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UNR'S MURAL PROJECT COMPLETED, ARTIST RAFAEL BLANCO DESCRIBES THE MURAL PROCESS

EMILIE RODRIGUEZ — JULY 23, 2020

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Braving Nevada's dry heat and temperatures reaching the upper 90s, muralist Rafael Blanco painted two murals for the University of Nevada, Reno which will be revealed to students upon returning for the fall 2020 semester.

From June 17 to July 14, Blanco painted. He woke up early and retired late into the evenings, some days pulling all-nighters to get the murals done on time.



Rafael Blanco's second mural, "Stimulate the Senses," is located in the interior courtyard of the Church of Fine Arts Building. Blanco was originally going to paint the second mural on the Ansari Business Building; however, due to a disagreement on the color palette, students voted against the completion of the mural.

individuals representing diversity in race, ethnicity and religion. Blanco used a vivid color palette to show the differences and commonalities of humanity.

"Many things have inspired me, one of the main things is humanity," Blanco said. "I was trying to show brightness with the colors, we are trying to celebrate our differences and our commonalities."

The Sierra Hall mural also features a quote from Audre Lorde saying, "... it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence."

Lorde was an American writer and civil rights activist, and dedicated her life to fighting racism, sexism, classism and many other injustices known to people of color. The students who organized the mural project voted on her words to be showcased on the Sierra Hall mural.

Blanco also added the word Nevada, which runs horizontally down the building. Placed above the word Nevada is a multicolored fist, a similar fist used for the Black Lives Matter movement. This artistic element showcases to the campus community that this mural specifically represents diversity, equity and inclusion.

With the quote, the colors and the diverse people painted on Sierra Hall, Blanco says the mural is powerful and he hopes it sparks conversation about the racism that happens in Reno and on campus.

The piece does not go unnoticed. The sheer size of the mural will catch the attention of all who walk by. However, the bigger the mural, the more administrative challenges Blanco and his team encountered.

"We had obstacles the whole time," Blanco said. "The first week was a roller coaster of emotions."

One of these obstacles for the mural project as a whole was the consensus of the students on the Ansari Business Building. Blanco was going to use a color palette similar to the Sierra Hall mural, but paint actual university students to represent UNR's diverse student body. While the initial plans of this mural were approved, in the end students wanted the color palette to represent the true skin tones of the students instead of the original colors Blanco picked out.

"It was going to be more meaningful if I painted specific students," Blanco said. "Some students wanted their skin color, but changing the process would take me three or more weeks."

The conversation went on for weeks, and in the end students voted on the mural to not be completed. The mural would not be done unless all students were on board with the project.

Blanco admitted he was discouraged, and while the Ansari Business Building does not have a mural, the Church of Fine Arts Building does, and it's quite the eye-catcher.

Blanco only had a week to complete the second mural and quickly brainstormed ideas for the art students.

"The purpose of this mural is to unify the school of the arts," Blanco said.

Blanco decided he wanted a term to unify the three departments of the arts. The theater, music, and visual department all stimulate the human senses, and Blanco wanted to portray this through a shocking and expressive way.



Duchenne documented his work by taking pictures of his patients during the therapy sessions.

"Once I saw these photographs, I thought I could paint something funny and visually stimulating," Blanco said. "Almost everyone who sees this mural is going to have a reaction to it."

The mural is indeed stimulating, and it livens up the blank wall that originally inhabited the courtyard.

Even with the initial hiccups and difficulties, Blanco completed both murals by July 14. Blanco loves working in his studio, but he also appreciates every opportunity to paint murals for others. Students will be able to view both murals upon arriving back to campus in the fall. These paintings will indefinitely spark conversation among the university community, as they were intended to do.

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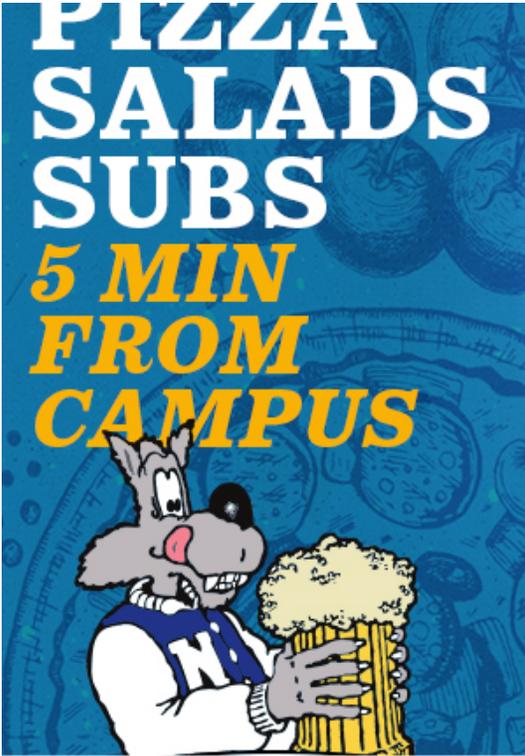


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