La Villa Hispana

KARIN CONNELLY RICE | WEDNESDAY, JUNE 05, 2019

LACHA will bring two new murals and a community art garden to La Villa Hispana

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Artist Will Sanchez grew up in the La Villa Hispana neighborhood. But it wasn't until he was sentenced to 18 months in prison in 2003 for trying to rob a convenience store at 5404 Storer Ave. that he discovered his love and talent for art—and re-embraced his childhood community.

In 2018, he opened La Cosecha Gallery (the Harvest Gallery) in the exact same location he tried to rob 15 years earlier.

"My heart is in La Villa. I grew up there, caused problems there, evolved there," he says. "So, I always had the goal in the back of my mind to reopen La Cosecha Galeria in our neighborhood somewhere. I chose the location as a thief in 2003 by trying to rob the store owners at gunpoint. The location chose me in 2018, after 15 years of preparing me, and it's been a crazy ride since.'

Along with relocating La Cosecha Galeria from the Stockyards neighborhood to La Villa
Hispana, Sanchez was further inspired to do something to beautify his new surroundings, gain recognition for the Latino artists who are often overlooked, and give the neighborhood an identity through art.

“You can travel from neighborhood to neighborhood throughout Cleveland, or any city for that matter, and be reminded by art or public projects of the community that resides there,” Sanchez explains. “Not us, when people speak of [La Villa Hispana], it’s about poverty, crime, gunshots or drugs. We’re invisible. A lot of times, people don’t even know La Villa Hispana is here.”

That’s about to change, thanks to a new initiative Sanchez is spearheading in tandem with Eduardo Rodriguez, program manager for the Hispanic Alliance Leadership Development Initiative (HALDI). The two recently came together to form the Latinx Arts and Culture of Hispanic Alliance (LACHA) to act as heritage keepers, further artist development, and advocate for diversity by bringing awareness to Latinx artists through storytelling and recognition.

The LACHA project will bring two new murals and a community art garden to the neighborhood as well as the opportunity for local Latinx artists to exhibit artwork at La Cosecha Galeria.

“We invited several artists from different disciplines, ages, countries, and stories to be part of the creation of the LACHA, [designed to be] a space for the development of artists of color,” explains Rodriguez. “With this movement, we take a step towards the support of artists of color and a space where there is significant support.”

The two joined forces Cuyahoga Arts & Culture’s Learning Lab program, which pairs local artists and nonprofit community organizations together to make change.

“It’s empowering to see Latino artists plant their metaphoric flag,” says Rodriguez. “With the project launch of LACHA, we envision a place that only exists in our imagination, yet it impacts our reality stronger than the knowledge of it being intangible. If one thinks it to be so, it is so.”

LACHA has already formed a committee made up of professional artists to create a plan for promoting the arts in the area and create two murals. One mural will be Sanchez’ “Aztec Warric 3101 W. 25th St. (near the Hispanic Alliance); the other, “La Villa,” will be at Las Tienditas del Mercado (2886 West 25th St.) and will depict four Cleveland figures: Cesi Castro, Nelson Cintron Jr., Judge Jose Villanueva, and Jose Feliciano, Sr.

Additionally, Sanchez just leased three vacant lots next door to La Cosecha to create a community art garden. And, as part of Cleveland Council member Jasmin Santana’s beautification initiative...
Sanchez will paint a mural on the 300-foot-long alley between the gallery and garden on July 1:

Sanchez says he hopes these artistic efforts will let Clevelanders know what the La Villa neighborhood is all about. “It’s to let others know we exist and have a history here,” says Sanchez of the “La Villa” mural. “[I want people to see] the mix of culture. Everyone refers to us as Hispanic or Latino, but actually a spectrum of countries and shades of color. It’s a beautiful thing.”

This article is part of our On the Ground - La Villa Hispana community reporting project in partnership with Dollar Bank, Hispanic Business Center, Esperanza Inc., Greater Cleveland Partnership, Cleveland Neighborhood Progress, and Cleveland Development Advisors. Read the rest of our coverage here.

Read more articles by Karin Connelly Rice.

Karin Connelly Rice enjoys telling people’s stories, whether it’s a promising startup or a life’s passion. Over the past 20 years she has reported on the local business community for publications such as Inside Business and Cleveland Magazine. She was editor of the Rocky River/Lakewood edition of In the Neighborhood and was a reporter and photographer for the Amherst News-Times. At Fresh Water she enjoys telling the stories of Clevelanders who are shaping and embracing the business and research climate in Cleveland.