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Catherine Cajandig Interview

Rebecca Murphy

DePaul University, rebeccakaitlynmurphy@gmail.com

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Interviewer: Rebecca Murphy
Artist: Catherine Cajandig
Location: In Person – Chicago, IL. Lincoln Park
Date: February 14, 2017

Note: The following interview was conducted by a DePaul University undergraduate student enrolled in AAS203: Asian American Arts / Culture during the 2017 Winter quarter as part of the Asian American Art Oral History Research Project conducted by Laura Kina, Professor of Art, Media & Design.



Bio:

Catherine Cajandig is a painter, printmaker, muralist and curator. At an early age, she showed an interest in art that was encouraged by her parents and teachers. She attended classes in the SAIC Junior School.

In 1960, she was juried into The Chicago Society of Artists and has remained an active member. She has served as a board member that included various committees and was the President for one year. She is the committee chairwoman that publishes the yearly CSA Print and Drawing Calendar.

Her images are of personal topics and observations, developed through series and recurring themes. She enjoys mixing mediums, techniques, materials, and realism with abstraction. Her interest in printmaking and artists led her to lithographs, linocuts and monoprints. Her early works were in oil, now, she works with water base materials, linocuts, monotypes and acrylics. She has exhibited in the United States, Mexico, Italy, Spain and Nicaragua. She has had 28 solo exhibitions. Her work is published in books and art magazines and is in the collection of the El Paso Museum TX., Concordia College Chicago, and represented in the Platt Fine Art Gallery. Chicago and many private collections. She received a BAE and MAE from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in painting and printmaking, a MFA from Instituto Allende, Univ. of

Guanajuato, Mexico in mural painting and studied Japanese Printmaking, Ukiyo-e with Ansei Uchima. She has been an Art Instructor and Adjunct Assoc. Prof. at Univ of Illinois at Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago, Vermont College and Chicago Public Schools.

Many of her murals are on Chicago's west side, including Center for Neighborhood Technology, Clemente High School, and Whitney Young Magnet High School, Mozart Park and Vacaville Calif. Most recent mural: "Children Are Our Future", cement relief, mosaic and paint, part of The Chicago Highline 606 Project: Original in 1970 and restored in 2016 repaired with new cement and new painting design and poetry.

Interview Transcript:

Rebecca Murphy: So, do you want to tell me a little bit about yourself? Like your birth date, where you grew up, what your family dynamic was like?

Catherine Cajandig: Here in Chicago, 1932 as a matter of fact, southwest side, west side, north side, most of the time on the north side. My mom's American, whatever you want to call American. Dad, I don't know if you are familiar with what they call waves, from the Philippines. He was in the first wave, that's how far back he goes 'cause he came over with the Navy and served with them for four years, eight years. I don't remember. I've been in Chicago. I've been out of the country a lot, but this is my residence. I started out very early in art. Actually, it's interesting because most of the people I know that were Filipino. They're like me. They came, their fathers came over, there weren't any women here hardly so they married somebody American and I went to school with several and I keep in touch with only one person now, but then their kids came along and married so everybody's assimilated. There are six kids in my family and nobody married a Filipino except my nephews.

It's the same thing with Japanese and Chinese people. Chinese had a better chance because there were more Chinese people here. But as far as Filipinos go, and I really don't have too much relationship with the Filipino community except in a professional way because the later people who came in except my -in-laws, they had a tendency to settle with people they knew and associated with. The people like me, there wasn't anybody so I sort of hung around Chinatowns. I grew up sort of in Chinatown you might say. That was as close an Asian background, my friends I still keep in touch from high school were Chinese, you just assimilate where you went. Now I know a lot of people, but my associates are mostly in the art world. I went to Mexico for two years and studied down there. And also, where I grew up, the neighborhood in those days it was everybody – 'lotta Irish, a few Mexicans. I probably have more association with the Mexicans than I do with Filipinos and then my brother-in-law, who just recently died, was Mexican but he wasn't from Mexico. His kids all married all different kinds of people so it's like mish-mosh. So far as real close relationships with the Filipino community, I really don't have that much. So, my associations are still now days in the art world--Bueno Silva and his son and a bunch of guys that we kinda hung out with, but they all went different ways.

RM: How and why did you first get involved with creating art?

CC: I think my first experience was like, I always liked to draw and I remember around second grade or something like that, I went to parochial school so you had to draw Valentine's and I drew an airplane, but because I helped my brothers build airplanes, most kids drew airplanes like looking straight down at it. I drew mine like you would see an airplane on site and I remember the nuns getting really excited. They said, "O my God she knows perspective", and she ran around, she went to the next room, "Look at this, Look at this." I didn't know anything about perspective but that's the way I always saw planes, and they liked me to help cut out the pieces, that was my job. Anyway, I drew the airplane and I got a reputation in elementary school for being an artist. Those days you would decorate the blackboards and when the other kids were doing work I would go around and draw pictures on the blackboard, like borders so that's kinda how I got started but also, I liked to draw.

My dad liked to draw, they don't do that anymore, but in the paper, there used to be a thing "Draw me" and you would send it in and you could win a scholarship. Well it was a gimmick to get you, they never gave you a full scholarship but they'd say, well the scholarship costs so much, you did it all at home, but we will give you so much money off, they told me mom and dad. They sent me some materials to work with. I think it probably was a bit of a sacrifice for my parents to put money into it because there were six kids, I'm in the middle. Anyway, I worked with them for a while, and then my mother was not satisfied with how they were doing things. You would draw your picture, you'd send it to them and they would critique it and send it back so she sent my younger brother and I to The Art Institute of Chicago Junior School. And that was my affiliation with the Institute and it kept going all the way through 'til I wound up going to school there in later years. We went to summer school too. I did art in high school, but the school I went to was a parochial school, but it was co-ed, one of the few in Chicago. It's where the cathedral is. That used to be a high school and a grammar school, now it's all grammar school. And all we did was poster contests, but we did learn some things about art and the nun who was teaching it, she liked art. She used to paint the vestments, she was very good, for the priests, and the scapulars and stuff. So, she did know art and she taught us. We drew one perspective drawing, we did one of this and one of that. And at the same time, I was attending classes at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago so that gave me a pretty good background.

When I decided to go to college, don't ask me why, I applied for the architecture department...architectural engineering. At Univ. of Illinois and at that time there were no women in there, and I didn't even know that. I thought I was 'gonna do big buildings, that's what I wanted to design buildings...so crazy. Anyway, I was accepted and went there for two years. I was the only girl in the whole department and I didn't think anything of it. I would go with whatever the assignments were and the guys never bothered me like why are you over here, what are you doing here? At the same time, I always wanted to do more free things, I think what really killed me on the architecture, 'cause in those days – we're talking about a long time ago, we went to an architectural firm and this man who gave us the tour, he was an old fellow. "I started emptying waste baskets, that's where you're 'gonna have to start." I didn't know if he was trying to discourage people or what but I do know that I spent two years in the architecture department and about that time I decided I really wanted to do more fine art painting and things like that and so I decided I wanted to transfer to the Art Institute; I was familiar with them. The dean called me in and he goes, "Why do you want to transfer?" "I just want to do it." He tried to talk me out of it; I think he liked the idea of having a girl in the department. The next year a

couple girls came in but what's interesting in that group that I was in, as far as I know, only two, well that was really tough, they really try to knock you out. It was a five-year program and the only ones that I know are two guys who finished the whole program and went into architecture. Everybody else dropped out and went into something in art, but in some other form. Now I look back and I look at again all these people, I said dang I should have stayed in there I could be building big buildings. I'm happy where I am, I'm really happy with what I did. But at that time, I wasn't disappointed, just thought this is the way I want to go.

RM: How would you define or categorize your art or yourself?

CC: Well, I do a lot of different things. And it's very difficult writing that bio for me because I was trying to figure out how do I say this, rather than saying she is mish moshing all over the place. When I left the Art Institute I went to Mexico. I wanted to do murals because at that time murals were big, and they had a mural program and Sterling Dickenson, who was from the Art Institute, had gone down there and that's one reason why I was able to get down there, I mean with my parents saying, OK he's down there and he became the director. They had a program in mural painting and that's what I wanted to do, I didn't know what would happen, but I went down and they gave me a scholarship. It was the one place where they would put up a wall for you and you could actually do a fresco. I mean they would say, Oh, we're gonna put up a wall, do you 'wanna do a fresco? They weren't meant to be permanent or anything like that; and secco, which is you paint on dry plaster. So, they would say, "anybody 'wanna do this next week?" and then they'd get the workers to come out and put your wall up. It was just for practice. I did get a master's degree. I stayed with two years. They gave me a wall which I designed and painted. And it was the only wall that was slightly abstract. It was a very narrow corridor and probably no wider than 12 feet and outside the sculpture studio. So, I put these big forms like going around. But anyway, that's what I did; I didn't do any figurative, like the usual Mexican type of art work. I went down there because Sterling Dickson was in charge so my parents felt okay, He's from the Art Institute – she'll be okay. And Siqueiros, one of the three major muralist painters was going to be there and teach and he was 'gonna do a mural with students. So, I thought, oh wow, this is a great opportunity.

So, when they accepted me I went down. I think I arrived a few weeks after he left – 'cause I don't know if you know anything about him – he had a horrible temper. Got in fights with everybody and he had gotten into some kind of discussion and he left. So, by the time I got there he was gone but the mural program went on. James Pinto was the instructor who took over the program when I was there for two years and did all the required work. I came back to Chicago thinking I was 'gonna return to Mexico because they said I hadn't used up all my scholarship money, but unfortunately, I guess it's the way life is. I got home and a few months after that my father died. He wasn't sick, just all of a sudden, things happen and my family goes, "it's time for you to stop playing and contribute to the family, like get a job."

So, I went to the Board of Education and applied for a job. I had all the credentials and everything because I had applied before I left. I went and started teaching for the Chicago Board of Education as a substitute. They gave me a job teaching English as a second language and they didn't even have a program in it. So, they gave me this room with all these kids from Italy, Greece, Mexico and Puerto Rico.

It was in Little Italy, Taylor Street so most of the people were Greek or Italian. I was there couple years before I got into high school; that's where I was supposed to be teaching anyway and I wound up in a high school on the west side, Crane High School, which was pretty tough. It wasn't when I went in but it got rougher as it went along, it got real tough. So, I taught there but I loved the kids, the kids were great, I never had any problem. Though they were having riots in the neighborhood. I never had any problem with the kids especially in art. Today, every once in a while, one of them will turn up and I get an e-mail.

From there I went to Whitney Young Magnet High School. It was the first magnet school in the city and I was looking for something. So, they were building the school and I went and applied for it. They were looking for faculty. They hired me as head of the art department. I was there from the beginning when they first opened. It was a wonderful time because we wrote the whole curriculum we had a four-year art program which kids could take if they wanted to. I stayed there until I retired. I'd give workshops in studios and for clubs. I knew people down at the Art Institute, Angela Paterakas, Head of the Art Education Dept., I called her and said, "I'm not 'gonna be here anymore so don't send me any more student teachers, but talk to other people." And she said, "Well, what are you doing?" I said "well I'm not quitting but just I'm out there." So, she said, "She said, "come down here" and she gave me a job teaching just one class – Methods to Student Teachers. So, I was there for like three years. Also, I worked with the Art Department, over at the University of Illinois Circle, looking for a new art instructor. The head knew me from the Mural group and she said, "look you can do this." So, I went and worked for them for five years, one class. It was one class, I would go and visit the students and supervise them and their teaching methods. When I got out of there I said that's enough teaching except for workshops if people want them. Now I don't even want to do that anymore. It's funny now, all of a sudden I got all these offers, from all over, years ago I would've jumped at them, now I don't want this anymore. So that's where I am now, I'm just doing my own work, but as far as the murals go, I would do a mural one summer and the next summer I would travel. I would go somewhere. I went all over the world, I've been to about 18 countries and I like skiing so I'd go on a ski trip. I kept going in both directions and now I've given up skiing because I broke my leg, but I think the 606 is my last mural. Climbing around on a scaffold that did not break my leg but people put out the rumor that I fell off the scaffold, which I did not do. I told them to keep saying that 'cause that sounds much better than I just was walking in my bedroom and fell over something, but at this point the leg is not 'gonna support me in the skiing. I belong to a ski club and they go, "when are you going skiing?" and I say, "never."

So that's where I am today, doing my own work but I'm doing smaller works. I could do a mural, mosaics. You could do little pieces and then mount it on a wall. I guess the other thing with the mural is the people don't realize that most were community murals. I didn't do many private murals. When you work with the community murals, you work with the people in the community, you work with schools. You work with people who think they know what they want, who want to have some say in what you do, so you do these drawings and you take it to them and they don't like this part, they don't like that part. If you're smart you can talk them into doing it the way you want. You go in with preconceived idea of that you want and then you show it to them and they come up with ideas. You talk to them and show them why this will work and that doesn't.

I would start before I got out of school in June, because I'd get the commission in April or May. Most of the time I worked with another artist. We would start thinking about what we would do, how to present this, what materials to use so when we were ready to go on the wall in June. If you work for a school it wasn't bad because you could pick out the kids you want, for the city of Chicago they would supply the kids and just give you any kids. Some were very good, some just wanted the money and they weren't interested until we got almost finished and then they would be, "wow this looks pretty good." They weren't too interested in the art itself. Then we had a party at the end with food and stuff, music and then they would come.

There were kids who I remember working with—oh I forgot how many—that' about 30 years ago, when I was just starting. We worked with this young man. I remember him so much because we had to lug all our materials like a block away because you couldn't leave them on the street, and there was a coal place and we had to lug back and forth every day. He was about 6 feet tall and I would be picking up the stuff and he would always come and take it from me. He was this gentleman and he was a high school kid. Several years later John Weber and I were working this mural on North Avenue, which is still there. We start working in cement and we thought everybody will do cement – nobody wants to do cement, it's too much work. Anyway, this guy comes up and goes, "John and Cathy?" It was the same kid, He had grown up, he was working as an apprentice in a lawyer's office. I don't remember if he was going to school but he was studying law. So, there's a kid we made contact with.

A lot of the kids you never know what was 'gonna happen. I haven't really kept in contact with - except when I was at Whitney Young. I would find two or three kids that would qualify if they were working for the city – they had to have low incomes and stuff and I would get them to be the lead artists because many of the kids just never had art. You'd paint something and when they finish painting it, you'd have to go back and repaint it. I did a mural at Clemente High School and all the kids from there we were able to pick from the art classes and those kids were interested. They were good. I would say, "You don't want to do that, that's 'gonna be too much. They started cutting the tiles to little pieces, the parts they cut small look like little diamonds glued and set. Sometimes the kids come out with some ideas.

Most of the time you're working with a fellow artist, but sometime you are the lead artist and then you have the say and the others go and come. This mural is on North Avenue, that's all hand applied cement. First of all, we had to make a form and figure out how deep – thick it had to be and it has to go two stories high. Then we drill holes in the wall and put mesh in and put bolts in there to hold the cement. You could do a section at a time because it would dry too fast. I think it's 'kinda faded now because the colors were not as good – they are much better now. John and I had cement in our brain. We did several murals with cement. We were looking for something more permanent because we realized that paint doesn't last in this area. If it lasts 8 to 10 years you're doing good before it starts to peeling and fading. Over the years, we used oil base paint. They don't use oil anymore so everything is water base which is good for me because I can't use oil anymore. Then I was in Mexico what we used to paint with the paint for cars you'd be inside and the smell was everywhere and that stuff was really toxic. Now I just do mostly easel works and everything is water based because I can't use oil anymore. I am a cancer

survivor and after that I couldn't walk into a room where they were using oil. They've improved acrylics. I hated acrylic when I started and I still don't know if I'll ever learn to use it correctly.

RM: So, you use a bunch of different media in your work, which one?

CC: Oh, yeah, I did lithography. I don't do that too much anymore, with stones. That was my favorite. I can't do that anymore because the acids. So, I'm mostly doing linocuts, there is one in the here at DePaul. I really got a good feeling for just black and white. I'd start with color and I'd go I just want this in black and white. All of a sudden color took over and people lost their appetite for black and white. Now people are looking at old photographs, and black and white is just as good and important.

I don't do much etching, I don't particularly like etching – I think it' because I like lithography. I started with lithography. They always say if you like lithography you won't like etching and vice versa. I did go back and took a class at Lill Street Studio in non-toxic etching and thought I would learn about new materials. They have been experimenting last 20 years for safer materials.

I don't know if my cancer was caused by some of the stuff I was using, with the stones. I was using nitric and phosphoric acid and inks and other things were toxic. I know some of my teachers in later years came out with problems. Nobody thought about ventilation. You sit in a room like this and do all this crazy stuff, you were breathing in all those fumes. I took silkscreen, I got to a point that I could not go in there without a mask.

BM: Do you ever address Asian or Asian-American identity, themes, or histories in your artwork?

CC: I don't think I really do, but I did take a summer with Ansei Uchima and I learned how to do Japanese wood block printing and I feel that without realizing it I really like things not so crowded, more negative space. I really don't even address Mexican themes that much, depends on where I'm 'gonna do the piece like I did Clemente Mural in a Puerto Rican neighborhood. I know I had an argument with the people they wanted something political. I just didn't feel like that was what I wanted to do. I felt you should look at what you are, where you are, I mean if it was the day and time for that, then you should do it.

I'm doing a lot of landscapes. I don't do flowers. I did a piece for Oakton College in a women's show based on, I think my mother's background--some American Indian. I did a painting on a Canadian Indian artist. More or less, my pieces are based on what I'm looking at present day. I don't like to do a lot of ethnic stuff no matter what it is. I think it's all right if you want to do it but you sort of limit yourself.

RM: Is your work ever contextualized as Asian American Art?

CC: Oh no, I don't think so. I started out an abstract artist. All my training early was abstract. I only have one friend now who came along at the same time I did. Her dad was Filipino and her mom Polish, most of her stuff is abstract using color no figurative stuff at all.

I did a lot of traveling all over Europe and Asia etc. sometimes I'd have a sketchbook and I would use things from there. I remember I did a whole series of 50 prints when I had gone to Guatemala. At the end of a year I look back and see what was important to me and that's where I get my subject matter. I don't try to stick to anything particular now as far as Asian theme – I did a show with Bueno Silva and all Filipino artists – that's quite a few years ago but they were all quite diverse. The Philippines don't have a body of work that you could consider Filipino Art most of it will come out religious art. Not like Mexico and other countries where they have a history of indigenous people who produce a style of art. Kids don't know their history, I read a lot of history *I See the Philippines Rise* – the first president of the United Nations was Filipino. My father was from Iloilo, when he went to school, he learned the local dialect, then Spanish, then English. Much of the language is Spanish. When I was there I'd speak Spanish and people thought I understood Tagalog.

RM: Is identifying as Asian or Asian American something that is important to you personally?

CC: Not that much, because, I guess all my friends that I grew up with. My dad would always say “You're an American.” And he tried to make us realize that if you're 'gonna get along in this world you're American. In Europe they'd say, “What are you?” I say “American.” They say “but what are you?” Today, I identify more because more people; my problem growing up and all the people I went to school with were all part Filipino and their kids, none of them married Filipinos. Now there are more Filipinos but then there weren't and not in Chicago. I remember there was only one Japanese restaurant until after the war. So, I mean my sisters and brothers – there weren't any Filipinos around for them to marry even if they wanted to. So, they married Irish, Scots, French all kinds of mixtures and their kids are all over the place? One of my brother's wife was French and Italian. His oldest son married Polish. They have two sons and of course they kept the last name Cajandig and love saying they're Filipino. I think a lot of nationalities are like that – some people do like to stay in their culture, but if you're always divided out I don't know. Having traveled a lot, I realize that in Europe (and I've been there many times, I even backpacked through once); if I was in Italy, they thought I was Italian and if I was in Spain, they thought I was Spanish, so it's like whatever.

RM: What types of exhibition opportunities have change or stayed the same over the years?

CC: Well a lot things have changed. The main scene where you have big galleries is very difficult to break into. There used to be a lot more little galleries, if you went downtown in Chicago there were all sorts of galleries along Michigan Avenue, there aren't many. Sometimes you need a foot in the gallery to help, now it is a whole different scene from when I started out. If you knew somebody, when I was younger I had a lot of people who kinda mentored me but they were well known artists and they'd say, “Look at this girl's work” or something like that. Today, I don't think that makes too much difference. Everybody runs their own gallery scene if you don't know someone in it, it doesn't always help. What really makes me a little ticked off is curators. They have classes that teach how to curate and you are the artist doing all the work. If I know the curator, I know what they like and don't like, I don't even bother because I know they aren't going to choose my work. Prints are coming back, for a long time if I had prints I wouldn't

enter because they were all painters. Now they have a different feeling and there a lot of shows just prints, it's changed quite a bit and it's opened up in many ways

RM: You were just in this printmaking show here at DePaul: so, can you tell me a little bit more about that?¹

CC: Well Hector Durante and John Weber put it together, Jose Guerrero, who it's dedicated to was a mural painter and I knew him all these years. He was a very interesting person and talented artist. I was never on an original team with him but I worked within a group. They used to be called the Chicago Mural Group and now The Chicago Public Art group. They aren't just doing murals, also sculpture and mosaics. I knew him from that and he and his wife over the years. When he died, I was asked, "Would I like to participate in this portfolio?" and I said sure.

It's been languishing on for a couple years. I did the piece, which I thought was a little bit whimsical, I don't know, cause he had a funny sense of humor, he was a very nice person and also political minded guy, he was "for the worker, for the worker" all the time. So that's how I got into this portfolio.

RM: You talked a little bit about the 606 Trail mural.

CC: Oh, yeah

RM: Do you wanna talk about it a bit more?

CC: Oh, well, that was done with John Weber. I don't know if you know anything about the murals of Chicago. It all started out on the south side. Some people painted on a wall and then from there it grew. When I came back from Mexico in 1978 there was nothing going on here so I'm thinking what am I going to do with murals now. The WPA was doing things in schools and places but that was a closed thing. That's when the Chicago Mural Group got together and started looking for places. I was not a founder but I joined soon after and we found that people looked at murals like graffiti they did not respect them, I mean if you did a mural, they go it's just something on a wall, no matter how good or how bad it was.

I started working with John Weber and Cecelia Radeck. She moved out East when we finished the mural. But we were looking for something else beside paint and we thought cement was gonna do it. So, we went and researched all this stuff, how do you mix the cement and all that jazz, finding all the materials-all hand applied cement. So, we put it up-we did that piece and the walls. The painted part had a different painting, we painted both sides of the street and then we brought little kids over, and they painted the bottom of the wall, from the daycare center.

It was really quite interesting because the whole neighborhood got involved and the different schools.

¹ "José Guerrero Memorial Print Portfolio," curated by Brother Mark Elder, February 2–May 31, 2017, DePaul University Richardson Library, Chicago, IL.

We had a cement mixer and we had to do all this stuff, it was very physical, there's only one person I know who actually is going on with cement. I looked at him a couple weeks ago, I'm like, "You're getting to old to do this stuff." But some artists in our group do little pieces, and if you go around the city, you'll see, sometimes figures in front, but most of the time the cement got to be too much for them, and that just another added process that one has to deal with besides painting.

If you go over in that neighborhood. It's another one being gentrified. Well there's a railroad, but the railroad has been unused a long time, but this will be interesting to you. I think when we were going to do a mural that place was pretty bad with gangs and stuff. One group was painting at night, so they'd bring their cars and show the lights-that's how they would paint at night. Well somebody came by with guns and shot into them and killed a girl. So, I don't know who came, but somebody in the neighborhood came to our group and says, "would you paint a mural on that wall because I don't think they were thinking of finishing." And of course, John says Okay, "You know that would help since she got killed." So, John and I contacted every gang in the area, I look back and that was insane, and I would be out in an alley, what am I doing and they would say meet us on a corner of such and such place. So, we'd meet 'em on the corner, we'd sit on a fireplug and we'd talk to these gang members. All they wanted, of course, it's different now, was to give us the OK to work in their neighborhood. Now I do know a couple other people who just went in put a mural up on a wall, it didn't stay long. When we got our group together we were talking to our kids and one of the girls says, "Isn't that where that girl got shot and we go "Yeah" and she goes "I ain't going over there." And the rest of the group, several of them were gang members, "No, we are not going over there." So, John and I thought we better look around and that's how it came up, the railroad.

So, then we had to contact the railroad people, the railroad had already stopped being used. So, we asked can we paint on this section and we got their permission. After we painted and did the mural people kept painting and they would have a day and send out a call, anybody who wants to paint come over and they called it the Bloomingdale Trail. When we started back redoing this one, you'd be surprised how many people came up and said, "We're so happy you're doing this." I hadn't gone over there in years. Cause the murals started getting ragged if you don't get some money to fix it. It's just like Lincoln Park; I used to live there for 35 years. I noticed all those buildings were gone, I couldn't believe it and the coal yard was gone and the school was new. It changes for better or worse, I don't know. I feel sorry for the people someone who lives there for years and years 'cause they get knocked out. What was surprising to me as we worked on the mural, people would come by and say how happy they were we were redoing it. When we put it up, we put a lot of poetry of two people who lived in the neighborhood--David Hernandez and Salina Rivera.

It was surprising how many people came by and made comments and the fellow who runs the day care center came and wanted to know if the kids could work, but we really can't fit that in here but when we did the first one, we had a whole strip about a block long and the parents would bring their kids and we'd give them brushes and they each had a little square, they painted their own pictures, it was really a neighborhood thing. When they decided to do this gentrifying, they went through and blasted every mural off the wall. And I'll be honest with you, I think, they blasted our painting off, which was going pretty bad, deteriorating. They didn't take ours off

because the cement, they would have to jackhammer it off and they said ours was historical, it's the first one that was ever put there. They would have to first jackhammer it off the wall, then repair the wall, but it was better and it's a nice mural. So that's how we came about doing it again 37 years later. It's a long story when people start telling you, they'd come by every day and talk about it so that's how the 606 got rejuvenated. We worked with two well accomplished artists and high school kids part time who were very good. So that's how 606 came about.

RM: Is there anything you're currently working on?

CC: No, I haven't done any more murals and I think that might be my last one unless I do small mosaic. I was supposed to do something in the school with one of the fellows I worked with, that didn't come about and I didn't push it anymore. We finished the mural in August and three weeks later I cracked my femur but I can't believe I've never broken anything. I have skied off mountains out west and in Europe. I never broke anything and here I am walking in my bedroom. What I found out was that the doctor told me – I wore a brace on my knee, because my knee was hurting and I didn't realize, she said, when I went to the emergency, “You kept your knee but you weakened all the muscles up there.” So, when I was in my bedroom, I turned and fell but I didn't think it hurt until the night and the next day was told I cracked the femur and there was nothing they could do except wait for it to go back and do physical therapy. So, I did that for 7 months, didn't get much work done.

I could help design something but I won't be climbing scaffolds. I did one- I don't think I mentioned, out in California in Vacaville several years ago but now that's been destroyed. I went out and thought I was gonna do a mural about the size of a large window. This is what happens you get crazy, she shows me the wall average about 20 feet high and it's a whole block long and I go, “I gotta do the whole wall.” They gave me a bunch of kids who were really good from the schools and the town, they were kids from art classes and I designed the wall– this is the first time I did the whole thing myself. I was out there every day and the kids came when they had time but I had simplified it very much. The background was a lot of color and people would come up and say “can I help you” and they would bring their kids and there were bricks so I'd say, “Yeah here paint those, you have to make sure you get all the sides of the bricks.” It was a very community thing and somebody came up one day with Kentucky Fried Chicken to feed us.

I was out there every day and the scaffold three tier high but we got it done. Then the city bought the building and after they bought the building which was really stupid, it faced the south and they decided they wanted to put windows. I didn't know, but I didn't find out until late that in California you cannot remove a person's mural without their permission, when I found out the mural was already being destroyed and I was contacted, “you wanna sue” and I go, “I don't wanna sue, I can't deal with all that. let it go”

I also found out that there was a young man in the neighborhood whose father owned the best Mexican restaurant in the town and he was graffiti artist and he was good. He had been running around up and down California doing graffiti art and it was good. He did all the sky because I couldn't, reach that high so he air brushed it. His father wanted him to help run the restaurant, he didn't want to do that, he wanted to do artwork. I was in the restaurant on day his father says, “Aren't you the artist that's doing that out there? You're the one.” I say, “I didn't talk your son

into doing anything.” He was about ready to kill me. I found out his wife was going to school, they were a young couple just starting out. I heard later they divorced and he was out doing art what he wanted to do. They blamed me. I had nothing to do with it. Every mural has its own story. It’s really interesting and you do get to know people and sometimes the experience is good and sometimes not so good but in the end when the piece is finished you feel like you accomplished something.

I guess my worst experience was Mozart Park. I had to work with the park district. I did all the drawings and then they had two people on the park district panel come over – “Why did you put this here? Why did you put that there?” I was ready to say forget it. I guess they feel they have to say something. The architect was a young fellow and this was his first job and he was like – “You’re ‘gonna mess up my building” but we got it done and that was the worse job working with community people- I mean it wasn’t that bad, but I had to listen to them back and forth and they were determined to make their say.

So, other than that it’s been very satisfying. It’s like anything, your work with a group of people, some times their kids. I remember over there that I had a bunch of kids who were gang bangers and the police came by and asked for this kid and I go, “he wasn’t here yesterday. He drove to work.” He said, “he drove to work? It was a stolen car.” I never saw the kid again – so anyway, you really run into a lot of interesting stuff. So that’s my story I guess, as best I can.

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