

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

06/07/2018

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## **Historic Mural Repainting Unveiled at Celebration in Houston's East End**

***1973 Mexican-American mural by Leo Tanguma gets second life***

**HOUSTON, TEXAS** — “A lot of sweat equity went into this,” said Mario Figueroa, Jr., better known as artist “Gonzo247” as he stood at the podium in front of the sweeping mural at 5900 Canal Street in Houston’s East End. Titled *The Rebirth of our Nationality*, the mile-long mural is rich in color, characters, and story, enveloping the side of an empty warehouse that borders the Harris County Records Building, a facility that was recently renovated by Kirksey, who also served as the project manager for the reinterpretation of the historic mural. A crowd of around 200 community members, residents, and county officials gathered on the street on June 7th to celebrate the event under the hot summer sun.

A striking work of art, the original mural, painted in 1973 by artist and muralist Leo Tanguma, features the trials, tribulations and victories of the Mexican-American people. Originally crafted with whatever spare house paint Tanguma could find, the mural served as a reminder to the community of everything Houston’s Mexican-American and Latino cultures had been through. A young Figueroa, born the same year Tanguma painted the original mural, remembers passing the wall on the way to Sunday mass every week. Years passed, and the mural, along with the building, suffered from deterioration and years of neglect. But Figueroa never forgot it.

In 2013, Harris County purchased the building, as it stood empty (it had previously been home to the Continental Can Company, which had long since moved away). Kirksey was brought on board to renovate the adjacent building so it could serve as a records storage facility for the county clerk’s office and new offices for the Precinct 6 Constable. To the credit of Figueroa and a number of other community members, more attention was finally paid to the mural itself. Figueroa — known for his famous “Houston is Inspired” downtown mural — was chosen for the task of repainting it, with Tanguma (who, at 75, now resides in Colorado) as his guide.

Both artists attended the ceremony and discussed the significance of this East End mural, and what it means for Houston.

“This mural isn’t mine,” said Figueroa. “This is Leo’s. And beyond being Leo’s, this mural actually belongs to the community.”

Describing the mural piece by piece, Tanguma started in the center. The deep, red flower opens up to reveal a young Mexican couple within, arms outstretched on either side.

“This represents our new generation of chicanos,” he said.

The older people, figures painted on either side of the flower, are being drawn toward the center, bringing with them their stories and their struggle for liberation.

“I wish all of us could say to the younger people that ‘we struggled for your betterment.’ It’s good to recognize that,” Tanguma said.

Many of the figures within the mural represent everyday Mexican-Americans: a family, embracing one another, symbolizing the need to stay together so the Mexican-American culture can prevail.

A farm worker, holding a farmer's union contract. A man tied up in rope, representing how we can sometimes get wrapped up in our own prejudices and attitudes.

Each of the figures, on both sides, are drawn toward the center couple – a journey that embodies the struggle and hard-fought passage that made the way for today's generation of Mexican-Americans.

"What if Americans knew more about our struggle? What if we knew more? I'd like to think we'd be more compassionate with one another," Tanguma said, gesturing toward the mural.

Figueroa got visibly choked up when addressing the crowd.

"This is public art, and this is what public art is for. To share. To represent who we are as a people and inspire the next generation moving forward," he said.

Tanguma echoed his sentiments. "Together, we will be a formidable force in this city."

Above the young couple emerging from the flower is a white banner that reads, "To become aware of our history is to become aware of our singularity."

**PHOTOS BELOW**  
*Photos by Ruben Serrano*



**PHOTO CAPTION:** Mario Figueroa, Jr., better known as "Gonzo247," addresses the crowd about his repainting of the historic 1973 Leo Tanguma mural, titled *The Rebirth of our Nationality* on June 7, 2018 in Houston's East End.



**PHOTO CAPTION:** A crowd of 200+ gathers on the street across from the mural for the repainting celebration.



**PHOTO CAPTION:** Leo Tanguma, the original artist, explains the meaning behind the figures in his mural. Tanguma served as consultant to Figueroa during the repainting process.



**PHOTO CAPTION:** Leo Tanguma and Mario Figueroa, Jr. “Gonzo247”, cut the ribbon.



**PHOTO CAPTION:** Sasha Wyrwal, of LUX Art Consulting, with artist Gonzo247 (Mario Figueroa), and Kirksey’s Benito Guerrier. Kirksey Architecture served as project manager for the mural repainting.

**About Kirksey**

Kirksey is a Houston-based, sustainable architecture and interior design firm with more than 35 million sf of LEED® projects in their portfolio. Team-based in structure, Kirksey serves Commercial, Collegiate, Community, pK-12, Government, Healthcare, Hospitality, Religious, Science & Technology, and Multi-Family Residential markets. For more information, visit [www.kirksey.com](http://www.kirksey.com).