

**EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY.
A GLASS MOSAIC PICTURE TELLS IT PERMANENTLY.**

By Ron Treister



Large-scale public artwork has morphed to become an ongoing visual feast across the North American landscape during the last four decades. People seem to respond to it much more today than in the past. Not coincidentally, the Chicano movement in the United States has undergone a great deal of change during this same time period. Perhaps these are two of the major

reasons why the University of California, San Diego, recently decided to have a 17-by-56 foot mural depicting Chicano History positioned on the east wall of the school's Peterson Hall.

When the mural was first unveiled, UCSD Chancellor Marye Ann Fox stated, "This mural is a great artistic addition to our campus. Cesar Chavez, one of the leaders in the Chicano movement who is portrayed in this mural, believed education was a powerful tool to improve society."

The mural which is aptly named "Chicano Legacy 40 Años," not only depicts 40 years of history... its production has a unique history of its own, as well. The original artwork, which many students from urban areas say that upon first glance made them think of home, was painted by well-known San Diego-based Chicano, Mario Acevedo Torero, an artist internationally known for his dedication to peace through the fusion of art and activism. The initial painted mural was introduced in 2009 in the form of a giant 17 x 56 foot geecle digital vinyl banner that was temporarily installed on the east wall of Peterson Hall. . Shortly thereafter due to strong demand, a decision was made to have the mural image become a permanent work of public art.

After an exhausting amount of research regarding the production of the "permanent version," Torero came to the conclusion that the best way to maintain the brilliant colors of his sizable masterpiece... and, to keep it safe from the

negative effects of sunlight, rain and various other climatic changes, was to create this next stage using glass mosaics. In his estimation, this product was the best, most permanent material to be used. The glass body of each tile is non-porous, which means water cannot seep into its body and cause any resulting damage. And glass not only keeps its color in the original permanently; glass reflects and refracts light, giving off almost an ethereal effect in certain lighting conditions.

After the decision was made to go with glass mosaics, the next item to be addressed was, obviously, which glass mosaic supplier would be most apropos for this project? After an extensive search program, Torero selected Hakatai Enterprises, an Oregon-based glass tile importer and distributor. Hakatai represents Cartglass Ltd. of Panyu, China, a firm which employs highly skilled mosaic muralists. "Mario's decision was made after reviewing images of the many Cartglass murals installed around the globe," stated Marshall Malden, president of Hakatai. "He became very involved with the mural making process, and after inspecting actual mural sections produced specifically for his scrutiny by Cartglass, he became comfortable knowing his mural would be reproduced to his total satisfaction in glass."

Being a top mosaic muralist is not like implementing a cut-and-paste process. For many years, Cartglass has enjoyed the distinction of being one of the world's leading glass mosaic mural producing companies. Not only does the firm use the finest quality glass tile materials; its artisans are incredibly passionate about their work... and, represent only a small percentage of the talented candidates who attempt to attain employment at this prestigious operation. Each prospective mosaicist, for example, is thoroughly challenged via focused testing programs to prove his/her artistic abilities. Once employed, that person apprentices alongside master mosaic artisans for a specific time period, during which comprehensive skill-sets are learned. Only after a Cartglass muralist has mastered the art of working with simple, rough-cut murals are the higher-end, more complex projects assigned.

During the production of the "Chicano History 40 Años" glass mosaic mural, a decision was made to replace some of the originally proposed glass material with stained glass, which was more able to meet the artist's lofty demands for the brightest possible colors in particular sections of the mural. Additionally, expansion joints, which accommodated outdoor installation on pre-sectioned wall units, had to be taken into account during the mural's production, as well.

Without question, one key to having a totally successful production of this magnitude was continual, smooth communications between the stateside customer and the overseas factory throughout the entire production process. Hakatai, which prior to this endeavor had logged many, many successful years working to liaise between artist-client and mosaicist-factory, handled this highly detailed procedure at optimal levels. “When high-end, large scale glass mosaic murals are being produced, there is no such thing as compromising levels of quality,” declared Malden. “And these high levels don’t just include production and the ultimate installation of these projects. When a mural is produced that has been created to last for decades, every aspect such as scheduling, shipping and much, much more, must be addressed, handled accordingly and completely chronicled. A project like this is permanent. And with it, so become the reputations of those who worked in making it so.”

Marshall Malden actually arranged for Mario Torero to visit the Cartglass mosaic production studios in Panyu, China, where the two of them sojourned together earlier this spring to inspect the final production of the project prior to it being shipped to the jobsite in San Diego. “Mario was amazed at the level of professionalism at the factory,” added Malden. “It was fun... and, interesting, seeing how one artist scrutinized the work of others.”

This glass mosaic mural was unveiled on May 25th of this year, bringing a vibrant splash of color to the UCSD campus. The artist, Torero, clearly believes that spirits helped in the creation of his Chicano History 40 Años mural. “I went to Chicano Park and did my earth prayers. Then, I brought some earth from there and sprinkled it in front of the wall at UCSD, in front of the banner. From there, I did my chanting, sending out a spiritual message. It’s just my way of giving things and uniting our cosmic forces. And sure enough, the miracle happened.”

Spirits. Artistic genius. World-class mosaic artisans. Time-tested stateside glass tile expert supplier. Visionary campus administrators. It’s obvious that all of these entities played a major role in the creation of one of the most dynamic, exquisite and permanent mural installations to be seen in this country. “I wanted to make a long-standing statement,” concluded Torero. “And glass mosaic tile was clearly the material with which to accomplish this.”