In Barrio Logan, a new Chicano Park mural reflects on history and promotes unity
One of the largest Chicano Park murals in recent history began to materialize last weekend under the leadership of artist Alicia M. Siu with help from members of the Barrio Logan community.

The initial drawing for the mural was outlined and sketched onto a massive canvas inside Bread & Salt gallery, and over the course of the next several months, residents will work with Siu to complete the painting before it's eventually installed in the Chicano Park Herb Garden.

The garden is an open space established in 2015 to promote community and healthy living. It's not an easy feat to paint a new mural in the park, which required quite a bit of cooperation between the Chicano Park Steering Committee, the Environmental Health Coalition and the local neighborhood.

Siu, originally from Honduras, focuses her artistic practice on history, including the generations that came before and the ones that will eventually follow. Through this mural, Siu aims to tell the story of Barrio Logan, while at the same time empowering youth to be caretakers of their environment.

Barrio Logan's rich history is kept alive in this recent addition to the park. The content of the mural was conceptualized during a number of community workshops, where ideas were suggested and discussed. Siu was then responsible for collaging the final concepts into a unified vision.

Through the creation of the mural, Siu is careful to emphasize the importance of her collaborators. As an artist and community-minded individual, she is cautious to have too much of the attention on herself. Perhaps that's because murals have such a rich history in Southern California, something she is eager to continue.

Murals are so much more than decorative pieces designed to enliven an area. They are a visual representation of a community's voice. In this particular instance, the mural symbolizes the history of the Kumeyaay (Native Californians indigenous to San Diego County, Imperial County and Baja California) and an environmental solution for a sustainable future. The mural's title — “Haawka: May the Fire in Your Heart Burn Bright” — is a traditional Kumeyaay greeting.

The imagery of the mural is centered around an oak tree that illuminates a burst of light outward. The tree represents living in harmony with the earth, as acorns from oak trees were an important source of food for the Kumeyaay. On the left side of the mural, several generations of Kumeyaay...
are represented by individuals of varying age, depicting generations without noting specific people.

Pushed to the top left corner of the composition is an evil business man and other representations of corporate greed, aiming to interfere with the community’s way of life. Siu shared that the good snake that creates hope and the bad snake that creates havoc were a conceptual foundation for building the composition. In comparison, the right side of the mural moves forward into the present and a more hopeful future. On this side, community members are working together and sea life swims outward in a healthy ocean.

Archeologists believe that the Kumeyaay tribes have occupied regions in Southern California for 12,000 years, a detail that emphasizes the importance of preserving Kumeyaay culture in our communities. Projects like this not only help preserve local histories, but also encourage future generations to become part of this narrative.

This venture, coupled with the City Council’s recent approval of the creation of the Chicano Park Museum and Community Center, are significant moments in the history of Chicano Park. The mural’s importance is twofold: It celebrates the Barrio Logan neighborhood’s rich history while also promoting a message of unity and resilience.

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