

Learn About the América Tropical Interpretive Center



*El Pueblo
de
Los Angeles*

Learn About the América Tropical Interpretive Center

An Educational Activity Book

By: Michelle D. Garcia-Ortiz



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For more information visit
www.elpueblparkassociation.org



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Learning Objectives

The objective of this booklet is to help students form a connection with the América Tropical Interpretive Center by developing an understanding of key ideas, people, and places that relate to David Alfaro Siqueiros and his mural, América Tropical.

This booklet aids middle and high school students in applying the following California State Standards:

- Chronological and Spatial Thinking
- Historical Interpretation
- Historical and Cultural Context
- Aesthetic Valuing

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Mission & Vision

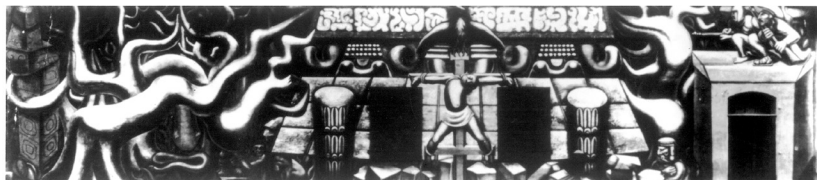


Mission

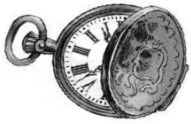
The mission of the América Tropical Interpretive Center is to interpret the contributions of David Alfaro Siqueiros to the contemporary Mexican muralist movement, his cultural and social justice legacy and his creation of the mural *América Tropical* on the wall of the Italian Hall in 1932 when he was a political refugee in Los Angeles.

Vision

The vision of the América Tropical Interpretive Center is to display, protect, and conserve *América Tropical* in perpetuity, and to interpret the legacy and influence of David Alfaro Siqueiros' life and work from 1895 to 1974. The center is committed to Siqueiros' inherent belief that art is public for everyone.



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Timeline



The stock market crash and the Great Depression begin (1929)

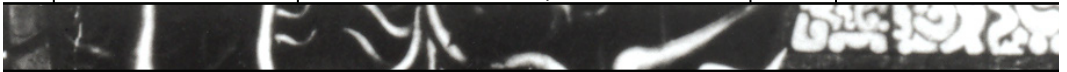
David Alfaro Siqueiros was born (1896)

Siqueiros arrives in Los Angeles after being exiled from Mexico (Apr. 1932)

Siqueiros begins work on *América Tropical* (Aug. 1932)

América Tropical is unveiled (Oct. 1932)

The Chicano mural movement renews interest in *América Tropical* (1960-69)



The Mexican Revolution begins (1910)

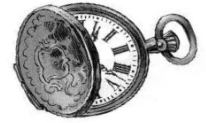


Opening of the 10th Summer Olympic Games (Jul. 1932)



The mural is completely whitewashed (1938)

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The Sylmar earthquake damages *América Tropical* (1971)

Jean Bruce Poole, Shifra Goldman, and Jesús Treviño have the mural assessed (1977)



Getty Conservation Institute, El Pueblo Historical Monument, and Friends of the Arts of Mexico undertake conservation of *América Tropical* (1988)



Groundbreaking for a viewing platform, protective shelter, and interpretive center (2010)

América Tropical Interpretive Center opens (Oct. 2012)



David Alfaro Siqueiros dies, preventing him from painting a replica of the mural (1974)

Jesús Treviño completes a documentary on *América Tropical* (1968)

The first protective shelter for the mural is installed (1978)



A second temporary protective shelter is installed and the mural is stabilized (2002)





Key Terms

Censorship: When people find moral or political fault with an artistic creation and then take steps to keep it away from the general public by restricting or concealing it.

Commission: When a person of authority assigns someone to a particular task or function.

Conservation: Working towards protecting and preserving the deterioration of particular pieces of art or other items of importance; taking action to make sure something lasts as long as possible.

Exile: A person leaving his or her country for a long period of time either because circumstances made them want to leave or because they were forced to leave.

Immigrate: Leaving one's homeland and relocating to a new country.

Interpretation: Figuring out the meaning or explanation behind a phrase or artistic work.

Intolerance: Unwillingness to recognize and respect the beliefs or practices of others.

Justice: Treating people equally in society and under the law.

The Mexican Revolution: A revolution to overthrow the government and regime of Porfirio Díaz that began in 1910.

Mural: A large picture painted on a wall or ceiling.

Nationalism: A sense of pride and ownership for a person's country of origin. Belief that one's country and the characteristics and trademarks of that country exceed all others.

Political: Having a specific view on a particular policy or system of government.

Revolution: When the people who are being governed or ruled attempt to replace the government or ruling body who are overseeing them.

Whitewash: A white paint used to cover up an image or surface.

Who was David Siqueiros?



David Alfaro Siqueiros was an important Mexican artist, who strove to impact lives through his art. While he was growing up in Mexico, many people were not happy with the way that the Mexican government was treating them. A group of people got together and decided to overthrow the government as a way to seek a better way of life. This led to the Mexican Revolution. Siqueiros was a soldier in the revolution and during the war traveled throughout Mexico. After the war, he kept traveling. He met many artists, and watched how they created their art. This inspired him to develop new and exciting ways of creating art by combining his ideas with traditional techniques. Siqueiros became part of the Mexican Muralist Movement that the new government started in order to cultivate Mexican culture. His artwork contained strong political ideas. In 1932, he was exiled from Mexico, and immigrated to the United States.

While in Los Angeles, he was commissioned by F.K. Ferez to paint *América Tropical*. Ferez rented the Italian Hall from Christine Sterling who had recently opened a Mexican marketplace on Olvera Street in 1930. Ferez chose that title because he wanted Siqueiros to create a tropical picture that would fit in with the romantic imagery of Olvera Street. However, Siqueiros painted a mural with a message that was reflective of the current political environment in Los Angeles. When people saw the mural, they were shocked. Some people were offended by the image of a indigenous man on the cross. Others were offended by the revolutionaries pointing their rifles at the eagle. Shortly afterwards, Siqueiros' visa expired and he went to South America and continued to paint. By 1938, *América Tropical* was completely whitewashed - literally covered with a "wash" of white paint. After decades of neglect, renewed interest in the mural developed, which led to its preservation. His mural has now been made accessible to the public once again so that Siqueiros' legacy can live on.

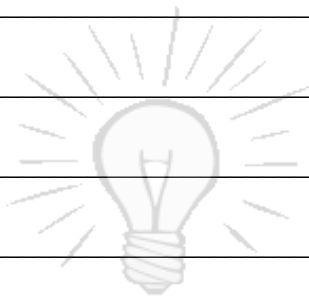
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Reacting to the Mural

People who saw the mural when it was unveiled had different reactions to it. Some people really liked it, but others did not. The pictures that Siqueiros painted made some people very angry due to its political and religious content. Others found the mural very inspiring. When you look at the mural, what do you see? What impression does it give you, and what message do you think Siqueiros was trying to send with this painting? List ten words or phrases that come to mind when you look at *América Tropical*.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____



Creating the Mural



Siqueiros arrived in Los Angeles in 1932 during the Great Depression. Los Angeles was advertised as an idyllic paradise, but in reality it was suffering from political and social unrest. The plaza at El Pueblo was a center of political activity in the city. Siqueiros believed that his art should be a reflection of the society where it was created. América Tropical was no different. Siqueiros painted a mural that reflected his interpretation of the social and political climate of the time.

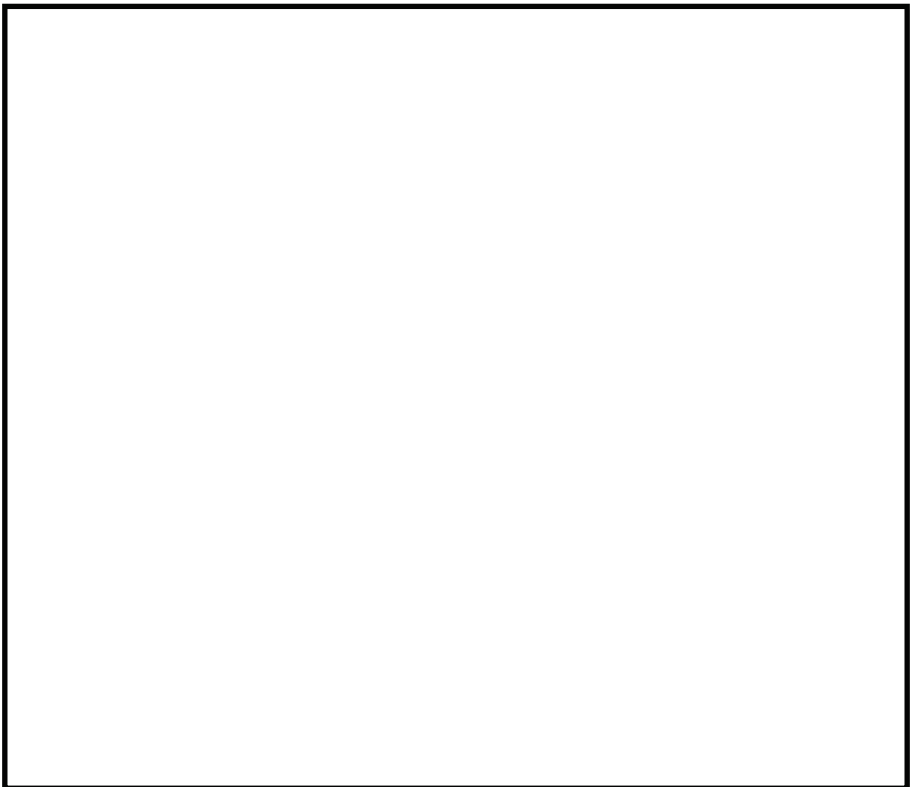
F.K. Ferez commissioned Siqueiros to paint the mural because he believed Siqueiros was the only artist who had the technical skills to create it successfully. Siqueiros painted murals in a way that no other artist could. He projected and traced images onto the wall. He also used airbrush, cement guns, and pre-colored cement mortar, which he used to replace brushes and other traditional materials. Unfortunately, these techniques, while innovative, may have sped the deterioration of the mural. This style of painting later inspired the Chicano Muralist Movement in Los Angeles, which began in the 1960s.



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Create Your Own Mural

F.K. Ferenz commissioned Siqueiros to paint *América Tropical*. He chose that title because he intended for Siqueiros to paint a peaceful picture that would fit in with the overall nostalgic feeling of Olvera Street, but Siqueiros had a different interpretation. People often take the same idea and interpret it differently. What images do you think of when you hear the title *América Tropical*? Now is your chance to be a muralist. In the space below please draw a mural that reflects your interpretation of the title: *América Tropical*.

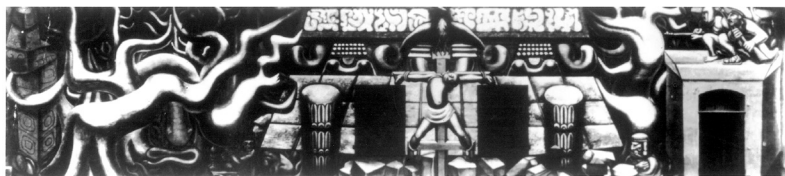


Whitewashing the Mural



Siqueiros began work on the mural just after the close of the 10th Summer Olympic Games, which were hosted in Los Angeles in 1932. During this time people were feeling a strong sense of nationalism, or national pride. That is one of the reasons people were shocked and angered when they saw the images he painted in his mural. Siqueiros had other artists help him create the mural, but it is rumored that he did most of the painting himself. On the night before the mural was to be unveiled, he sent the other artists home and spent all night painting the central figure, the indigenous man on the cross, which he had kept a secret.

The morning the mural was revealed, people were taken aback with both awe and anger. Many people criticized him for his abandonment of classical technique and for his haunting imagery of a crucified indigenous man and revolutionaries aiming their rifles at an eagle. The people who had commissioned the mural were not sure how to react to Siqueiros' interpretation of *América Tropical*. Later that year, it is believed that city officials came to the decision that the mural was out of place on the Italian Hall and should be censored from public view. The part of the mural visible from Olvera Street was whitewashed soon after and by 1938 *América Tropical* was completely hidden.



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Crossword Puzzle

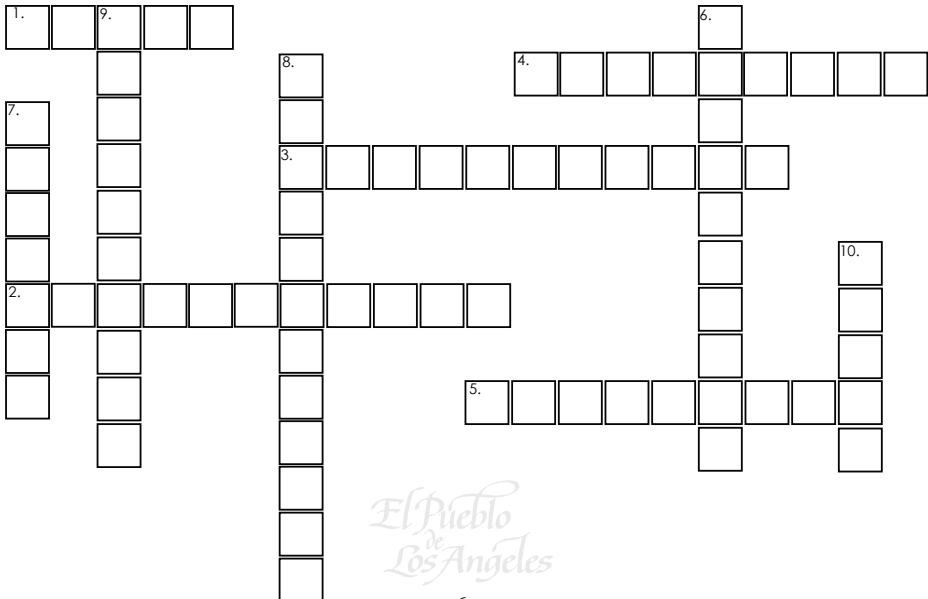
Use the hints below to solve the crossword puzzle. (The answers are on page 12.)

Down

- Restricting someone from displaying or creating something because it is considered by some to be morally or politically unacceptable.
- Treating people equally in society and under the law.
- Actions taken to ensure that an item or artifact lasts as long as possible.
- When a group of people take steps to overthrow the government or ruling body.
- Being forced to leave one's country or home.

Across

- A large picture painted on a wall or ceiling.
- Failure to have an open mind about other cultures, peoples, or ideas.
- Pride in one's country of origin.
- Artist who created *América Tropical*.
- Having a specific view on a particular policy or system of government.



Word Search



Locate and circle the words listed below. They can be up, down, diagonal, sideways, or backwards. (The answers are on page 13.)

1. Big Three
2. Censorship
3. Exile
4. Great Depression
5. Los Angeles
6. Mural
7. Olvera Street
8. Political
9. Censor
10. Siqueiros
11. Sterling
12. Whitewash
13. Interpretation
14. Commission

l l g c e n s o r s h i p m p
l s w h i t e w a s h b n i r
w i e x i l l o s b c i o n w
a q d n f b i g t t r g i t d
l u g o h i x j k e e t s e c
s e s i q u e i m e v h s r h
s i t t m n i o p r o r e p n
e r e a c u o f r t l e r r o
l o r v e o r r s s u e p e i
e s l r n r u a u a t i e t s
g y i e s o x l l r i e d a s
n z n s o z o o b e o x t t i
a c g n r c e r f v n i a i m
s g h o e o k o l l m l e o m
o n o c p q r z s o t e r n o
l p o l i t i c a l u v g i c

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Key People & Places

Use these names and places to fill-in the word bank on the next page.



David Alfaro Siqueiros



El Pueblo Historical Monument



Getty Conservation Institute



Italian Hall



Los Angeles



Mexico



Olvera Street



Sepulveda House

El Pueblo de Los Angeles

Word Bank

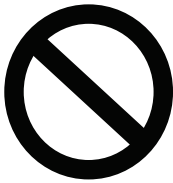


Use the names and places on the previous page to fill-in the word bank. (The answers are on page 14.)

_____ Alfaro _____ arrived
in _____ in 1932 as a political
exile from _____. He was commissioned
by F.K. Ferenz to paint *América Tropical* on a wall of the
_____, located
on _____. When
the mural was revealed people had many different
reactions to it. Some people liked it, but it made others
angry. Eventually the mural was whitewashed. Eighty
years later, it is once again accessible to the public
to see. An interpretive center has been created in
the historic _____
due to the combined efforts of El _____
_____ and the
_____ Institute.

Matching Game

Match the words and pictures with the definitions. (The answers are on page 15.)



1. Censor

Treating people equally in society and under the law.



2. Whitewash

A person's pride for their country.



3. Exile

Stopping someone from displaying or creating something.



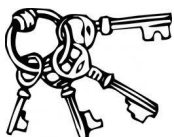
4. Justice

Being forced to leave one's country or home.



5. Nationalism

A white paint used to cover up an image or surface.



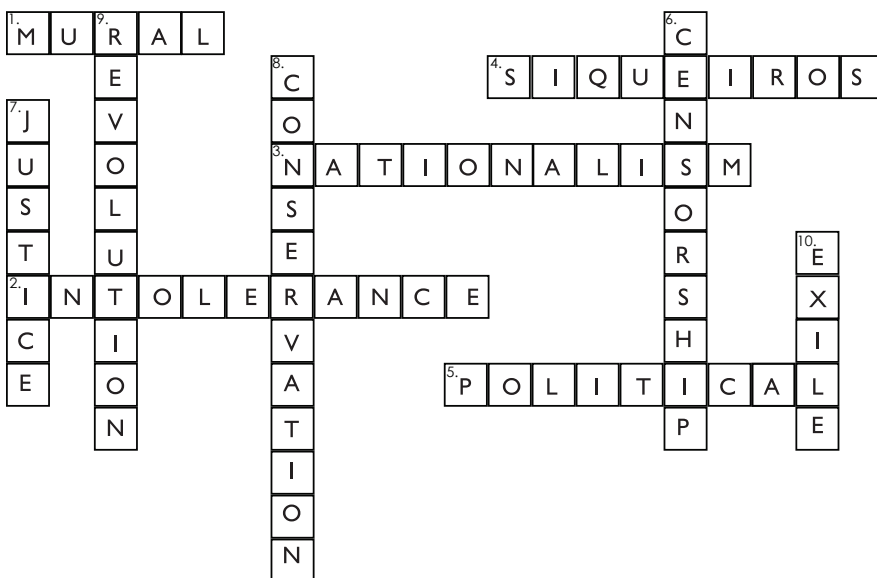
Answer Key

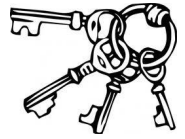
Down

- Restricting someone from displaying or creating something because it is considered by some to be morally or politically unacceptable.
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Across

- A large picture painted on a wall or ceiling.
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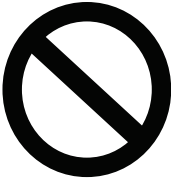
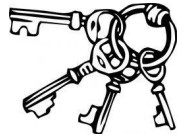
1. Big Three
2. Censorship
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7. Olvera Street
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10. Siqueiros
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14. Commission

l l g c e n s o r s h i p m p
l s w h i t e w a s h o n i r
w i e x i l l o s b c i o n w
a q d n f b i g t t r g i t d
l u g o h i x j k e e t s e c
s e s i q u e i m e v h s r h
s i t t m n i o p r o r e p n
e r e a c u o f r t l e r r o
l o r v e o r r s s u e p e i
e s l r n r u a u a t i e t s
g y i e s o x l l r i e d a s
n z n s o z o o b e o x t t i
a c g n r c e r f v n i a i m
s g h o e o k o l l m l e o m
o n o c p q r z s o t e r n o
l p o l i t i c a l u v g i c



Answer Key

_____ David _____ Alfaro _____ Siqueiros _____ arrived
in _____ Los _____ Angeles _____ in 1932 as a political
exile from _____ Mexico _____. He was commissioned
by F.K. Ferenz to paint *América Tropical* on a wall of the
_____ Italian _____ Hall _____, located
on _____ Olvera _____ Street _____. When
the mural was revealed people had many different
reactions to it. Some people liked it, but it made others
angry. Eventually the mural was whitewashed. Eighty
years later, it is once again accessible to the public
to see. An interpretive center has been created in
the historical _____ Sepulveda _____ House _____
due to the combined efforts of El _____ Pueblo _____
_____ Historical _____ Monument _____ and the
_____ Getty _____ Conservation _____ Institute.



1. Censor

Treating people equally in society and under the law.



2. Whitewash

A person's pride for their country.



3. Exile

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4. Justice

Being forced to leave one's country or home.



5. Nationalism

A white paint used to cover up an image or surface.

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