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Beyond San Diego

Catching Up with globe-trotting artist Ruben Seja

By Kat Avila | Web Published 5.21.2006

Ruben Seja is a globe-trotting artist based in San Diego who feels as comfortable painting a mural as he does with producing and promoting. He is currently in Japan following up on one of his latest projects. Check out his web site 246FotoMorph at <http://www.246fm.com>, which he launched about a month ago.

KAT AVILA for LatinoLA: Your work came to mind when I was in Yokohama this past March. On my way to the youth hostel there, I was surprised to run across a particular mural/graffiti wall. This wall was where, in 1992, yourself, Victor Ochoa (whom I had interviewed about it that year), Richard Martinez, and Roberto Salas had joined Japanese muralists such as Rocco Satoshi, Satoru Uehara, and Morimasa Sagaya to paint as part of the San Diego-Tijuana-Yokohama Art Exchange celebrating the 35th anniversary of the Yokohama-San Diego sister city pact. Any comments?

RUBEN SEJA: This was a way to get to paint a mural in Japan, but what was also part of the deal I had to produce an art exhibition at the same time. I brought over 125 artist works from Tijuana and San Diego and exhibited at the [Yokohama] Citizen's Gallery in Yokohama and, of course, I produced the exchange part. I brought over 60 Yokohama artist works and exhibited in San Diego and Tijuana at the CCUT [Tijuana Cultural Center].

Also, one last comment on the murals, my mural was painted out by a crazed art activist protesting the exchange the day after we all finished. I got a nice apology from the mayor and director of the city's art exchange. Of course my piece included the [United] Farm Workers Huelga Eagle/Flag.

LLA: You first visited Japan in 1987 with mask maker and multimedia artist Zarco Guerrero [<http://www.zarkmask.com>] from Arizona. What did you do?

RS: I painted a mural at a local restaurant in Kyoto. Made my contacts with Yokohama powers that be and started my first [international art] exchange and met Rocco Satoshi.

LLA: Do you still have an office in Osaka?

RS: New office is in Tokyo at the Ebisu Towers, right next to the Ebisu brewery. What luck. They have a good dark beer.

LLA: You've also painted murals in Singapore and Thailand. When were you there?

RS: In '97. In Singapore I painted for a multimedia group called Media Arts. The mural was about slavery, cheap labor, and the breaking of chains. I think there was a movie out about that time about slave ships. As for Thailand, I have not painted murals there. I have registered my company there. Check out <http://chenla.org>. Currently setting up a studio there.

LLA: In 1996, you produced an international digital exhibition



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in Beijing. How did that turn out?

RS: This was a year after our cyberfest event in Hong Kong. We were invited to participate in Vision Quest with a mini-cyberfest. Aside from having to start their Internet infrastructure by repairing and providing technical support, witnessing the public execution of their fire department personnel, having them every night crash our systems by turning off all the power without warning exactly at closing time, and the fact that I took some nine-year-old Chinese genius to solve a major PC problem and that we were on their national TV program making us all stars, it went okay.

LLA: What's up with your record company? In 2002, you were producing an all-women salsa band with Mexico as your market.

RS: New company is called WorldBeat Publishing. We have a recording studio at the WorldBeat Center in San Diego. Check out <http://worldbeatcenter.org>. We also produce a TV and radio program 7 days, 24 hours called OneWorld TV and Radio.

LLA: How did you end up at the [nonprofit multicultural arts organization] WorldBeat Center?

RS: I and Makeda [Dread] are the original creators of the center 18 years ago. But we started in the park [Balboa Park] when we discovered they had plans to demolish the water tank. We went before the city and they gave us the space.

I have been a friend of Makeda for over 25 years when I produced reggae and African concerts. You can ask her. I started her off in the concert business.

LLA: Is there a particular philosophy that guides your work?

RS: Say what you mean and mean what you say. Challenge all that tell you no. Do right by all. These next words are not mine, but kinda what I go by: Man can accomplish anything as long as he doesn't care who gets the credit. Peace.

LLA: Thank you, Ruben Seja! Peace and happiness to you too.

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