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Faded Westside Mural Restored

By MARILYN MARTINEZ, SPECIAL TO THE TIMES
August 31, 1996

Just three weeks ago, the images on a landmark West Los Angeles mural were dull and fading.

The red, white and green stripes of the Mexican flag were anything but bright. And the open arms of the Virgen de Guadalupe needed some redefining.

But today, the images of "Chicano Heritage," which celebrates the history of West Los Angeles' Mexican Americans, appear as clear and vibrant as when it was created 20 years ago.

The restoration of the Stoner Park Recreation Center mural was recently completed after some water blasting, plaster repairing and repainting.

"It looks wonderful," said Valerie Carbajal, park director.

The mural, one of seven in Los Angeles targeted for restoration, was chosen because of its community significance, said Sydney Kamlager, community art coordinator for the Social and Public Art Resource Center.

In 1976, artist Judithe Hernandez created the mural with the assistance of young men belonging to a neighborhood gang. Since then, it has become a sort of protected mascot, unmarred by graffiti.

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But the effects of the sun, time and careless drivers have taken their toll. Until recently, motorists were allowed to drive up to the mural's wall, and once a car smashed into it and took out a chunk of plaster. Someone tried to repair the damage with plaster and paint, but the result looked messy, Kamlager said.

"They've done their own sort of grass-roots maintenance of the mural and we thought we'd give it a professional job," said Kamlager.

When word spread of the mural's impending renewal, the gang members who have watched over it for years jumped at the chance to help refurbish it. Now former gang members whose children play at the park helped artists Alma Lopez and Noni Olabisi mix colors, erect scaffolding and paint.

"For them it was something they would like to pass on to their children," said Carbajal.

A rededication ceremony is scheduled Sept. 19 at 5:30 p.m. at Stoner Recreation Center, 11759 Missouri Ave., West Los Angeles.

Information: (310) 822-9560.