now—just you learn about yourself. You learn about what you want, what you don't want. What you want is important.

And it just [*gets*] more focused; I think you just get more focused. And I think you have to learn about yourself first before you can help other people. So at the point when I made the transition to mural painting, that's what I wanted to share: whether it's an individual or a whole community, if we want to make things better, we have to start from inside of ourselves. And because that's where I felt myself. But then I could see myself in everything around me. And it really was—and I felt that whatever the community wants to see I identify with that because I can see myself in that. I can see myself in that.



So it was easy for me to transition into that with that kind of approach, and then be able to share that kind of value with other people.

What's important to me, the light, I think—the light and the color. And what's important to you is this is respected and is important to me. And we're going to illuminate that and [make it] something beautiful for the community. And I think Luis understood that, the importance of that too in the community work we were doing, and [he] was always there to help and share that process.

And, yeah, so he was always there doing that too. And that's the way we worked together. And it seemed to be something that people continue to want to experience. We don't know how it works. But we make it work somehow. Bringing people together is just respecting everybody's level of experience, their effort, and [it] doesn't matter what it is. It just opens the doors to other possibilities for everyone. Well, it's not about your becoming an artist. It's about becoming a better human being.

**SG:** And then thinking about what you just said, how would you say your personal art and/or the art of Precita Eyes is engaged with social justice and political issues?

**SC:** Well, I think it is with, when—well, I mean, the murals for sure reflect whatever is important to the community. And it reflects social change because people see this is what's going to make our life better. And that's what this is—the things that they want to reflect on and have in the mural. And if there's an issue of a very strong social justice issue, like violence, they're going to find a way to create nonviolence in their neighborhood. They reflect that in the design of the mural.

My personal work recently has been probably [a] more social justice type of painting. Probably put together a lot more like a mural because my—rather than going in deeper into myself and reflecting the inner self, it's to me, it's all the same.

But people, maybe they understand images a little easier than something that's abstract that has shapes and light and color, which is the way I see the inside of myself. OK. So how can we make that translate into a social justice composition?

So I take photographs. I've been taking photographs all my life. And I love taking pictures of nature and things and experiences, odd things. So at the beginning of last year, I decided I wanted to do my own personal work in a little different [way] than going inside and just apply[ing] it to—the same thing that I do [with] murals but using my photographs. So the first photograph I pull—and that's the first photograph I pulled out that gave me that idea. [It is

of] the front door of our home that we were evicted from over fifteen years ago that is still boarded up.

So that picture is there. And I says, I'm going to start with this picture. And it's called *Home Sweet Home* because that's what the door said since 1970. And so I started with that. And I just started putting all these images together, going around it. It's kind of like a mandala. But it's starting with images and going around. Sometimes it's a little symmetrical. But it's like, you know.

So there's like a labyrinth on Bernal Heights I took a picture of. The labyrinth is made out of rocks, but I made the rocks look like they're jewels. So that's something that we experience. So that's on each side of the door. And then, there's—I can't remember because that was one of the first ones I did. But eventually, the door started to get bigger and things started coming from inside the door out.

So I think one of the last ones I did was around the pandemic, which is called *Be Kind, Stay Safe*. And, of course, it had the door. But it had images of, oh, it had my—I have a Tibetan bull that I do [a] ceremony with every day. OK, the inside of it is all ornate, right, two sides with that.

And I have just—how do I explain this? How to say? Oh, there's the effect of the pandemic has [had] on the African American and Latino [communities] predominantly. So I had this—we have this African statue with all these, that had these nails in it. So I have that on one side that represents the African that's being affected by the pandemic.

And then I have this Jaguar mask with a bird, black bird, sort of Latino thing. So all these things are revolving around the door. And the final thing is like this luna moth, which represents rebirth kind of a thing coming over the patterns of the other meditation bowl. And there's a lot of other things. This one was very complex.

One's got the balloons that were—that I took pictures of, that were on top of Bernal Heights—that were in the shape of a virus up at the top. So something like that. And then there's the one, *Stop the Violence*, which has Gandhi in the center. Because I took this photograph. I was going through my photographs. Gandhi—this is a great picture of Gandhi. It was like a bronze statue in San Francisco, hidden, of Gandhi behind the Ferry Building in this very barren, obscure place that—no one ever would find him there. But I think it was a time when I was getting ready to get on the Amtrak, which was across the way. I go and I look at it. And I says, it was just tiny. I says, This statue should have been twenty or thirty feet high, at least. Because he was such a huge person in our life, within the whole world. And it's just this little statue. [*laughs*] I couldn't believe it. So I started my painting with this.

And, of course, it ends up—without describing everything in it—it's about stopping the violence. It has my hands. My hands are dark green with some patterns that I had taken earlier. Stop, you're pushing me out this way toward you.

So just things like that. That's what I'm doing right now. I have nine pieces in this series called *Home Sweet Home*. And people look at them and they say, "Well, these are around social justice things, OK." But they're still kind of like—they're my images. I put them in a way that's—and I identify with each one the same way that I do my own, the inside of myself. I always look inside, inside, outside.

So it's an interesting process for me—direction, I should say, because it's all the same process. But I'm just using images and in my own way. Because I always—I took these pictures and said, Oh, one day this picture would be good in a mural somewhere. But it never happened. So now I'm using them in my own paintings. And they're all about five feet by five feet square. They're fairly good sized.

And I had the Gandhi one that's displayed in the window down at the Precita Park right now. So it's been fun though, fun painting these too. And I've been doing one every other month, something like that. Takes a few weeks to do in between doing the murals too. But it's just fun to do something a little bit different on my own.

I have other work on amate paper, which is the sacred paper of the Aztecs. And it's like, a friend of mine, they were in Mexico, and they sent me a lot of this paper. So I started doing squash paintings on it. And it's really the paper that gives me the imagery. And these are figurative as well. And they're really—they're very interesting. They're very different.

But I have a few of those too. And I like working on the amate paper.

**SG:** That's really exciting. And so something that I feel like is something you've said and something we've kind of seen throughout is your attraction generally to painting on large surfaces. What appeals to you about that?

**SC:** Well, I've always wanted to paint, well, because I want something outside of my own periphery. So the larger the canvas, the better because then I don't see the edges. Small things just kind of make me feel like this. So I never imagined myself working as big as I have.

Luis used to make big canvases for me. I think the biggest canvas he ever did for me was about a ten by ten, or something like that, in a shape. It's like a triptych, but it was ten feet square almost. And that was the same thing. I just wanted something outside of my

periphery. And he always made canvases for himself. I think they were square too. They were like five by five by—five and a half square, I think. Because that's what his reach was. I think your span is the same as your height. So it's like this. So he would always make a canvas for himself that was no bigger than his hand reach, which is around five and a half feet square, or something like that. So all his paintings are about five and a half feet square mostly.

[*laughs*] You have all kinds of different things.

But in all my paintings are only—he used to make shaped canvases. We used to have like a pregnant square. So it was like bulged. And I have lots of canvases that are like that.

There's one that I did, a spiritual portrait of him, about four years ago. It's called *The Eyes of Time*. And it's being displayed at the Chico Art Center visionary art show. So that's interesting that they selected that one. Yeah, that's the last canvas that I did.

I don't think I'll be able—I won't say I won't. But, again, I don't have room to put canvases [in]. So I'm working on Tyvek paper. So I do five-foot-square Tyvek paintings. It's an archival, tear-proof, weather-resistant paper. I really like painting on it. It's kind of like—it's a spun fiberglass, but it reminds me of rice paper. It has that translucency. And you let the fibers—the fibers can come through. So I use the texture of the paper a lot. I let it come through the pigment. It gives it a glow.

**SG:** That's so interesting. And so thinking about these large surfaces, these large canvases, these large pieces of paper, and then how you translate that into working murals on these large buildings, what would you say is the most important mural you've worked on and why?

**SC:** Well, I can't say. I mean, because each one of them is your child, is your baby. And each one is unique and different. And so it's always the one that you're working on right now [*laughs*] [that] is the most important.

I mean, the thing that would always come to my mind first is probably the Women's Building because of its scale and the monumentality of it and the impact that it's had in the community. And to women, other women artists, and to my sisters in paint, the *MaestraPeace* women group and how important it has been in our lives and how we bonded and stay together, sharing our lives. So I think that that's the one that comes up on the top, you might say. But there's others that have very special stories probably, as well.

If I were to stop and think about each one or the, the one—the *Soul Journey* out in the Bayview. It's way out there. That one, I think, is a special one too. I think the Tenderloin People's Garden one is really special. Of course, the McDonald's mural that we did, the *Culture of the Crossroads* on 24th and Mission.

We've done about, over six hundred or seven hundred murals. Of course, the [Alemany] Farmers Market murals. I mean, there's eighty-three murals out there that we did for the farmers market to help preserve the legacy of the farmers market, because it's very valuable property there. And we hope that the city never sells it to a developer. So we did these murals for all of the farmers' stalls.

The farmers market there is over a hundred years old now. And people have grown up with that here in the city and continue to patronize it. And so that was a special project—to work with the farmers and get to know them and what they wanted to see in their particular stalls that reflected their lives and what was important to them. And that's where we get our food from.

So those are just little stories. Each one has its own value. Yeah, so.

**SG:** And then how has it been being an arts educator compared to being an artist and a muralist? Do you feel like those things are integrated, separate? How are those roles for you?

**SC:** I think they're the same because you teach the same thing. I mean, if you're doing a community mural project and you do the community mural workshop, you do—it's the same thing, what I teach. So I'm a mural arts educator. So when I do my workshops here or if I'm asked to do workshops anywhere else, it's the same narrative.

I'm a teacher from how it all works and how you can practice this. And so I have the community mural education workshop, which I do once a month, [and] people who want to learn the process can come in and share that. And I take them through the whole process. We do a hands-on part of it, where they're developing the theme, they're drawing out their ideas, or seeing how it works on the paper, on the composite, and making a composition together. We don't actually do the painting. But they can see how it all works as a collaboration with each other. All the other participants in the workshop, they all get to see how it all comes together.

So that's what I teach. And so that's what I do when I go out to all these different sites and lead a workshop; it's teaching. I put my teacher hat on.

And when I'm out there painting, I put my [*laughs*] muralist paint, muralist hand up there. I think it's all pretty much the same. I have been invited to different places to do speaking. And so I'll just show a lot of slides about the process. I went to Sweden. I've gone to—I went to Toronto for one. Different places, or to China or to Russia, or whatever it might be, teaching the same thing. They want to know how it's done. And so I teach it. I think the last time I was

in China was—the first time it was with 150 students. Never experienced anything like that before. Did two murals. But the second time was with twenty art teachers. And they collaborated on one piece. But they learned the process. And now they're doing murals using that process in their own schools or neighborhoods and communities. They really liked it a lot. So that's what I practice. That's what I teach. Yeah.

**SG:** And so, how would you like to be remembered and how would you like Precita Eyes to be remembered?

**SC:** Um, oh, I don't know. [*laughs*] Just that, I guess, [I'd like to be] remembered as someone who believed that there was an artist inside of everyone. And [in] the organization as a place where one could share their expression with others in a collaborative way and with respect. I think that that's—that would be a good way to be remembered.

**SG:** And thinking about how your practice is as an artist, as a muralist, as an educator, what kind of legacy are you leaving behind, do you think?

**SC:** Well, I think I'm leaving behind some—a way for people to practice their work with community in a way that shares your skills and knowledge with them so they can continue practicing with their communities, with their neighborhoods, with other people, with other artists, with the children, with the youth. That there's a way to bring art into the lives of people outside of the artist community, that we can just bring art to the people. Yeah, so that's, it is—it's a people's art. And I think that will be understood and respected more and more, as we go forward in this world, to make a better place.

**JB:** I'm curious, as part of that legacy or that view that continues and carries on, in many ways, I think of you as a person who—you painted with Mujeres Muralistas right back in the seventies.

**SC:** Mm-hmm.

**JB:** And now you're painting with good walls, right, and the [*inaudible*]. Right, you have this, you're a connect[ing] bridge through all these generations. And you continue to paint. And I'm wondering if you can talk about what that's been like to paint with muralists from the seventies and then painting with younger generations today? How has that transformed your practice and your artwork?

**SC:** Well, I think what it does is that it's just kind of—it's rejuvenating. It gives you strength to share your practice and with future generations, with younger generations. What's great about that is that they're showing their respect and honoring you by wanting to be near you,

with you, and wanting you to participate with them in some way. And your inclusiveness in your process with them has brought us together. And that they understand how that was possible. And that they will be able to do that for future generations in their lifetime.

**JB:** What is the advice that you generally tend to give young painters?

**SC:** Just, well—they need to just basically do it, to continue their practice. Don't deny it or don't stop. Don't stop it because you—I think every person needs that creativity inside of them to find the—to become a visionary, you need to continue that practice.

And a visionary is one that sees the whole thing, I think, and one that sees the needs outside of themselves. And if you practice and you share that with other people, there's a lot of greater things that can happen that you can't even imagine if you don't do that. It's just basically doing, just be active, actively engaged in your creative practice, that's going to open up a lot of possibilities for you and for everyone around you. Yeah.

**JB:** What do you think are the effects that continuing Precita Eyes, or starting Precita Eyes, has had on the mural world, not just the Mission?

**SC:** Well, it has reached outside our neighborhood, outside the Mission, outside of our country. It's had an impact. I mean, even the mural movement itself; it started with nothing. And because we made it accessible to everyone—no matter what your practice is, even individual artists that come and paint their own walls, because they saw that it was something that was public, something that could be given to everyone. It included. It was an inclusive practice that is for everyone, whether you work with community or not.

It's something that—the street art, the graffiti art, everything has really had an impact all over the world. But because we started with nothing and gave it, I think, a quality that it's for everyone, that it's for people, is inclusive, I think, if you keep that idea in mind, no matter what you do.

And that's what Precita Eyes is. That's the kind of legacy that we're going to have—that it's always been an inclusive process and will always be as long as it continues to [be practiced] and be itself in the future. And if not, the people who have experienced that practice here will continue it somewhere for decades to come and for the future because it has had an impact.

It does make the quality of life much more important and livable and beautiful for people to see, to feel, to experience in their daily lives. It needs to be out there all the time. You have to be active. And I think that that's what it brings—that inclusiveness is so important.

**JB:** I think that was amazing. I don't have any more questions. What about either of you? Stephanie?

**SG:** I don't have any more questions. This was so wonderful. Thank you.

**SC:** You're welcome. Thank you.

Bells from the nearby St. Peter's church rang on the hour and we would stop the recording then to give Susan and ourselves a break. Even though she was eager and excited to spend the day with her granddaughter, Susan was very generous with her time and her story. She mentioned her plans to take her granddaughter to the herb store in the neighborhood for the first time and to the nearby copper shop, where Susan wanted to get her granddaughter a ring.

In Susan's fifty-seven-year-plus career as an artist and muralist, she has created over four hundred murals and has exhibited and lectured on community mural making all over the world. At the core of her practice is a deep dedication to seeing and nurturing the creative potential in everyone and offering her skills and knowledge to others [so they can] collectively contribute to making the world a better place. Susan has taught generations of artists and muralists who continue to use and share the creative fundamentals and community mural making processes, and Susan herself continues to be a prolific artist.

This oral history of Susan Kelk Cervantes was a collaborative effort, like murals also are. The team behind it was:

**ERICA GANGSEI:** Erica Gangsei

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

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

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

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

**CAMILO GARZÓN:** Who served as the oral histories' producer and mixer.  
The rest of the team included:

**JB:** Javier Briones



**KEVIN CARR:** Kevin Carr

**CHAD COERVER:** Chad Coerver

**CARY CORDOVA:** Cary Cordova

**MELISSA SAN MIGUEL:** Melissa San Miguel

**SG:** And it was produced and mixed by me, Stephanie Garcés.

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Thanks for listening.