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Train mural takes shape in Live Oak

By Chris Kaufman/ckaufman@appealdemocrat.com
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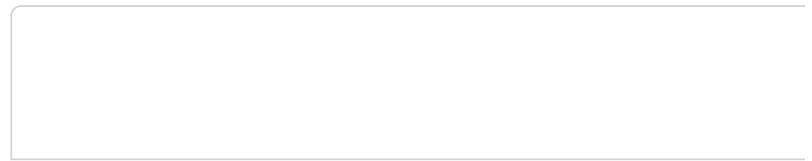


Rafael Blanco works on a 17-by-50-foot mural Friday, July 7, 2017 behind the Peach Tree Clinic in Live Oak.
Chris Kaufman/Appeal-Democrat

As the sun came up in Live Oak on Friday morning, a train roared by Pennington Road. And several feet away from the tracks, a mural of an old train is taking shape.

The 17-by-50-foot mural by Rafael Blanco is the second to be created as part of the Murals of Live Oak project, a collaboration between Yuba Sutter Arts, Live Oak and Sutter County. It's behind the Peach Tree Clinic and pharmacy facing west.

"I'm very interested in how we lived before cellphones and the boom of technology," Blanco, 35, of Quincy said. "I took an old photo of a train and added a tree, some layers of colors and some splashes."



Blanco, a native of the coastal Spanish town of Alicante, is an art professor at Feather River College and has created other large-scale projects in Quincy and Reno.

"I submitted designs for all three of the themes of trains, Native Americans and farming," Blanco said. "It's common for artists to submit several options because it's a community art project."

He said some residents have already stopped by to share their thoughts about his work.

"One woman came over and brought me a Sprite because it was so hot and said she liked the mural," Blanco said. "Another man came by and said, 'It looks good, but it needs a naked woman in there.'"

Blanco said community art projects are important, even though he knows not everyone will like what he's doing.

"When the city does things like this, it sends a message that they want to beautify the place — to make ordinary life more interesting," Blanco said. "Not everyone will like it but it's better than a blank wall."

He came to the United States in the early 2000s on a tennis scholarship, first to Florida Southern College then to Saint Mary's College, and has a family history with both trains and art.

"One of my grandfathers worked at a train station, and my other grandfather was a well-known sculpture artist," Blanco said.

Following his undergraduate studies, Blanco returned to Spain and later moved back to the United States to become an assistant tennis coach. He earned a master's degree from the University of Nevada, Reno.

David Read, executive director with Yuba Sutter Arts, said the \$120,000, three-year project is funded by Yuba Sutter Arts, California Arts Council, National Education Association and Live Oak.

"He's a super guy and submitted a tremendous railroad-themed mural," Read said.

Blacno said it will take him about 10 days to complete the project.

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