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Mural, New Native Wildflower Garden Bring Joy to East Oakland Neighborhood



1 Photo of new mural by Mike Melero.

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Local volunteers recently converged on a vacant lot at Seminary and Macarthur to install a native wildflower garden under the benevolent gaze of the freshly painted Egyptian deity Ptah Hotep.

The July 10 event marked the completion of a large-scale mural along the back of the lot - designed and executed by Unity High School students, the Community Rejuvenation Project and neighborhood activists.

The mural was organized by Unity High School's Arrow-Soul Council afterschool program teacher Desi W.O.M.E, a founder of the Community Rejuvenation Project.

"It's all about mentorship, giving kids a safe space to create their first works and develop their own individual style," he said. "We talk a lot about history and context before designing the mural together."

The mural's theme of black and brown unity was inspired by the Oakland Museum's recent exhibit, "The African Presence in México," and was enriched through consultation with local activists and artists.

Unity Lewis, a neighborhood activist and hip hop artist who contributed to the mural's conceptualization, was thrilled with the final results.



"I feel like it's really an amazing piece with powerful energy jumping off it because it's been blessed with the spirit of the ancestors and energy of the young retelling the tale so we don't forget our history," Lewis said. "I see that mural every day. I've been over there and prayed over there. It's helping raise the consciousness in the community, as people discuss who the figures are and the meaning behind it. I hope we can use the space for some powerful community events in the future."

The garden beds were created out of discarded boards and iron rebar found in the lot, supplemented by community donations of soil, compost and seeds. Local businesses provided access to water.

Leo Delgado, a Unity High junior who painted parts of the mural's sunset and temple, talked about why he came back to install the garden.



"This mural is important to me because we have worked really hard and put a lot of effort into caring for the community," Leo said. "The garden is important because it shows how we all come together to make our community a better place."

The Community Rejuvenation Project is an Oakland-based nonprofit targeting blight and

neglect by creating murals to celebrate the local community and reflect neighborhood culture. Its model combines mural painting with the installation of native, drought-resistant gardens and healthy food distribution. The murals become a focal point for neighborhood cohesion through project block parties thrown at each mural dedication in collaboration with the nonprofit Roots and Branches. Block parties always include hip hop performances, live aerosol art and healthy food.

Source: <http://oaklandlocal.com/article/mural-new-native-wildflower-garden-bring-joy-east-oakland-neighborhood>