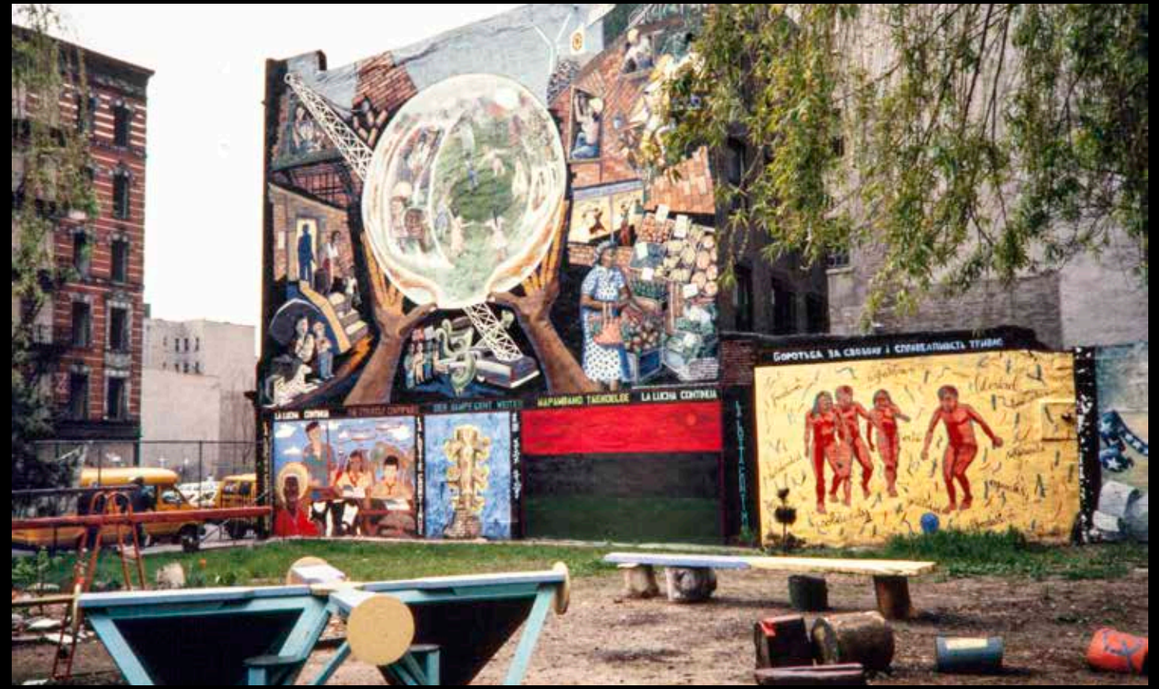
La Lucha Continua
The Struggle Continues:
1985 & 2017

an exhibition organized by Artmakers Inc.
curated by Jane Weissman

April 8–June 30, 2017

The Loisaida Center
710 East 9th Street
New York, NY



La Lucha Continua The Struggle Continues, La Plaza Cultural, 1985. Photo: Eva Cockcroft

La Lucha Continua
The Struggle Continues: 1985 & 2017

WANTED: Artists of Conviction to Paint Political Murals. Summer 1985. Flyers with these words and posted by Artmakers Inc. throughout Manhattan's East Village (Loisaida) announced a May 7th meeting to plan *La Lucha Continua The Struggle Continues*. That summer, 34 artists would paint 24 murals on seven walls of the four buildings overlooking the La Plaza Cultural community garden, located on Avenue C and extending midblock from East 8th to East 9th Street.

If, by the mid-1980s, much of New York City had emerged from the fiscally bleak years of the 1970s, Loisaida residents remained beset by poverty and drugs, victims of gentrification and displacement and fraught community/police relations. "The Lower East Side, in the 1980s, was a junk store," recalled *La Lucha* artist Nancy Sullivan in a blog written twenty years later in Papua New Guinea. "Before it got gentrified, before it became real estate again, Gambino family heroin was run out of abandoned buildings—from 14th Street and Avenue A down to the projects at Grand Street and Avenue D. The East Village was crawling with junkies; our lives were filled with them. They lined the streets, sat on the sidewalks, OD'd in the backyards and, with all their passivity and ennui (before crack cocaine radically changed the tempo of addiction), generally filled the landscape with a pall of bathos."

La Plaza Cultural in 1985. Photo: Camille Perrottet

La Plaza Cultural had suffered a similar fate. Developed in 1977—a collaboration of the housing and cultural organization CHARAS and the Council on the Environment of New York City (today GrowNYC)—the garden, by 1985, was neglected and filled with garbage. Except for vagrants and crack addicts, neighborhood gardeners and residents generally avoided it. Of the buildings surrounding La Plaza, most were vacant, others were homesteaded, some by squatters.

Early in 1985, Eva Cockcroft—activist, author, founder of Artmakers, and a leader of the national community murals movement—traveled to San Francisco, CA, to visit Balmy Alley in the Mission District. There, over three dozen artists—organized by Ray Patlán and known as PLACA—had, over the past year, painted 27 murals, transforming fences and garage doors into a gallery of potent

images celebrating Mesoamerican indigenous culture and opposing U.S. involvement in Central American wars and the attendant political abuses and human rights violations.

The PLACA murals not only left their mark—a *placa* in Spanish—on the community, they inspired Eva to create something similar in New York City. The result was *La Lucha Continua The Struggle Continues*—"a political

Balmy Alley, 1984. Photos: Tim Drescher

art park." In 1985, 34 artists painted 24 murals; in 1986, artists painted two additional two murals. All totaled, they covered 6,645 square feet of wall. Today, the garden is thriving, but only two of the murals still exist, the paint cracked and faded.

Tim Drescher is a mural historian based in Berkeley, CA. He is the author of many books including *San Francisco Murals: Community Creates Its Muse (1914-1994)* and, from 1976 through 1987, an

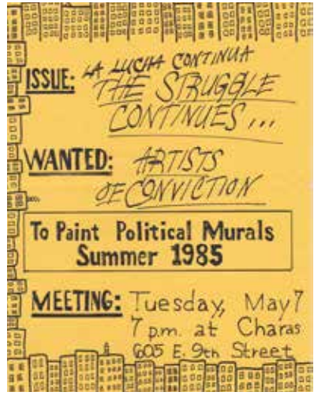
Miranda Bergman and O'Brien Thiele, *Culture Contains the Seed of Resistance Which Blossoms into the Flower of Liberation*, Balmy Alley, 1984

editor of *Community Murals Magazine (CMM)*. He speaks of the "differences [that] emerged in Balmy Alley's trip east—specifically a political shift from cultural politics (that celebrated Central American cultures and opposed U.S. involvement there) to a more vigorous, aggressive politics (the fight or *la lucha*). It was an ongoing struggle, not just a celebration. New York's murals were, for the most part, more confrontational."

La Lucha Continua The Struggle Continues addressed six political issues, four of which remain of deep concern: gentrification, police brutality, immigration, and feminism. Today, activists concentrate on the need for affordable housing and the rampant growth of tall buildings that replace older, viable housing; stop-and-frisk practices, and minority youth (and adults, too) killed by police who are not held accountable; mass deportations of immigrants without serious criminal records, the resulting break-up of families long residing in the United States, and the construction of an unnecessary, expensive wall along the Rio Grande River; and the threat to Roe v. Wade and the elimination of reproductive health services for poor women. Opposition to apartheid in South Africa has morphed into continued racism in the United States and the resulting Black Lives Matter movement, as well as advocacy for Palestinian rights and a two-state solution. Opposition to U.S. interventions in Central America today translates to the rise in militarism and U.S. involvement in ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Chino Garcia. Courtesy La Plaza Cultural Archive

Artmakers contacted Carlos "Chino" Garcia, one of the six founders of CHARAS (its name is an acronym of their first names) who, working with Adopt-A Building, obtained permissions from building owners to paint the exterior walls. The artists viewed the site with a mixture of optimism, horror, and pragmatism. Karin Batten reflects, "La Plaza was perfect. Yes, the buildings were mostly deserted, but so many walls were available. The community was in favor of it as we promised to clean up what had been a park and now was mostly used for drug dealing. We also promised to welcome community volunteers, especially children wanting to help paint the murals." A.G. Joe Stephenson recalls, "What I remember most clearly were the discarded crack vials and human feces. I told Eva that we needed to have our heads examined to be painting in such conditions. But each day before starting work, the artists put on gloves and picked up the garbage and used needles." Kristin Reed adds that "it was a pretty depressing site—the garden overgrown and reclaimed by addicts, a bunch of looming bombed-out-looking buildings, members of Hell's Angels prowling around. At the same time, we imagined creating 24 colorful murals and turning La Plaza into a center of community pride."



Courtesy Karin Batten

The May 7th meeting, held at CHARAS's El Bohio Community Center, attracted many "artists of conviction"—a group of minority, political,

graffiti, and East Village artists, the majority women. They joined the artists who, a month earlier, gathered over a spaghetti potluck dinner at Eva's loft on Lafayette Street where, Rikki Asher recalls, Eva spoke "about the difficult conditions facing people living in Loisaida and elsewhere where the delivery of government services to meet basic needs never arrive. The conversation soon turned to the frustration of artists unhappy that New York's mural organizations no longer offered opportunities for political murals. By the end of the evening the group decided to issue a call for artists to participate in a neighborhood mural project entitled *La Lucha Continua in Central America, South Africa and The Lower East Side*." Writing in the Winter 1985 issue of *CMM*, Eva recognized that "coming on the heels of the Artists Call Against Intervention in Central America and Art Against Apartheid exhibitions in New York, it seemed essential that the project deal with, at least, those two issues. The third issue, the housing struggle or gentrification, is the most important issue in the local neighborhood."

Design selection committee

For years, Eva—along with Leslie Bender, Maria Dominguez, Camille Perrottet, and Joe Stephenson—had worked with Cityarts Workshop, established in 1968, its murals lauded for addressing social ills. Then, in the late 1970s, its long time funder NYSCA (New York State Council on the Arts) not only expressed its dissatisfaction with the "aesthetics" of the murals—which Eva and Joe considered code for "political content"—it also changed funding eligibility guidelines which, in effect, limited painting opportunities. Expressing this frustration, Eva wrote in *CMM* of the founding of Artmakers and the "desire to return to the organic feeling of the early mural movement when the personal conviction and politics of the artists and the aroused communities coincided".

1985 was not dissimilar to today when, following the 2016 elections, artists banded together to (re)dedicate themselves to political art and create new vehicles for making it. Eva was active in many organizations, and several *La Lucha* muralists met her through their political associations: Art Against Apartheid (Susan Ackoff Ortega, Noah Jemisin), Artists Call Against Intervention in Central America, Artists for Social Responsibility (Rikki Asher), National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression (Karin Batten), Political Arts Distribution/Documentation or PADD (Karin, Keith Christensen, Noah Jemisin, Elizabeth "Betsy" McLindon) and War Resisters League. Other artists learned about the project from notices in various journals such as the *Village Voice* (Dina Bursztyn) and the Latino magazine *Ajá* (Kristin Reed),

Design proposals. Photos: Camille Perrottet

flyers posted in the neighborhood (Etienne Li, Noel Kunz), or by word of mouth (Willie Birch, Leon Johnson, Leslie Lowe, Marilyn Perez Uncal).

"We were idealists," recalls Keith Christensen. "We were acting on our beliefs that things could be better, that it took collective work to make it so, that a more hopeful future was possible. We were committed to the struggle against the right wing political direction of the country, open to friendships, and supportive of each other. We were against the Reagan administration and the problems of the times [including] the fear of imminent nuclear destruction… We aimed to develop a new history of activist art."

Eva headed up a design selection committee that included Artmakers artists, members of CHARAS and El Bohio Community Center, and other community activists. "That first review meeting was quite an experience," recalls Camille Perrottet. "The artists presented their ideas, backed up with sketches, drawings, and paintings. As we looked at them spread out on the floor, two additional themes emerged—feminism and police brutality." In 1986, a sixth theme was introduced: immigration.

Strategically sited, the murals allowed viewers to see all five themes from any vantage point in La Plaza. This was not always easy to achieve as their placement needed to be reviewed and approved by the few people tending the 8th Street Garden and by 8 BC, the "trendy" nightclub also on East 8th Street. The club thought the murals too "social realist" in style and wanted the mural on its building—ultimately painted by Luis Frangella—to be more "expressionist" in character, reflecting the burgeoning East Village art scene.

For two months starting in July—a summer marked by record-breaking temperatures—the artists worked, their efforts drawing community residents, family, and friends into the garden to help paint, socialize, and start reclaiming the open space. Twelve artists collaborated on the 30' x 41'8" collective mural on the Avenue C building. Directed by Eva, this mural—which lent its name *La Lucha Continua The Struggle Continues* to the entire project—presented the issues plaguing Loisaida, a term coined by playwright Bimbo Rivas (a CHARAS founder) providing a sense of identity and place to the neighborhood. The collective mural also presented the successful efforts residents undertook to tackle these problems.

Murals showing all *La Lucha* themes viewed from E. 9th St. Photo: Eva Cockcroft

Many of the artists working on this mural joined several others to create 23 smaller murals ranging in size from 8' x 10' to 10' x 22' in both

Camille, Keith, Cliff and Eva. Photo: Joe Stephenson

horizontal and vertical formats. (The two murals that brought the total to 26 were painted the following summer). Characterized by the artists' individual styles, these murals—entitled by their creators—were unified by colorful bands running above, below, and in between them, with the words "The Struggle Continues" in many languages, reflecting the backgrounds of Loisaida's residents and workers.

Reaching out to the political art community, Artmakers and CHARAS raised approximately $3,500 including small grants from North Star and Citizens Committee for New York City as well as the support of artists May Stevens, Coosje Van Bruggen, Leon Golub, and Nancy Spero. The raised funds covered insurance, scaffold rental and some administrative expenses. Materials for the Arts (NYC Department of Cultural Affairs), Golden Artists Colors, Amsterdam Color Works, and Kaminstein Brothers donated paint and supplies.

The artists donated their labor, liberating them from bureaucratic and artistic restraints imposed by funders. Had the budget included artist fees and materials, it would have topped $35,000, at the time an unheard of amount for a community mural. Today, that budget would approach $90,000, scaffold rental alone would be $20,000.

"I still don't know how we achieved all this [planning and painting the murals] in such a short time, only a few months," reminisces Karin Batten. "It was a lot of work but very satisfying, celebrated by a great opening

Dedication fiesta, September 14, 1985. Photo: courtesy Joe Stephenson

with music, speeches, food, and dancing." The "dedication fiesta" organized by Artmakers and CHARAS took place on a beautiful Saturday afternoon, September 14, 1985. Emceed by Chino Garcia and Bimbo Rivas, it was attended by hundreds of people from both the political art world and the neighborhood, amid many expressions of community unity and a renewed sense of purpose. The celebration's buoyant

Dedication fiesta, September 14, 1985. Photo: courtesy Joe Stephenson

mood and good will was beautifully captured by John Hunt in his half-hour video documentary *La Lucha Continua The Struggle Continues*. It can be viewed on YouTube.

"Over the weeks as we worked, we developed a camaraderie and exchanged ideas and reflections of each other's work and our artistic processes," recalls Susan Ackoff Ortega. "Creating work dedicated to people's struggles in the U.S. and around the world was an energizing experience, both for me and, I'm sure, all the artists who took part in this historic project." Joining the artists, poets, musicians, and singers—and validating the topicality of the South African and Central American murals—were Neo Mnumzana, the representative of the African National Congress to the United Nations, and Roberto Vargas, cultural attaché of the Nicaraguan embassy.

La Lucha Continua The Struggle Continues garnered significant critical acclaim. The *Christian Science Monitor* declared in its article "These walls have a voice" (August 6, 1987) that "These murals pull at the eye—and sometimes the conscience." Writing for *In These Times* (October 2-8, 1985), art critic Lucy Lippard couldn't "remember a summer when arts activists have been so active… [*La Lucha* is] the biggest and most impressive collective mural project to date." Her words about Robin Michals and Kristin Reed's collaboration—"Where collective murals too often obscure the best of individual's [sic] styles, this collaboration integrated and enriched very different personal styles."—apply to *La Lucha* as a whole. Lippard concluded, "Projects like these are ignored in the 'higher' art altitudes, although those spheres have nonetheless acquired a certain tolerance for 'political art' over the last few years, thanks in no small part to the activities of precisely such progressive groups as those involved in *La Lucha*." In *New York Daily News*, Jimmy Breslin devoted a column—"Walls of Sorrow on the Lower East Side"—to the Michals/Reed collaboration; the murals by Etienne Li and Chico that paid tribute to Michael Stewart, the 25-year old graffiti artist murdered by transit police in 1983; and Seth Tobocman's wall protesting police brutality.

Not long after the completion of *La Lucha*, Loisaida residents restored La Plaza, which today, after a protracted struggle in the late 1980s

against its development, is a permanent open space under the aegis of City of New York Parks & Recreation. In 2003 La Plaza was renamed in memory of Armando Perez, a CHARAS founder who, murdered in 1999, recognized the power of gardens to bring communities together. As Eva wrote in *CMM*, "An empty lot has become a place of beauty. For myself and the other artists who participated in the project, there was the sense of joy that comes from working successfully with others and the satisfaction of having accomplished something both public and coming directly from the heart."

La Plaza Cultural in 2016. Photo: Don Yorty

La Plaza Cultural with ghost of Rikki Asher's 1985 mural
Photo: Don Yorty

Pat Brazill recalls "walking by the newly thriving neighborhood garden and seeing how lovely all the murals looked as a backdrop to the lush greenery. What I most remember is that confident, lively group. Many of the artists were handsome and beautiful, and many were exceptional artists. While I didn't leave the project feeling like mural making was the perfect art form for me, I'm eternally grateful for that opportunity. I loved being part of it. It forced me to step outside of my comfort zone, to be more social, more in the world. What's the point of being in New York if you're not out there in the thick of it?"

"The Lower East Side in the mid-1980s was a unique time and place," adds Robin Michals. "To me, *La Lucha* seemed to walk the fine line of improving the neighborhood for the residents without adding to the gentrification that was to come. We were extremely lucky to experience the daily street life toward the end of rampant drug dealing and violence, and before real estate development flattened out the area's individuality into yet another upscale neighborhood of Manhattan." Joe Stephenson muses that "all of us artists were very sincere and concerned about the human conditions depicted in the themes we chose. Who would have 'thunk' that the more things change the more they stay the same... La Lucha Continua!" His thought is echoed by Camille Perrottet: "After those last elections, we must continue the struggle more than ever. La Lucha Continua!"

For many artists, *La Lucha* led to new collaborations and projects. *La Lucha* was Kristin Reed's "first experience doing community murals and I went on to do many more afterward, including a second collaboration with Robin Michals—*The Enchanted Garden* (1986) a few blocks away on East 4th Street. We had another priceless Artmakers experience where the connections and friends we made during *La Lucha* served as invaluable connections and friends for our safety and productivity. Meeting Eva and becoming involved with Artmakers changed my life in so many ways." Dina Bursztyn had a similar experience: "*La Lucha* introduced me to street/ community/public art, and it sparked many other projects including *Gargoyles to Scare the Developers* (1987, 1988)—29 bas reliefs installed on buildings throughout Loisaida. And in the process, I made new friends."

"Eva was always thinking, constantly creating ideas and designs for murals," muses Tim Drescher, reflecting on his many "fascinating telephone conversations" with her. "She always saw the murals as part of a larger struggle, whatever the specifics may have been. She wrote in *CMM* that, 'the dedication did not signify an end to the project. In a sense, it is only a beginning.' It was just one achievement in the middle of her long and productive career of activist art. I don't think she considered her involvement with *La Lucha* a career move, but simply one project among many that contributed to informing audiences about important issues while, at the same time, brightening their lives and demonstrating original artworks to them." Eva died in 1999, following her struggle with breast cancer. Her life and accomplishments are celebrated in Artmakers' *Homage to Eva: La Lucha Continua* (2002), which still graces the corner of East 3rd Street and Avenue B, a few blocks from La Plaza Cultural.

Zio Ziegler's *Salvation of Energy*, 2015
on the original site of the *La Lucha* group mural
Photo: Jane Weissman

CHARAS' *El Bohio Murals,* 1988. Photo: Eva Cockcroft

La Lucha was the catalyst for other Artmakers projects and the inspiration for an equally grand one by Mike Alewitz. Following the *La Lucha* model, Artmakers issued a call for proposals for an installation in the Broadway/Lafayette subway station, a project sponsored by the Metropolitan Transit Authority Arts for Transit program. Five *La Lucha* alumnae—Eva, Kristin Reed, Karin Batten, Thérèse Bimka, Dina Bursztyn,

and Camille Perrottet—were among the 19 artists who created the collective mural and ten individual pieces that made up *The Changing Face of Soho* (1988). That same year, Maria Dominguez directed a six-mural cluster at El Bohio, the community center run by CHARAS. She and Eva were among the artists who painted murals in the building's recessed panels, all speaking to the Loisaida experience and painted in the artists' individual styles.

Pathfinder Mural. Photo: Eva Cockcroft

When Women Pursue Justice, 2005. Photo: Jane Weissman

La Lucha Continua covered 26 walls, creating 6,645 square feet of powerful, pointed imagery. In 1988, Mike Alewitz began *Pathfinder Mural* in Manhattan's West Village—a two-year project that, at 6,715 square feet, was hailed as one of the largest political murals in the world. Gathering 80 artists from 20 countries—including *La Lucha* alumni Eva and Keith Christensen—the mural presented a history of the international labor movement and national liberation struggles whose leaders were honored by individual portraits on sheaves of paper issuing from a large red printing press.

One day while writing about *Pathfinder* for our 2009 cultural history *On the Wall: Four Decades of Community Murals in New York City*, Janet Braun-Reinitz announced, "I'm a painter, we need to make a mural." Thus the genesis for *When Women Pursue Justice* (2005), which celebrates 90 women who, risking life and liberty, worked for social change in the United States from the mid-19th century to the present day. In three short months, 12 principal artists (including *La Lucha* alumnae Rikki Asher, Maria Dominguez, and Kristin Reed), five young female interns, and over 30 volunteers painted movement leaders and activists surrounding the 35' high central image of Shirley Chisholm astride a golden steed and brandishing a pennant with the words, "A Catalyst for Change." At the top of the 45' x 72' mural is a portrait of Eva—based on a photograph of her working on *La Lucha* and rendered a little bigger than the other faces.

So completes the circle that begins with the PLACA murals in San Francisco's Balmy Alley, works its way through *La Lucha Continua* to *Pathfinder Mural*, and ends with *When Women Pursue Justice*.

Remembering Eva, Tim Drescher points out "the seriousness and skill with which she managed *La Lucha*. Most memorable to those who knew her personally, was the delight with which she took on such challenges. Her face lit up when she talked about this gathering of artists and that idea. Bringing together usually separated artists gave her joy." Today, thirty two years after *La Lucha's* dedication, the participating artists have again gathered together, their words* animating this exhibition—*La Lucha Continua The Struggle Continues: 1985 & 2017*. Indebted to Eva for opportunity, inspiration, and finding their artistic voices, they may have temporarily lost touch with each other, "but never with Eva's memory and the continued struggle to make ours a better world, even a decent one, for everybody. That was Eva's challenge to us all."

Jane Weissman
Exhibition Curator

Homage to Eva: La Lucha Continua, 2002. Photo: Margarita Talbot

* The statements quoted in this essay come from the publications cited herein and private correspondence sent to the exhibition curator.

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JANE WEISSMAN

A member of Artmakers since 1991 and its longtime administrative director, Jane is co-author of *On the Wall: Four Decades of Community Murals in New York City* and *When Women Pursue Justice*, based on Artmakers' 2005 mural. She curated *Images of the African Diaspora in New York City Community Murals*, traveling it to Paris and Dakar.

La Lucha Continua The Struggle Continues, 1985, 30' x 41'8". Photo: Camille Perrottet

1 La Lucha Continua The Struggle Continues

Addressing the theme of gentrification, this collective mural overlooking La Plaza Cultural gives its name *La Lucha Continua The Struggle Continues* to the entire series of 26 murals. Negative, critical images of life all too real in Loisaida dominate the mural's left side: a homeless family, an eviction, a wrecking ball destroying a building whose residents have fled to the fire escape. Positive, affirming images fill the right side: a windmill and solar-paneled rooftop, sweat equity workers undertaking building renovations, a community cultural center, and a local market offering fresh, fairly priced fruits and vegetables. In the center, a large crystal ball holds hopeful images for the future: the promise of "housing now," female construction workers, and young children playing in a lush community garden, which indeed La Plaza has become.

Eva Cockcroft
Photo: Camille Perrottet

Camille, Noah Baen, Rikki, Keith & Hamid Irbouh
Photo: Joe Stephenson

La Plaza Cultural Mural by Freddy Hernandez
1977, ©CITYarts Inc. Photo: Eva Cockcroft

The past and the future can be found in two vignettes. The *La Plaza Cultural Mural* (1977) by Alfredo "Freddy" Hernandez preceded *La Lucha Continua* on this wall. Here, in the upper right corner, two muralists work on a rig painting the faces of the African woman and Chinese and Puerto Rican men originally portrayed in Freddy's mural. They represented recent immigrant groups to the neighborhood. The faces of the female workers in the crystal ball are referenced in the 2002 mural *Homage to Eva: La Lucha Continua* (page 13), celebrating the life of Artmakers founder Eva Cockcroft who died in 1999. It can still be seen on East 3rd Street at Avenue B.

Separating the collective mural from the five small murals below are black bands with the words "The Struggle Continues" painted in various languages. The first translation was in Cyrillic script in honor of the neighborhood's longtime Ukrainian residents; it's located above the second mural from the right.

ARTMAKERS COLLECTIVE

Eva Cockcroft
project director
Rikki Asher
Karin Batten
Thérèse Bimka
Robert Brabham
Marguerite Bunyan
Keith Christensen
Etienne Li
Camille Perrottet
Judith Quinn
A.G. Joe Stephenson
Dorianne Williams

Camille. Photo: Eva Cockcroft

These bands appear throughout the park. They do more than frame the smaller panels; they unify and lend coherence to murals characterized by many individual painting styles.

Individual styles are also present in the collective mural. Under the direction of Eva—who created the crystal ball images—the artists suggested ideas and imagery that, collectively, they incorporated into the final design. Primarily a ceramist whose drawing skills were limited, Thérèse recalls using "collage to explore ideas. My rendering of brick patterning became a unifying feature of the mural—a perfect example of how muralism makes room for everyone's contributions." Keith designed and painted the homeless family taking shelter under an umbrella, his "real" dog Casanova keeping them company. He also created the anti-gentrification protestors below the crystal ball; they challenge the "octopus mobster landlord" (page 38), his tentacles squeezing buildings, the grill of his limousine morphing into shark-like teeth.

Eva and Camille. Photo: Keith Christensen

Dorianne and Keith. Photo: Camille Perrottet

Marguerite painted the evicted family—the looming policeman behind them was contributed by Judith Quinn—and the fire escape scene under the wrecking ball. Joe recalls working on "an evil bulldozer-looking machine which I called the 'gentrificator' for use by 'developer$' to demolish buildings; a version made it into the mural. I also developed the alternate energy ideas; the windmill actually existed on East 11th Street." Etienne designed the sweat equity workers and the community center, and Rikki painted the produce market.

Joe recalls that "Freddy's mural was destroyed in 1981 when the landlord waterproofed the wall with a coat of black tar. The surface determined our use of oil-based Bulletin sign painter's colors instead of acrylics, which would have been easier and safer to use. There was also the weirdness of painting on a soft black background, which expanded and contracted with the weather."

Interns Dorianne & Robert
Photo: Camille Perrottet

"Sweat Equity Worker" by Etienne. Photo: Camille Perrottet

Helping to erect the scaffolding, Thérèse "loved working outdoors, in the streets. I loved the idea of taking art out of museums. It felt alive and in closer alignment to the role it played in more ancient times when art was part of daily, ordinary life." *La Lucha Continua* was Rikki's first large scale mural. She remembers "Eva being incredibly gracious, supportive and inspiring. Often, when we came down from the scaffold, there were a few neighborhood residents who gave us immediate feedback. Some liked what they saw; others offered constructive criticism. We would jot down these comments, integrating most of them into the next day's work. We used to talk about how much we liked a mural's ability to bring art to the public. Eva knew that 'Wherever there is a struggle, it's important to represent that struggle through art.'"

"The Eviction" by Marguerite. Photo: Camille Perrottet

Keith and "Homeless Family". Photo: Camille Perrottet

Nicaragua, 1985, 12′ x 16′. Photo: Camille Perrottet

2 Nicaragua

Karin's mural addresses United States involvement in Nicaragua, one of four Central American countries—the others being Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala—where U.S.-sponsored funding and interventions led to disastrous results. Fearing that Nicaragua would become another Cuba, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency trained militias to overthrow the democratically elected Sandinista government, "popular," Karin writes, "for its free education and healthcare as well as the preservation of the small farms people favored."

In the mural, a Sandinista soldier stands protectively over children learning to read, the words "La Lucha Continua" filling a page in their books. Above, helicopters release bombs over the land. "Since the mural did not require scaffolding, neighborhood children worked alongside me, helping to paint the farm scene—a farmer, a cow, a chicken, and trees. They were city kids who had little experience with farm animals and crops. Being a teacher, I explained the food the animals provide and what a farm produces."

Photo: Camille Perrottet

In late 1985, months after the mural's completion, the Reagan administration began diverting funds from weapon sales to Iran to buy arms for the Contras fighting the leftist Sandinistas. This violated both an international arms embargo against Iran and a congressional order forbidding the administration from supplying the Contras. The weapon sales were revealed a year later. Known as the Iran Contra Affair, the deception to protect 14 officials, including the president, has been described as "post-truth politics." This is very similar to the current administration's tendency to promote "alternate facts."

Karin met Eva through her work with the National Alliance Against Racism and Repression. She was also a member of PADD (Political Art Documentation/Distribution) and worked with critic and activist Lucy Lippard. As a teacher at Parsons, Karin organized shows addressing opposition to war and nuclear proliferation. She helped organize *La Lucha*, designing the flyers seeking artists as well as the poster for the dedication fiesta, which was attended by Roberto Vargas, the cultural attaché of the Nicaraguan Embassy.

KARIN BATTEN

A painter and graphic artist, Karin lives and works at Westbeth artist housing in NYC and directs the Westbeth Gallery. She is represented by June Kelly Gallery and shows regularly in Europe. Karin's work is in the collection of the National September 11 Museum, and she taught for many years at Parsons School of Design.

karinbatten.com

Root of Loisaida, 1985, 12′ x 9′8″. Photo: Camille Perrottet

3 Root of Loisaida

Having explored the idea of a root as a metaphor in his personal paintings and drawings, Keith saw his mural "as a way of symbolizing community and social activism. The root growing from underground portrays political action as an organic origin and essential source of making social change. I wanted *Root of Loisaida* to be a hopeful and specific symbol for the community, even though I portrayed the root's limbs—containing names of community organizations—cut and severed to express a movement that was hurting, attacked, and tortured. Yet, the root would be a kind of angelic figure rising upward toward the collective mural's crystal ball with its positive images, thus conveying a sense of being indomitable and growing in strength. Tony (Anthony Buszco) painted the background and texture patterns."

Photo: Camille Perrottet

Keith met Eva—who introduced him to "the methods, context and politics of making murals in communities"—at a conference for activist artists in 1983. At the same time, he met muralists Judy Baca (SPARC) and Tim Rollins (Group Material). Keith belonged to PADD (Political Art Documentation/Distribution), serving as the art editor for the magazine *Upfront* and working with its editor Lucy Lippard. Participating in *La Lucha's* early planning stages, he remembers "going to many meetings and many political and community discussions at the PADD office in the War Resisters League building.

"We muralists were idealists, open to friendships, committed to the struggle against the right wing political direction of the country and supportive of each other. We were aiming to develop a new history of activist art. We were acting on our beliefs that things could be better, that it took collective work to arrive at a hopeful future. We were against the Reagan administration and the problems of the times including apartheid, the U.S. intervention in Central America, what seemed like imminent nuclear destruction, and the gentrification of New York City neighborhoods, specifically Loisaida."

KEITH CHRISTENSEN

Keith continues to be active as an artist and involved in social justice issues. Exhibition: National Public Art Biennial (Neuberger Museum). Commissions: permanent installation at the Minneapolis Government Center's Light Rail Station and a labor history mural in St. Paul, MN. He lives in Minneapolis and teaches at St. Cloud State University.

kc.ampstudio.org

Rise, People, Rise, 1985, 12′ x 16′. Photo: Camille Perrottet

4 Rise, People, Rise

"When I heard of the opportunity to be part of *La Lucha,"* remembers Cliff, "I responded because I wanted to produce a visual image of the African struggle for the community and for the wider public.

"The work is not just about apartheid. It is about the struggle in all of Africa against the legacy of imperialism and today's corruption of neo-imperialism.

Photo: Camille Perrottet

Cliff and unidentified friend. Photo: source unknown

"The colors represent the African liberation flag. The red sky symbolizes the conflict; the black center, the people; and the green base, the nurturing life of hope."

The following excerpt from Cliff's 1989 article "Art, Politics, and the Life Force," published in the *Journal of Socialist Thought*, resonates today.

"We are all one flesh. Creative communication is our responsibility, not only to ourselves and our oppressed communities, but to our oppressors as well. We must demand the economic means for our survival, and for theirs. As artists and members of humanity's global community, we cannot separate ourselves from the political process which will decide our ultimate fate. Our work is political, regardless of pretension to purity. It supports the status quo; it questions it; it condemns it, and if our work transcends the present world, we must struggle to make this transcendence a possibility for all.

"In our struggle for transcendence, we cannot separate our professional efforts from the totality of our day-to-day lives. Resolution of contradiction is the essence of the creative process, in artistic production and in our commitments to social cause. Our creative gifts obligate us to a larger responsibility in the course of history. We have the opportunity in this year of political decision to look honestly at the reality around us, and to make choices consistent with the affirmation of life."

CLIFF JOSEPH

Long a civil rights activist, Cliff is a pioneer in art therapy. He helped start the art therapy program at Pratt Institute and developed arts intervention programs in prisons throughout the United States through the Black Artist Emergency Coalition.

Photo: Terry Evans

Liberté, Egalité, Solidarité, 1985, 12′ x 19′. Photo: Camille Perrottet

5 Liberté, Egalité, Solidarité

Camille arrived in New York City in the early 1980s "as a young woman searching for a new world, new friends, new adventures, and new opportunities. I was a freelance photographer in Paris and, with Basque friends, had recently published a book about Basque political murals in Spain. I was very impressed with New York's amazing community murals, which at the time seemed everywhere, and I began to document them. By 1985, I was living in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, with my companion Paul and our 3-year old son Jules. Walking from the subway to Loisaida's Avenue C, I was confronted by the obvious poverty in the neighborhood and the prevalence of drugs, daily finding needles in La Plaza, which we removed as we worked on our murals. I was also amazed to find everyday kindness, generosity, and solidarity.

"In my mural I wanted to express my joyful feelings as an artist and a young mother, conveying these positive emotions to the community and its youth. My artistic influences were Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat, and I used bright, primary colors and bold, dynamic lines to portray kids playing soccer. Around them on the yellow ground, I wrote the words *freedom, equality, and solidarity* in English, French, Spanish, and Basque (in honor of the Basque community that gathered at the Euskal Etxea Cultural Center in NYC.) My friend Hamid Irbouh from Morocco gave me a hand. Today, I regret not writing the words in Arabic.

"The soccer players were naked to represent freedom. I grew up in France, and during summer vacations kids ran around naked. So it was natural for me to paint the young girls and boys with genitals. One day as I worked, Eva came by and said that someone from the neighborhood was very upset to see children's genitals in a mural. Cultural shock! I laughed, but in deference to the community, my poor little children became neutered.

"I met Eva at Cityarts Workshop—the community mural organization begun in 1968—and she became my mentor and best friend in New York. We made stencils for a peace demonstration—they represented the nuclear shadows of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—and I worked as her assistant on murals in Brooklyn and Queens. Working on *La Lucha*—Artmakers' first signature project—remains close to my heart and I miss my dear friend Eva who died in 1999."

Photos: Eva Cockcroft

CAMILLE PERROTTET

A co-founder of Artmakers and its current artistic director, Camille has been "a photographer, a painter, a teacher, a muralist, a videographer, a digigrapher, an installer, a nasty woman, mother, wife, etc. La vie continue."

camilleperrottet.com

Sueño, 1985, 12′ x 15′8″. Photo: Camille Perrottet

6 Sueño

At the time a Loisaida resident, Maria created a mural that "displayed the issues and injustices surrounding us and the world. I wanted to express my concern that Puerto Rican culture and arts were losing their true identity, being replaced by North American pop culture."

The mural presents the papier maché mask traditionally worn by *vejigantes* during carnival in Ponce, on Puerto Rico's southern coast. A vejigante is a folkloric figure whose origins trace back to medieval Spain. Usually dressed in black, red, white, and yellow—the vejigante represents the infidel Moors who were defeated in a battle led by Saint James, and to honor the saint, people dressed as demons. The word "vejigante" is an amalgam of the Spanish *vejiga* or cow bladder and *gigante* or giant. The vejigantes carry the bladders that have been dried, inflated, filled with seeds, and painted. Wielding the vejiga as "a trusty weapon, the vejigante happily walks among the people—chanting, singing, and whacking random passersby. The banter between the vejigantes and revelers is all part of the fun."

Photo of Maria signed by Lolita Lebrón. Photo: Marlis Momber

In *Sueño*, a skull representing the stifling of Puerto Rican culture lurks behind the vejigante mask, itself strangled by red, white and star-spangled blue banners, symbolizing mainland culture.

"My hours were irregular," recalls Maria, "and I was lucky if a volunteer dropped by to lend a hand. Ahmed was a young, newly arrived French Muslim artist; he loved drawing skulls and insisted on painting the one in the mural. A photograph of us appeared in Maureen Dowd's *New York Times Magazine* article "A Different Bohemia" about downtown's ascendant art scene."

In 1985, the Puerto Rican nationalist Maria Lebrón (1919-2010) visited New York. In 1954, she led an assault on the U.S. House of Representatives, wounding five members of Congress. Convicted of attempted murder, she was freed from prison in 1979, having been granted clemency by President Jimmy Carter. On her way to dinner at Casa Adela on Avenue C, Lebrón visited La Plaza and later signed the photograph of Maria, and an unknown community member, standing in front of the mural.

In 1989, Latin musician Eddie Palmieri issued the album *Sueño*. His producer, scouring Loisaida for a mural for its cover, selected Maria's. After the album's release, she gave its name to her untitled mural.

MARIA DOMINQUEZ

A co-founder of Artmakers, Maria is a dedicated arts educator who continues to paint murals—in schools and in the community. She frequently exhibits her studio work locally, nationally and internationally and, has designed a subway glass installation for the MTA Arts For Transit program.

mariadominguez.com

For the Freedom of South Africa, 1985, 10′ x 23.5′. Photo: Camille Perrottet

7 For the Freedom of South Africa

For the Freedom of South Africa is a joyous, colorful tribute to South African women and their role in the anti-apartheid struggle. At the time, Susan was co-coordinator of Art Against Apartheid, presenting exhibitions and performances to bring attention to South Africa's racist policies and the people's struggle for freedom.

She researched photographs of protesting women at the African National Congress Office to the United Nations, working up black and white drawings and gouache color sketches, the most representative collaged into her final design. Artmakers and Susan were greatly honored that Neo Mnumzana, the ANC representative to the UN attended the September dedication ceremony.

Photo: Camille Perrottet

Traditional South African dress inspiring its bold colors, the mural shows women—mothers, students, and workers—as activists protesting in the streets. They carry signs calling for the end to South Africa's legal racist policies and for equal rights for Black Africans to govern, vote, and have access to better housing, jobs, and education. One woman waves the flag of the African National Congress, the leading force in the struggle. Actual signs are depicted: End the Pass Laws, Equal Work for Equal Pay, Free All Political Prisoners Now, and Free Nelson Mandela (who in 1990 was released from his imprisonment after 28 years). Fists are raised and it's possible to imagine the women shouting the freedom call *Amandla*—a Zulu or Xhosa word meaning "power."

"Among my favorite memories of the mural," recalls Susan, "are the neighborhood people—even young children ages 8, 9 and 10—who joined me in the painting process. I enjoyed giving them an opportunity to add their creative touches and providing them with sense of ownership of the final work."

The mural was used as a backdrop in the 1985 music video *I ain't gonna play in Sun City* which "brought together the two worlds of rock and rap to protest apartheid. The title refers to the song by Steven Van Zandt, former guitarist of Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band. It spearheaded the musical boycott of South Africa's big-ticket resort town Sun City which, until then, had paid handsomely for superstars to perform at its concerts."

SUSAN ACKOFF ORTEGA

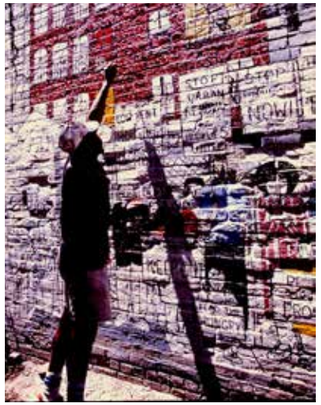
Since 1985, Susan has painted more murals, shown in exhibitions, written about art, parented a daughter and son, retired from teaching art, and built a home on Mexico's southern Caribbean coast where she lives some months painting and relishing her natural surroundings. She continues to be politically active.

Stop Urban Removal, 1985, 12′ x 14′. Photo: Camille Perrottet

8 Stop Urban Removal

A native of New Orleans, Willie participated in the civil rights movement as a teen. Arriving in New York City in 1975, he settled in Loisaida on East 7th Street. He recalls that it was "like going into a war zone. People were struggling and living in situations they couldn't escape. Housing was a big problem. People were displaced, profit taking precedence over people. I, too, felt I could be one step from being homeless. It was important to do something with the community."

In his signature style of presenting narrative through geometry, repetition, spacing, and proportion, Willie shows residents demonstrating against gentrification and for decent affordable housing.



Photos: Camille Perrottet

WILLIE BIRCH

After years in New York City, Willie returned to his native New Orleans. He continues to work as an artist, drawing inspiration from the daily life of his 7th Ward neighborhood, creating narratives that are emotionally connected to the people portrayed.

Beauty's Brigade, 1985, 12' x 14'. Photo: Marilyn Perez Uncal

9 Beauty's Brigade

Jimmy. Photo: Marilyn Perez Uncal

In *Beauty's Brigade,* Sandinista soldiers "are seated around a campfire at night, easing their struggles with a cooked meal, conversation, and some music. Alongside, a soldier looks warily off to the right." At the time, the United States backed the Contra or counter-insurgency in Nicaragua with money, training and troops. "For me," Marilyn remembers, "it too closely resembled the United States backing of the elitist Batista regime in Cuba, where I'm from. My cousin fought with Che Guevara and told me about guerilla warfare in a mountainous encampment like the one in the mural. I love how the people in a small, poor Latin American country pulled their resources together and were successful against a formidable outside threat."

Photo: Camille Perrottet

Neighborhood kids often came by as Marilyn worked and together they would "draw stuff." Her favorite was Jimmy—"he was a lot of fun"—and for him she wrote:

Jimmy gives the wooden broom a big sweep.

He demonstrates his willingness to help clear the space.

We share the bright idea, to expect something exceptional in the future.

Red paint drips down the sides of a gallon can.

Shiny unchecked excess coats the impoverished, the apparent neglect, and reveals a hot spot for liquid imagination which streams over hardened reality.

We enjoy this creative hub tended by our lively anticipation.

The temperatures peak like 'Amazon on the Hudson.'

Our hearts welcome the end of the struggle.

Maybe at night like the weary soldiers who find a little delight under the night sky

and who congratulate themselves on what they did today.

MARILYN PEREZ UNCAL

Marilyn lives in Manhattan and can be found in LinkedIn among healing artists who create in a safe space (Healthy Lifethyme Reiki). Inventing and tinkering with paint and painting are obsessions she can't give up any time soon. As an actress and singer, she is developing the solo performance *How I learned the high wire and lived to tell.*

The Disappeared, 1985, 14′ x 14′. Photo: Pat Brazill

10 The Disappeared

It was perhaps the article "Women's Grief Gives Rise to Activism in El Salvador" in *The New York Times* (Feb. 2, 1985) that, according to Pat, was "so completely heartbreaking and depressing that I knew, while ruminating on my mural, what it would portray."

In *The Disappeared*, Pat acknowledges all the mothers who waited for their missing sons to come home, holding out hope for hours or days before accepting that they were probably dead. The grieving mothers are represented by a lone woman; she faces a landscape marred by an open grave, "essentially a black pit." Above are the words *¿No hay bastantes sepulturas ya?* that translate "Aren't there already enough graves?" Above them is the estimated number of political assassinations and "disappeared" people in El Salvador between 1979 and 1984. Its civil war (1980-92) left at least 75,000 people dead.

Photos: Camille Perrottet

In 1985, Pat was a photographer who had begun to explore painting. Acting on the opportunity to move to New York and sublet an inexpensive apartment uptown, she learned about *La Lucha* from a friend who encouraged her to apply. "It seemed like a wonderful opportunity to participate in a big project—not only in scale, but also as a way to improve the community, address political issues, and work in a new, very different way. I remember, after an initial wariness on both sides, the friendliness of people in the neighborhood. My Spanish improved, as did my street smarts."

Pat would paint after work, all her supplies in a green garbage bag stuffed into a shopping cart. "Getting it up and down subway stairs was hell. Eventually people began to recognize me and often helped—particularly downtown. Covered in paint and grubby at the end of the day, I must have presented an aura of being homeless rather than that of an artist. People leaving the train would drop money and bags of food into my lap, not making eye contact, but making contact all the same. I tried to refuse, but eventually I took everything offered to me, especially a seat, and felt cared for in an odd (and sometimes humorous) way. To keep the spirit of giving going, I brought peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to hand out as needed. There were many homeless people, and what I brought didn't go far, but it was something."

PAT BRAZILL

After working in publishing (*Rolling Stone*) and as a prosthetics technician (making artificial legs), Pat established her own business—working as a *mailler* and making chain maille jewelry. Linking rings together, she aims to harness the power of repeating patterns, celebrating the beauty of designs from the distant past.

patbrazill.com

Young People Stand Up to Police, 1985, 7' x 14'
Photo: Camille Perrottet

Original sketch
All sketches courtesy
Seth Tobocman

Final sketch

Intermediate sketch

11 Young People Stand Up to Police

Seth is a co-founder of the magazine *World War 3 Illustrated* which, since 1979, has used comics as a medium for serious journalism and social commentary from a radical and independent point of view. *WW3* addresses such topics as "housing rights, feminism, the environment, religion, police brutality, globalization, and depictions of conflicts from the Middle East to the Midwest." Critic and activist Lucy Lippard, an admirer of Seth's work, introduced him to Eva who invited him to create a mural for *La Lucha*.

Seth's mural *Young People Stand Up to Police,* rendered in Seth's high graphic style, emerged from his involvement in the anti-nuclear movement. "I was involved in No Business As Usual, one of the few anti-nuclear actions that really tried to include young people. I was in my early 20s. We wanted to protest Reagan the way people today want to protest Trump. But the difference between the 1980s and today is that there are thousands of people protesting Trump and it was very hard to find anyone to organize with against Reagan."

On April 29, 1985, No Business As Usual organized a day of protests in 16 U.S. cities, many involving civil disobedience. Seth attended the action at Riverside Research Center in upper Manhattan where The False Prophets and Holy War played on the street. An "illegal art show" took place during the action. "A high school classmate of mine," recalls Seth, "did a performance piece. She was dressed in a costume made entirely of meat and held a very large replica of an MX missile over her head.

"Later in the day, there was a protest near City Hall. I don't know the details; I arrived when the police were breaking it up." There he saw a young man of color leaping into the air in front of a horse and taunting the helmeted cop. His "bravery" was the inspiration for Seth's mural.

Seth's preparatory drawings show the evolution of the mural. In the first, there are pointed anti-nuclear references: two missiles and the words "Well Armed." They are absent in the second drawing. The third drawing incorporates a knife in the horse's left front leg and gun parts. The angle of its head suggests a gun loaded, aimed, and ready to be fired.

Seth created several pieces about police brutality throughout the 1980s. His *La Lucha* mural also works as an indictment of police behavior in summer 1988 in Tompkins Square Park, one block west of La Plaza. A July 31 rally protesting a recently imposed 1 AM curfew led to several clashes between protesters and police. During a second rally a week later, the police charged a crowd of protesters and a riot ensued, lasting until 6 AM the following day.

SETH TOBOCMAN

Seth's images, posters, murals, banners, and tattoos have inspired peoples movements from NYC's Loisaida squatters to South Africa's African National Congress. His work has been shown at NYC's Museum of Modern Art, the New Museum, Exit Art, and ABC No Rio. He is the author of several graphic books, among them *Understanding the Crash* and *War in the Neighborhood* (2000), reissued in 2015.

ww3.nyc

Octopus, 1985, 6′ x 14′. Photo: Camille Perrottet

"Octopus Mobster Landlord" by Keith Christensen
detail from *La Lucha Continua* collective mural
Photo: Camille Perrottet

12 Octopus

Octopus speaks to the struggle for decent affordable housing in New York City. Noel remembers people "being evicted and displaced due to co-op conversions and demolition of buildings for new housing. (In fact, many of the buildings whose walls supported our murals have been torn down.) This uprooting and evicting resonated strongly. The first people to be evicted in the U.S. were Native Americans, driven from their tribal lands. Today there is 'extreme eviction'—the threat of rounding up and deporting thousands of immigrants and migrant workers and their families."

Cityarts Asian Mural Workshop, *Chi Li—Arriba—Rise Up!*
1974 ©CITYarts, Inc.

Noel's rapacious octopus sports a red, white, and blue suit and a stars and stripes top hat, perfectly "representing the corporate greed and government policies that favor the 1% over the 99%". Note the tentacle squeezing the life out of the tractor driven by a farm worker and the toppling bank, a prescient omen of the 2008 banking and subprime mortgage crises that led to the foreclosure of millions of homes.

In New York City's earliest murals, artists often used the grasping octopus to symbolize greedy landlords. In Cityarts Workshop's *Chi Li—Arriba—Rise Up!* (1974), a mother hands rent money to a gray-suited slumlord; his right arm morphs into the tentacles of an octopus draped in an "imperialist" American flag. In Keith Christensen's vignette under the crystal ball in *La Lucha's* collective mural, an "octopus mobster landlord" wearing a porkpie hat is confronted by protestors holding anti-gentrification signs.

While Noel painted, "someone criticized the use of the octopus, saying it was really a very gentle animal. Octopi might be gentle animals, but they grasp and eat their prey. When big government does good things,it is very good; when it is bad, it is evil. The stakes are high. When corporations and banks are too powerful, a security state may loom. It is a struggle. But there is hope. Activism matters."

NOEL KUNZ

A native of Chicago, Noel arrived in New York City in 1963. In 1971, she earned a combined masters degree in art history and a certificate in art conservation at NYU's Institute of Fine Arts. She worked several years at NYU's Conservation Center and Oberlin College's Allen Museum. Retired for many years, Noel continues to paint for her own enjoyment.

Self-Determination, Popular the World Over, 1985, 15′ x 14′. Photo: Elizabeth "Betsy" McLindon

13 Self-Determination, Popular the World Over

Elizabeth's mural *Self-Determination, Popular the World Over* is a "tongue-in-cheek reference to the common motivation for revolution—people's desire for one's needs being met and aspirations being represented. My primary sources of political inspiration were Loisaida, El Salvador and South Africa."

Balanced and equal, male and female, two figures with heart-shaped heads float in front of a larger heart. They gently hold planet Earth, intuiting its fragility and critical need for its care. Directly behind is a map of the historic Lower East Side and Loisaida. Vines emerging from the heart lead to shapes representing maps of South America on the left and South Africa on the right, the latter draped in the colors of the African National Congress flag. "Politically, equality—of gender, sexual preference, spiritual path, and race—is the missing piece in our world, today as 30 years ago," muses Elizabeth. "Progress certainly has been made, but we've a ways to go."

Elizabeth, then known as "Betsy", was an active member of PAD/D (Political Art Documentation/Distribution) where she knew fellow *La Lucha* muralist Keith Christensen and critic Lucy Lippard who told her about the project.

Noel and Betsy on ladder. Photos: Camille Perrottet

ELIZABETH "BETSY" MCLINDON

Moving from NYC to Arizona, then Cape Cod and Boston, Elizabeth settled in Gloucester, MA where, since 1993, she's juggled art and therapeutic massage. Both are process oriented and, done with hands, have immediate results. Her most recent work is a narrative assemblage using found (recycled) materials.

elizabethmclindon.com

MICHAEL STEWART

In the early hours of September 15, 1983, 25-year-old Michael Stewart left the Pyramid Club on Avenue A and headed for the First Avenue and 14th Street subway station to catch the L train home to Brooklyn. As he waited for the train, he allegedly pulled out a marker and began scrawling graffiti on the wall, not noticing nearby transit police. The events that followed are not entirely clear but, at 3:20 AM, he arrived at Bellevue Hospital in police custody, hog tied, badly bruised, with no pulse. Hospital staff got him breathing again, but couldn't bring him out of a coma. Thirteen days later, he died in his hospital bed.

Years before, the city had declared a "war on graffiti," waging a costly, and even sometimes violent, effort to eradicate it. However, as details of Stewart's murder became known—for tagging a subway wall—New Yorkers were shocked by its sheer brutality. The six officers—all white—were acquitted.

At the time, Michael Stewart's death was emblematic of the widespread police brutality faced by people of color in New York City. Nearly 35 years later, nothing has changed.

(Source: www.npr.org—Death of a Graffiti Artist)

To the Memory of Michael Stewart, 1985, 8′ x 14′. Photo: Camille Perrottet

14 To the Memory of Michael Stewart

French born and raised in Paris, Etienne came to the United States in 1979 to study for a PhD in pure mathematics at Columbia University. Before settling in New York City, he traveled around the country, hoping to meet people who, like him, were working on "personal issues with identity, gender, politics." Etienne recalls that his "favorite hanging place in San Francisco was the Mission district where I discovered Balmy Alley, the inspiration for *La Lucha,* and Precita Eyes Muralists. Soon, there I was, on top of a scaffold, painting and drawing for a few weeks. It was a very good way for me to get involved with the community and delve a little more in the Central and South American side of the local culture.

"When I settled in New York a year later to start my PhD, I was very impressed by the work of graffiti artists on the subways. Temptation was strong to try to join these courageous artists. Although I never got the nerve to go into the yards, where it was happening, I started making stencils on the streets and began to sign 'El Chino'.

"I was living uptown in Manhattan Valley in a Dominican neighborhood and helping building tenants fight our slumlord in court. I also spent a lot of time on the Lower East Side, getting to know local figures, musicians, dancers, junkies, activists, experimental filmmakers, and emerging gallery owners. With Paul Chelstad, I announced concerts via street graffiti at happening places like the Pyramid Club where Michael Stewart had been before leaving for the subway. I did not know Michael Stewart, but for our loose community of street artists, his death was shocking. We all had our problems with the police. It was not a very funny game of hide and seek, but we never thought it would threaten our lives."

Photo: Camille Perrottet

To the Memory of Michael Stewart reads like a comic strip. It opens at the Pyramid Club where Michael is shown "bartending and meeting a lady who kisses him goodbye. Then, all love drunk, he gives way to his inspiration on the subway platform. What happens next is that the transit police fall down on him, and he eventually ends up at the morgue, where Mayor Koch can be seen in the background."

ETIENNE LI

Etienne returned to France and teaches mathematics full time to engineering students in Marrakesh and Paris. He is also the producer of shows and films by his wife, the Spanish choreographer Blanca Li who began in New York—her performances were announced by his street graffiti—and became a star in France.

blancali.com

Tribute to Michael Stewart, 1985, 10′ x 25′. Photo: Camille Perrottet

15 Tribute to Michael Stewart

Chico knew Michael Stewart "from the community. He was a great person. He had a lot of ability and talent and he was well respected. Everyone was shocked and outraged by his death. In the 1980s, graffiti was unaccepted as an art. It took three decades to prove graffiti is an art. A lot of young writers need support and understanding. They need to be respected for their talent, for the art we all have within us. Graffiti is an art, not a crime."

In *Tribute to Michael Stewart,* Chico shows a subway car, representing the L train in the First Avenue station where Stewart was arrested. Looking at Chico's tag, the two transit police raise their nightsticks, foretelling the beating they would soon unleash on Stewart. To the right, Chico portrays Stewart intent on creating an image.

In this early version of the mural, the transit cops hold drawn guns. Photo: Marlis Momber

Photo: Camille Perrottet

CHICO (ANTHONY GARCIA)

Although Chico no longer lives in Loisaida, he often returns for special aerosol projects, traveling "back and forth… to give back to the community."

chicoartnyc.com

Untitled, 1985, 25′ x 17′. Photo: Camille Perrottet

16 Untitled

Wanting to be good neighbor, Artmakers reached out to members of the 8th Street Garden and the owners of the club 8 BC to review and approve the designs facing East 8th Street. The club thought the *La Lucha* murals too "social realist" in style and wanted the mural on its building to reflect the burgeoning East Village art scene. Thus, Luis' mural became part of *La Lucha Continua*. His "expressionistic head"—an image he was known for—perfectly expresses the frustration and outrage felt by many in response to the issues addressed in the murals.

WHEN SOMETHING NEEDS TO BE PAINTED IT LETS ME KNOW.

—Luis Frangella

Born in Argentina, Luis earned a Masters of Architecture at the University of Buenos Aires in 1972 and, having moved to Boston, worked as a research fellow at MIT's Center for Advanced Visual Studies. In 1976, he moved to New York City and quickly established himself as an important figure in the East Village underground art scene. Merging social life and artistic concerns, artists worked directly on the streets and in clubs—new venues that introduced novel forms of music, poetry, writing, and the visual arts. The period saw the rise of Punk, No Wave, graffiti art, and the kind of neo-expressionist painting that characterized Luis' work.

Starting in 1980, hundreds of galleries opened in the neighborhood, from Second Avenue to Avenue B. In addition to the galleries, often artist-run, there were alternative spaces and collectives. The East Village scene reached its peak from 1982 to 1984; by 1986 it had run its course. Rising rents (and gentrification spurred by New York University's expansion in the East Village) drove some galleries out of business. Others moved to Soho and 57th Street; it was still years before Chelsea emerged as a major gallery hub. Other contributing factors were the 1987 stock market crash, AIDS, and the deaths of Andy Warhol in 1987 and his protégé Jean-Michel Basquiat in 1988.

(Source: *www.artsy.net/gene/east-village-art*)

IN MEMORIUM
LUIS FRANGELLA

Luis died in 1990 from AIDS. His work is frequently shown in exhibitions about the East Village art scene, most recently in *Something Possible Everywhere: Pier 34 NYC, 1983–84* and *The Piers: Art and Sex Along the New York Waterfront.*

The Last Judgement, 1985, 18′ x 20′. Photo: Camille Perrottet

17 The Last Judgement

Robin and Kristin met through Ventana, a non-aligned organization that supported Nicaraguan culture and arranged artist/writer exchanges with the Nicaraguan Cultural Workers Union. In 1984 Kristin learned about the group from Eva after her Artists Talk on Art presentation about her mural work in Nicaragua. During her own visit to Nicaragua in the early 1970s, Kristin became "very intrigued with the Sandinistas and their struggle to free their people from the oppression of the U.S.-backed dictator Somoza." When she saw an ad in the Latino magazine *Ajá* seeking artists for *La Lucha,* she contacted Robin and, together, they submitted a proposal.

Kristin (left) and Robin. Photo: courtesy Kristin Reed

Robin: "Our politics were close, but our artistic styles were very different. Yet, we developed a design that allowed us to do what we were good at and, also, have the parts interact. The lower section presents, in Kristin's graphic style, the repeated image of a businessman—i.e., arms dealer—against a field of color, his missiles and guns littered on the ground around him. Above, are two rows of jurors simply outlined, but with their faces painted realistically, a style I was exploring. The idea was to turn the tables and let famous activists and community members sit in judgement of the global war makers below. Today, those being judged might be the 1%."

Kristin: "The top row of jurors consists of six leaders from South Africa and Central America: Daniel Ortega, the president of Nicaragua; Ruth First and Nelson Mandela from the African National Congress (ANC); Rigoberta Menchú, the indigenous activist from Guatemala; Oscar Romero, the assassinated Archbishop of El Salvador; and Winnie Mandela (ANC). Below, are people from the neighborhood. We wanted the community to select six of their best to sit in judgement.

ROBIN MICHALS

Robin is a photographer whose work considers the built environment and the de-industrialized urban waterfront. Since 2010, she has developed *Castles Made of Sand*, a series about the low-lying areas around New York City, New Orleans, and the Pearl River Delta in China. She has taught photography at City Tech for 14 years.

e-arcades.com

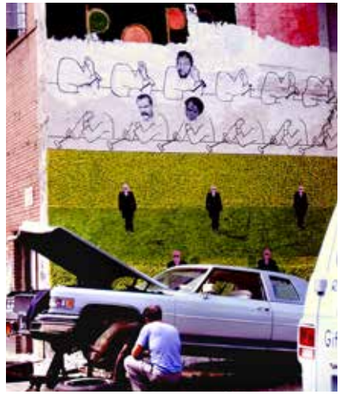
KRISTIN REED

Kristin continued painting murals—collaborating in 1986 with Robin Michals and with Eva Cockcroft in 1990. In 1991 she painted a community mural commissioned by the Erie [PA] Art Museum. By 2005, Kristin's art had shifted to a study in consciousness, becoming abstract and geometrical in form. She has a studio residency with *chashama.org*. She also practices and teaches Reiki, often volunteering in Central and South America.

kristinreed.com

By popular demand, residents and workers selected Carmen Pabón, the saintly matron of *El Jardín Bello Amanecer Boriqueño* (beautiful Puerto Rican dawn), the community garden a half block away on Avenue C; Junior, a Puerto Rican street mechanic; Mary, a well-liked woman, and Victor, her son; Augustine, a beloved senior citizen; and Ralph, a constant and seemingly homeless presence on the street."

Kristin: "The process of selecting neighborhood residents was settled within two weeks and cemented our popularity with the community members who participated. They frequently dropped by to see how we were and how the likenesses of their friends progressed. The people portrayed became 'celebrities' if they were not already. Robin and I had a great summer 'painting as performance' with our audience on East 8th Street who felt connected to the mural through this process. Or so we thought."



Junior working on a car. Photo: Kristin Reed

Robin: "As newcomers, we didn't always pick the participants correctly."

Kristin: "When we finished Ralph's portrait, the fun began. Arriving at the mural one day, we found that, during the night, someone had thrown paint bombs at his face. Robin had to repaint it and I had to clean the hot pink splashes off the bottom section. It turned out that not everyone was in favor of Ralph's selection as a subject. We thought he was homeless because he was frequently seen sleeping on the street. Actually, Ralph was a landlord, owning several buildings on the Lower East Side. He was notoriously ruthless and made enemies of several of his tenants. Whoops."

The "regulars" who frequented Junior's "shop" Photo: Kristin Reed

Kristin: "One day, a familiar face stood under our ladders. It was jury member Rigoberta Menchú, an indigenous K'iché Maya woman who dedicated her life promoting indigenous rights, specifically those of Guatemala's Maya peoples during and after the Guatemalan Civil War (1960–1996). She was in town to speak at the United Nations about the struggles of all indigenous peoples, not just her own. Only 26 years old, she was an effective and popular advocate, endangering her life and well-being in her native country. Robin and I had read her book *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (1983) and were thrilled to see her, smiling with a broad grin. She was humble and grateful to us, pleased we had chosen her for the wall. She invited us to meet her that night at a party. Of course we went and spent the evening chatting with her. (Rigoberta Menchú received a Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 and a Prince of Asturias Award in 1998.)

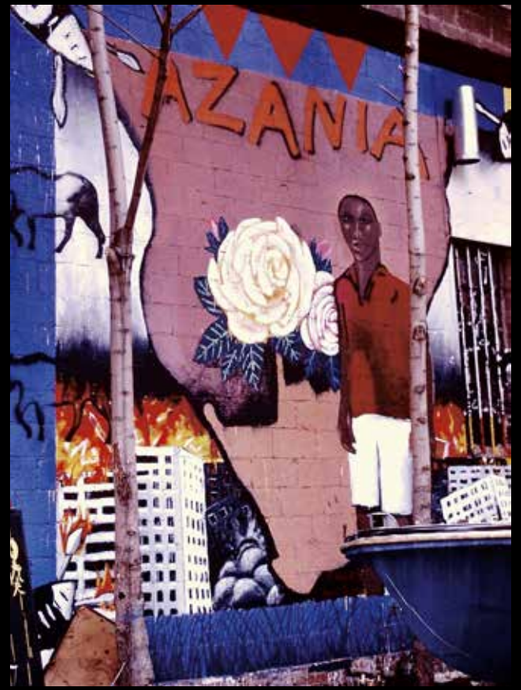
Robin: "We were extremely lucky to experience the daily street life on the Lower East Side in the mid-1980s, a unique time and place. I think *La Lucha* improved the neighborhood for its residents, without gentrifying it, before real estate development flattened out Loisaida's individuality into yet another upscale Manhattan neighborhood."

Kristin: "Our wall was closest to East 8th Street on a building that housed a plumbing supply store. The buildings across the street were abandoned, home to a small crew of squatters. A Hell's Angels chapter was close by; we could hear the sound of motorcycle engines revving. The adjacent lot, where Junior repaired cars, was a lively place. Folks brought lawn chairs and hung out, chatting with Junior, eating Latin food and washing it down with beer, speaking Caribbean Spanish and laughing heartily. If at first they felt inconvenienced by our presence—two white girls with ladders and paint—and a bit suspicious of our intentions, they soon became our friends, protectors, and helpers. Anything we needed they would provide."

Robin. Photo: Kristin Reed

Kristin and "friend." Photo: photographer unknown

Robin: "I lived only six blocks from La Plaza Cultural, but it wasn't until I started spending days on the lot, sometimes working, sometimes just hanging out, that I started to get to know the Lower East Side. I learned from local drug dealers that if you kept your business small, no one would bother you. I learned the delights of bacalao [a stew made with dried and salted cod], thanks to a kind woman who shared her food with me. I learned about the passion to create from a homeless sculptor from Haiti. I learned a lot about the neighborhood, about the idea of neighborhood. I learned the pleasures of spending time out on the street, of being outside in all weather. I learned to be aware of the rhythms of local life."



Azania, 1985, 18′ x 17′. Photo: Camille Perrottet

18 Azania

Leon emigrated from Cape Town, South Africa, to the United States in 1979—two years after the murder of Steven Biko. Biko co-founded, in 1968, the South African Students' Organization, an all-black group that resisted apartheid through political action. He later led the Black Consciousness Movement, which empowered and mobilized large segments of the urban black population. Adopting the rallying cry "Black man, you are on your own," the movement's activities eventually sparked the Soweto uprising in June 1976 when students marched to protest the compulsory use of the Afrikaans language in schools.

Anti-apartheid protest in Harlem. Photo: source unknown

After 176 people were killed, mainly by the South African Security Forces, unrest quickly spread throughout the country.

Biko was arrested many times for his anti-apartheid work, the last time in August 1977 in Port Elizabeth, located at the southern tip of South Africa. The following month, Biko was found naked and shackled several miles away, in Pretoria. He died the following day from a brain hemorrhage, the result of injuries sustained while in police custody. The news of Biko's death caused national outrage and protests. The police officers involved were questioned, but not charged. Two decades later, in 1997, five of them confessed to the murder.

For Leon, "the murder of Biko defined the scale of my horror of the capacity for brutality of the white patriarchy." In the mural, the white rose "represents the beauty of resistance and renewal." It conveys the message "a system in collapse is a system moving forward."

Azania—the mural's title—is the name black African nationalists used, in the apartheid era, for South Africa. Today, many South African groups argue that the official name of South Africa should be Pan-African Republic of Azania.

LEON JOHNSON

In 2014, Leon was a Martha Daniel Newell Distinguished Scholar at Georgia College and a Kresge Fellow in Film and Theater. A resident at the Wassaic Project in upstate NY, he and Audra Wolowiec published a book in late 2016. In early 2017, they co-published the first issue of a new annual zine, *SKRYER*. Leon currently lives in Detroit.

Heaven is where everyone knows the dance and there's no rehearsal, 1985, 18' x 21'. Photo: Camille Perrottet

19 Heaven is where everyone knows the dance and there's no rehearsal

A response to the gentrification fraying the fabric of the neighborhood, Leslie's mural presents "iconic figures especially popular in the East Village and the Lower East Side, important to the people who actually LIVED there."

Leslie remembers "imagining a group of dancers meeting on a roof top at sunset. The sky is framed by two tall buildings, their shapes suggested by the white rectangular 'windows.' From left to right, the figures are Chango Macho, Loa or spirit of wealth, energy and fire; Pittsburgh Pirate right fielder Roberto Clemente (behind the tree); Yemaya, the Goddess of the Sea; the Voodoo Queen Marie Laveau (whom I still paint); Elvis Presley; Michael Jackson (half hidden); James Brown (his back to the viewer); the Widow Ching, a notorious Chinese pirate; and a Native American Indian."

Unknown man, Kristin, Robin, Leslie, Rikki and Eva. Photo: Camille Perrottet

Finding her wall covered in black tar, Leslie decided "to use black as a base color rather than paint over it. The bare ground was uneven and, admittedly, it was a struggle wrestling with the ladder. Working around the trees in front of the wall was also a challenge. The Puerto Rican man who ran the garage next door was very helpful and, as I hoped, he recognized the figures in the mural, as did most neighborhood people when they came by to take a look. Most white people had to be informed who the figures were—which says something about the neighborhood at that time."

LESLIE LOWE

A native of New Mexico, Leslie spent the 1960s and 70s in San Francisco and Chicago, arriving in NYC in 1982. Migrating to New Orleans in 1993, she was "blown back" to NYC by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. "An amateur anthropologist and professional right brain thinker," she cites as influences alternative belief systems, music, and Egyptomania. Leslie was presented with a 2017 Acker Award for her contribution to the avant garde arts community.

Life Among the Ruins, 1985, 6'8" x 6'3" x 4". Photo: Camille Perrottet

20 Life Among the Ruins

In 1985, Dina "had my studio—kiln and all—in my tenement apartment, a 4th floor walk up. I had lost my studio on Wards Island and had been gentrified out of the Lower East Side. Living in NYC was not exactly by choice; I had fled the military dictatorship of my native Argentina.

Kristin, Robin, Eva, Dina and Rikki. Photo: Camille Perrottet

Dina (center) with helpers Photo: courtesy Dina Bursztyn

"I had been looking for street venues for my ceramic work and learned about *La Lucha* by chance. Perusing through the pages of the *Village Voice*, I saw a notice on the back page. It read something like: 'Artists interested in painting political murals in the Lower East Side, come to a meeting at...' I attended the meeting and was pleased the group would welcome a ceramic mural; otherwise, I was prepared to paint one."

Life Among the Ruins was "inspired by the Pre-Columbian ruins of Mexico and Central America, and the vitality and dignity of the people against repeated invasions. I mixed traditional Mesoamerican symbols with contemporary references.

"This was my first ceramic mural for outdoors, and I had no idea how to properly install it. With help from many friends and other artists working alongside my site, we pulled it off. This was my first experience with street/community/public art. It sparked, in 1987 and 1988, *Gargoyles to Scare the Developers*–29 bas reliefs installed on buildings throughout Loisaida. Viewed as protectors of the community, they declared that these buildings and their residents were not for sale.

"A few days before the reception celebrating all the murals, a dear friend of mine, Juan Carlos Vidal, died of complications from AIDS. He lived just a few blocks from La Plaza and I dedicated the mural to him and it became a sort of memorial for him. Friends in common often gathered at the site. The mural lasted for many years intact, even after the lot was partitioned and a section became part of the community garden."

Photo: courtesy Dina Bursztyn

DINA BURSZTYN

Ceramics still her main medium, Dina continues to exhibit and create public art (NYC Percent for Art and the MTA Arts & Design programs). She also writes, draws, and publishes books. Since 2006, she's lived in Catskill, NY, where she and her spouse, Julie Chase, run the Open Studio, a storefront shop and gallery.

dinabursztyn.com

Alphabet City Mural, 1985, 18′ x 13′

Photos: Camille Perrottet

21 Alphabet City Mural

Noah: "In summer 1985, my daughter Nora was making her annual visit to New York City and I thought collaborating on a mural might provide a good lesson and learning experience… a way to take art directly to the public by avoiding the middle man. I also hoped that working together would foster a close camaraderie and interrelation with my daughter, an artist in her own right.

"Alphabet City Mural honors the many activists I worked with during my days in Birmingham and Montgomery, AL, fighting for civil rights and opposing the Vietnam War. The mural served as an abstraction for all those brave souls who struggled to get the community's attention, who fought against the many inequities and miscarriages of justice occurring around the world.

"I was a member of Artists Against Apartheid and fought vigorously for Nelson Mandela's release from Robben Island. [Mandela was imprisoned from 1962 to 1990.] I also protested Reagan's secret wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua through PAD/D (Political Art Documentation/Distribution) and was the executive director of the Bronx River Art Center and Gallery, which served as a catalyst for cleaning up the Bronx River and reviving the South Bronx."

Nora: "That summer was hot as hell, and the only thing worse than staying inside and sweating was going outside in the sun and sweating. I remember 'hating' going to work due to the heat. I did it anyway, because Dad needed the help, but man, I earned my daughter points that summer. I remember walking over the Williamsburg Bridge. Back in the 80s, the city was falling apart… and there were giant rusted holes in the pedestrian bridge, big enough for a small child to fall through. I remember standing for hours in a weedy lot, handing Dad tools while he worked. I remember climbing a ladder and carefully painting within lines he'd drawn, and the smell of paint which I still love. I remember seeing a poster with the slogan 'La Lucha Continua'. I looked up *lucha* in my Spanish textbook, and did not find it. I did not learn the word for 'struggle' in school. I remember running though the spray of open fireplugs. When we had an especially productive day, I would persuade Dad to take me to this little place under the train that sold fatty, crispy Cubano sandwiches. I remember nights walking back across the bridge, forgetting about the holes that could have killed me, because… I was so consumed with the creative thoughts that spilled out of me. Dad suggested I become a writer then, but I laughed it off. I didn't think it was possible, practical, however much I enjoyed it. But you know… I don't remember the mural itself. Isn't that strange?"

NORA JEMISIN

Nora lives in Brooklyn and is an author of speculative fiction short stories and novels. Often nominated for Hugo, Nebula and World Fantasy Awards, she won a Locus Award for Best First Novel. In 2016, she became the first black writer to win the Best Novel Hugo for *The Fifth Season*.

nkjemisin.com

NOAH JEMISIN

Residing in Brooklyn, Noah describes himself as an "artist, professor, and world traveler." His works are in private and public collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He wrote and illustrated with 25 gouache paintings *Buried Treasure: The Story of the First African Americans in New York*, published in 2015.

Not For Sale, 1985, 10′ x 24′. Photo: Camille Perrottet

22 Not for Sale

Nancy—who became an anthropologist—kept family and friends apprised of her life in Papua New Guinea, where she worked for twenty years, via the blog nancysullivan.typepad.com. She also reminisced about her life in the East Village.

Photo: Camille Perrottet

"In a former life I was an artist on the Lower East Side of New York. It was the 1980s and the Lower East Side was a junk store. Before it got gentrified, before it became expensive real estate, the Gambino family was running heroin from every other abandoned building between 14th Street and Avenue A to the projects down at Grand Street and Avenue D. The neighborhood was crawling with junkies, our lives were filled with them. Snaking lines of buyers filled our streets, dispersing in milliseconds when, at the sight of a cop car, someone yelled "Bajando!" They sat on the sidewalks, OD'd in the backyards and, with all their passivity and ennui (before crack cocaine radically changed the tempo of addiction) generally filled the landscape.

"We lived through those crazy heroin days, the squats, the East Village galleries, the riots in Tompkins Square Park, and the mass evictions. Rising real estate values led to the gentrification of the last low-income neighborhood in lower Manhattan. In our building, Madonna lived upstairs and shamelessly flirted with my then boyfriend who was the assistant director on her first feature film, *Desperately Seeking Susan*. The front door of our apartment building on East 4th Street was so covered with graffiti it became a postcard. Advertising squalor and chic in equal measure, it was sold to tourists from West Village postcard racks."

Not for Sale takes brilliant advantage of the STOP sign on the chain link dog cage in front of Nancy's wall. The sign's symbolic meaning is made abundantly clear by the two oversized, outstretched hands trying to halt the development—symbolized by the wrecking ball—that threatens the lives of the children playing in the mural's background.

IN MEMORIUM
NANCY SULLIVAN

Nancy became an anthropologist and moved to Papua New Guinea. She gained fame as a staunch advocate for residents whose way of life was threatened by large-scale commercial logging and mining operations, earning the soubriquet "great warrior." In summer 2015, during a visit to New York City, she was killed in a car crash.

For the Women of South Africa, Central America and The Lower East Side, 1985, 10′ x 20′. Photo: Camille Perrottet

23 For the Women of South Africa, Central America and the Lower East Side

In late 1983, Rikki attended a talk sponsored by Artists for Social Responsibility and met Eva Cockcroft whose slide presentation "Art in Revolutionary Nicaragua" showed murals created with other *internationalistas*. "I introduced myself," Rikki recalls, "and asked how one goes about painting murals in Nicaragua. She told me about Arts for a New Nicaragua. A week later, I was in Boston planning a trip to Managua with artists, musicians, and dancers."

Photo: Camille Perrottet

The mural in 2016. Photo: Jane Weissman

In the mural, Rikki painted herself, taking a break from her portrait of "a South African woman who stands proudly in front of an African village and wears traditional clothing. Her hair wrapped in several pieces of colorful African fabric, she balances a basin on her head. I hoped to capture her grace. A second South African woman, a jug on her head, holds a child. I wanted to capture her strength. Between them is a Sandinista woman. To the right in front of a Central American landscape, a young girl harvests coffee beans, a job delegated to students during the Revolution. These portraits are based on the inspiring images of men, women, and children found in the book *Nicaragua* by photographer Susan Meiselas. A Nicaraguan red macaw sits on a tree branch overlooking the scene. The lives of these beautiful birds are threatened; El Salvadoran poachers capture and sell them in the capital's central market as 'Nicaraguan products.' I included the bird as a tribute to its beauty and its right to live.

"On the lower right, the woman hanging laundry represents the women of the Lower East Side, suggesting that, in a gentrified neighborhood, laundry lines will not be acceptable."

In Rikki's 1985 self-portrait, we saw an artist creating a mural. Today, Rikki's presence on her still extant mural reminds us that, in her words, "the issues important then are still relevant now. La Lucha Continua!"

RIKKI ASHER

Rikki remembers working on *La Lucha Continua* and "Eva telling me that one day I would lead groups in painting murals. Over the past 17 years, my CUNY Queens College Art students have been creating murals on campus with me and with their own pupils in various NYC public schools."

Stand Up, 1985, 10′ x 21′. Photo: Camille Perrottet

24 Stand Up

In *Stand Up*—one of two murals still extant—the artists depict Latin Americans standing strong against the clandestine actions and damaging policies of the United States. They showed how people, despite the constant threat of death, continued to live their lives, represented by images of peace, nature, art, dance, and music.

Ken: "The pig is the generic murderous fascist-swine military Latin American dictator funded by the C.I.A. The dude in the black suit and shades, carrying an attaché case overflowing with money, is a CIA bag man, although the people in the neighborhood might peg him as a main man dope dealer collecting his payments. Pretty close and, today, closer to home."

Alison (left) and Amy. Photo: Ken Bloomer

Amy: "The 'film strip' refers to the role media played in how these interventions were viewed by people in Latin America and the U.S. We considered the media a purveyor of propaganda. Ironically, in 2017, the media is under attack for not being a vehicle of propaganda for Trumpism. We realize more than ever that the media, as a purveyor of truth, is an essential and crucial element in a democratic society."

Amy: "As a way to comment on the importance of history, we preserved what was already on the wall, including the graffiti, such as the white triangles with parts extending, seen at bottom right, as well as other textures and colors."

Ken: "As we painted, a bunch of kids, maybe 7-12 years old, always came around to watch us work. They wanted to have a hand in the mural. That, of course, was impossible. All the paints were alkyd and the ladders could be dangerous. I went around the neighborhood and scrounged up some wax crayons. Crayola on tarred brick—nice! The kids had a blast just drawing stuff at ground level. All in all, a rather good experience."

Alison: "Painting the mural remains one of the few experiences I've had where art and political action came together. I loved the (often frustrating) challenge of forging a singular vision with others, and working outside in the community."

AMY BERNIKER

Amy left Brooklyn 16 years ago and lives with her family in Cohasset, MA. Focusing on printmaking, she has exhibited in several shows in New England. She is also an assistant art director at Candlewick Press, the children's book publisher in Somerville, MA.

ALISON LEW

Alison became a graphic designer in the late '80s, moving away from painting by the mid 90s. She established Vertigo Design "and that's what I've been doing for more than 20 years."

vertigodesignnyc.com

KEN BLOOMER

An art therapist, Ken is now retired, but continues to make art. He and Alison have lived on Long Island's North Fork for ten years.

She is But One of Many, 1986, 15′ x 15′. Photo: Eva Cockcroft

25 She is But One of Many

En route to a political meeting at The Brecht Forum—which turned out to be a week hence—Thérèse "accidentally" walked into an Artmakers planning session for *La Lucha*. Invited to stay, she thought that, "as a ceramic artist who did not identify with painters, I would simply observe. Before the meeting was over, I had my assignment along with everyone else: to brainstorm ideas for the 4-story collective mural" which she painted in collaboration with eleven other artists.

Thérèse "was delighted to discover murals." She says, "It gave me an opportunity to 'marry' my two loves: art and activism. Until I met Eva, these worlds were split and separate. The idea of art serving as a vehicle for social justice was radical and new and exciting."

Photo: Joe Stephenson

For many years, Thérèse worked against military incursions into El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua by the American government. When, in 1986, *La Lucha* expanded to include two new murals, she designed her first ceramic and painted mural. *She is But One of Many* is dedicated to the disappeared of Guatemala. The mural presents a map of Central America, every country painted except for Guatemala, rendered in ceramic. Set within its outlines is an indigenous woman, also ceramic. Framing her are "the names of hundreds of disappeared at the hands of the state and police. As I wrote each letter, I offered a prayer—a silent reverence as I tried to embody the pain and profound loss in each and every letter. It was poignant.

"Painting the bottom of the mural, I had to lie on my belly. Crouched on the ground, protected by newspaper and a blanket, I looked around and realized I was surrounded by all sorts of debris—syringes and trash—common those days in the East Village. As I wrote the names and prayed, a Japanese film crew happened by and videotaped what had become a ritual. When the mural was finished, I organized an event to educate folks about the tragic situation in Guatemala. Representatives from several Central American and peace organizations spoke as did a young Guatemalan woman who had lost 17 members of her family. It was heartbreaking."

In 1987, Thérèse joined several Artmakers muralists to create a series of installations for the Broadway/Lafayette subway station. For nine months, a team worked in her studio—"creating, sculpting, glazing, and mounting a 25′ x 20′ ceramic mural that depicted the gentrification of SoHo. It lasted ten years at the Bleecker Street entrance to the downtown #6 train before the station underwent its own gentrification. Without notifying Artmakers, the MTA dismantled and removed the entire project prior to a station renovation."

THERESE BIMKA

Living in the Hudson Valley, Thérèse is a psychotherapist with a practice in Brooklyn. She is the director of the Interspiritual Counseling Program at One Spirit where she teaches wellness practitioners, coaches, interfaith ministers, and therapists. She continues her creativity work, currently focusing on SoulCollage.

ThereseBimka.com

La Frontera (The Border), 1986, 10′ x 11′. Photo: Eva Cockcroft

26 La Frontera (The Border)

Eva and Joe were well versed in immigration issues, in part due to frequent visits to California and New Mexico—where, in the late 1980s, they both settled: Eva in Los Angeles and Joe in Albuquerque. Speaking of *la migra* or immigration, Joe describes *La Frontera (The Border)* as showing "the unlucky border crosser who, caught in the glare of helicopter search lights, is stopped and then led away by border agents. Meanwhile, the family—dependent on his earnings—nervously waits for news. Today, that family might be law-abiding residents in the U.S. facing the threat of deportation."

Illegal immigration was not a problem until the late 1960s, following the termination of the Bracero guest worker program. When, in the early 1980s, economic conditions worsened in Mexico, there was a surge in illegal border crossings, peaking in 1988. People seeking jobs or higher wages took advantage of previously established migrant networks and the growing availability of migrant smugglers known as "coyotes." The desperation of the migrants often put their lives in jeopardy. Political turmoil in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua significantly contributed to this rise, with hundreds of thousands of people fleeing the violence of their homelands.

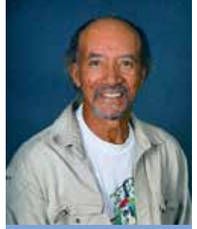
Eva and Joe. Photo: Camille Perrottet

Under the pretext of fighting communism, President Reagan supported military interventions in Central America, declaring in 1986 that "terrorists and subversives are just two days driving time from Harlingen, Texas."

Border crossings and apprehensions have greatly decreased since 2008, making the need for the wall advocated by the current administration absurd. Drug smugglers find alternate routes to import drugs, and domestic terrorists are, for the most part, American citizens. Today, it is the immigrants living and working here for years—contributing to both the economy and community life—who are, without cause, rounded up in raids conducted by ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement).

IN MEMORIUM
EVA COCKCROFT

As a muralist, Eva founded Artmakers in 1983 and painted murals in NY, NJ, CA, Nicaragua, and Germany. As a writer, she advocated for murals as a means of social change (*Toward a People's Art* and *Signs from the Heart: California Chicano Murals* as well as numerous essays). As a teacher, she taught in universities and was a beloved mentor to many muralists. Eva died in 1999 of breast cancer.



A.G. JOE STEPHENSON

A co-founder of Artmakers, Joe lives in Albuquerque, working with Working Classroom Inc. where he started a mural program in 1992. He is leading two mural projects at Tierra Adentro Charter School where he teaches art to middle and high-school students. Since 2005, he's been a scenic artist at the National Hispanic Cultural Center and is a finalist for the city's Public Art Urban Enhancement Program ("Nob Hill is 100").

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Saturday, April 8– Friday, June 30, 2017	Exhibition: ***La Lucha Continua The Struggle Continues: 1985 & 2017*** Thursday, Friday, Saturday, 12–6 PM, and by appointment
April 8, 3-6 PM	Opening Celebration
April 19, 6:30-8 PM	Panel: **Loisaida: Then & Now** With Chino Garcio, Maria Dominguez, Noah Jemisin, Kristin Reed, Seth Tobocman Libertad Guerra, moderator
April 26, 6:30-8 PM	Illustrated Talk: **Protest & Celebration: Community Murals of the 1970s & 1980s in Loisaida and on the Historic Lower East Side** Jane Weissman
April 30	1 PM Gallery Talk 2 PM Visit to La Plaza Cultural Community Garden (Gallery remains open to 5 PM)
*May 23, 6:30-8 PM	Talk: ***La Lucha Continua The Struggle Continues: 1985 & 2017*** Jane Weissman City Lore Gallery (56 East 1st Street, NYC) Also co-sponsored by Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation and City Lore
*May 27	2 PM Gallery Talk 3 PM Visit to La Plaza Cultural Community Garden

Unless noted, all events take place at The Loisaida Center (710 East 9th Street, NYC)
All events are co-sponsored by Artmakers Inc. and The Loisaida Center

For more info: l*oisaida.org/events*

*In conjunction with Lower East Side History Month

THANK YOU

To the *La Lucha* artists who generously shared their stories, documentation, and images.

Humanities New York

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Puffin Foundation

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Libertad Guerra and Alejandro Epifanio, The Loisaida Center
Chino Garcia, CHARAS
La Plaza Cultural Community Garden
Camille Perrottet
Kristin Reed
Tim Drescher
Jon Crow
John Hunt
Stephanie Osher
Lynda Rodolitz
Elena Del Orbe, AdoramaPix
Web Design for Non-Profits, Pace University

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