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CRP's new 'Healing Song' mural brightens West Oakland with mythology, local heroes

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Can a vibrant mural help bring calm to a community?

Community Rejuvenation Project artists Mike Threesixty, Desi WOME, Pancho Pescador and Release PYC think so. The crew recently completed a large colorful mural on the corner of 30th and West, Oakland's Ghost Town neighborhood.

Dubbed "Healing Song," the new mural was commissioned by local businessman Bill Vidor, who was looking for a way to stop blight on his property. Eager for a creative solution to a persistent problem, Vidor hired CRP to create the mural.

According to Vidor, the city of Oakland Code Enforcement Division issued repeated warnings regarding

blight on the property. Traditional abatement methods simply had not worked. As a more permanent solution, CRP was asked by Vidor to create a mural.



Figure 1 <http://communityrejuvenation.blogspot.com/> Photo by Eric Arnold

"We wanted to celebrate life," CRP founder Desi WOME says. "West Oakland in general, and Ghost Town in particular, have a bad reputation. But just because a neighborhood might be identified as 'ghetto' doesn't mean it's not a community. Its residents deserve to have self-esteem and self-respect, just like anyone living anywhere else."

Rich images with local roots

This is a vibrant mural with lots of stories. At the far left of the mural, at 30th Street, a

blackened bird drenched in crude oil sits in front of a burning derrick on the far left side – imagery inspired by the recent oil spill offshore of Nigeria. Emerging from the flames is a massive colorful phoenix. Next, is Chinese black water dragon whose two heads



symbolize the two possible paths the future can take. In the dragon's hand is a spray paint can, from which emerges a portrait of legendary Oakland female DJ Pam the Funkstress. The struggles of indigenous peoples are connected through an "EZLN" record on Pam's turntable, whose tonearm is the beak of a Mayan quetzal bird.

Figure 2 <http://communityrejuvenation.blogspot.com/> Photo by Eric Arnold

Beside them, on the right, Ken Saro Wiwa - a Nigerian activist who fought against the Shell Oil company - pumps his fist. Saro Wiwa is mirrored by Areyto Paredes, the son of local activist and war resistor, Pablo Paredes. Both men stand on either side of a massive 45 foot-long aerosol piece spelling out the word "Healing." The calligraphy intertwines with the wings of the Egyptian solar deity Horus, whose talons carry a boombox. Above the boombox on the corner of the wall is a massive six-sided water molecule, made famous by Dr. Masaru Emoto, who studied the effects of language and song on water.

On the "West" side of the wall, local artist, educator and activist Zakiya Harris - a recent resident of Ghost Town - is painted next to her solar-powered sound system. One raised hand of Afrobeat musician Fela Anikulapo Kuti points to a spiral; the other hand holds a microphone. An Ibis - sacred symbol of Thoth, Egyptian god of scribes, writing, magic, science and mathematics - sits just to the right of Fela. Finally, an appropriately colossus-sized Thoth, also known as Tehuti, documents the entire proceedings with a spray can.

"It is significant for an organization like G4G to be depicted and immortalized in a mural in a place like west Oakland because of the historical legacy West Oakland has in addressing environmental issues (police brutality, lack of access to healthy food, drugs etc.) through art culture and activism," Zakiya Harris says. "Our work, like so many others, is really just an extension of pioneers, like the Black Panther Party who paved the way for us to exist."

"As a female deejay in the hip hop community it shows that I have paved a way for young girls and women in a positive light," Pam the Funktress tells Oakland Local.

"Our collective features several female artists and in our murals, we always want to have a balance of male and female energy," Desi WOME says. "We chose to paint Zakiya and Pam because they represented people from the community, local legends if you will who deserve to be immortalized."

Source: <http://oaklandlocal.com/article/crp%E2%80%99s-new-healing-song-mural-brightens-west-oakland-mythology-local-heroes>