



A New Gift of Art Graces City College's Neighborhood

By Daniel Jenkins

Guardsman Staff Writer

The Virgin of Guadalupe appeared like a vision near Phelan campus in October, after City College faculty member Tomi Cunningham had a mural painted on her house at 16 Genessee.

Cunningham, an English as a Second Language instructor since 1983, said she had considered having the 5 foot wide, 7 foot tall mural painted for a long time, following a dream she had while visiting Morelia, Mexico.

She described the dream as a visit by the Virgin of Guadalupe, who identified herself as Maria. The religious icon warned her of an upcoming difficulty in her life that later proved to be true.

Cunningham would not comment on what came to pass, saying only that it was "very personal."

A docent of the Mission District-based Precita Eyes Mural Arts Center, Cunningham volunteers her time leading mural walking tours in the Mission District.

She placed an ad on craigslist.org, a San Francisco online community, seeking a muralist to paint the "Virgen de Guadalupe" on her 1920s stucco bungalow near City College and the Diego Rivera mural. Among the many responses was a letter and photo from local artist Rick Price.

"I'm strangely attracted to religious icons, though I am neither," he wrote. Price received a master's of fine arts degree from Savannah College of Art and Vision in 1996. He works for Westcoast Entertainment Technographic Studios in San Francisco, specializing in mural and large-

scale art production.

Cunningham lent him a photo book featuring Virgin of Guadalupe murals from which he selected a traditional image. The mural was painted during four weekdays in late October.

It depicts the Virgin in a traditional pose, praying for "Paz y Amor" (Peace and Love) with rays of light coming from behind her. The Virgin wears a cobalt blue robe with yellow stars, a cross around her neck and a black sash around her waist. It was Price's idea to place her on the cloth mantle, instead of painting a frame.

"I'm really happy with it," said Cunningham.

Since the mural was painted, a steady flow of curious onlookers has approached the house each day. Neighbors and passersby stop to admire the Virgin and share with Cunningham their own stories and beliefs.

"This is really a gift to me," said Cunningham.

Although the mural is the main attraction, the entire house is painted in a festive Mexican theme with colors that evoke Carnival or Fiesta. It stands out in vivid contrast to the light pastel homes lining Genessee.

"The house was in dire need of a paint job," said Cunningham. "I wanted something that would cheer people up, so I chose colors with names that appealed to me, like Prima Vera, Tropical Fruit, Purple Passion and Pink Flamingo."

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Photos by
Doria Mueller

She said a man who walked by the house after it was painted told her it looked like a Mexican restaurant. She took that as a compliment, however it was intended.

Cunningham described herself as “spiritual rather than religious” and said the Virgin of Guadalupe has long been a source of inspiration and fascination to her.

According to the legend, a dark-skinned woman appeared before Juan Diego on December 9, 1531. The woman identified herself as the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus Christ, and asked Diego to relay a message to the local Bishop that she desired a church be built on the hillside where she appeared.

After the bishop demanded proof of the Virgin’s appearance, she appeared before Diego again on December 12. The Virgin told him to pick roses from the hill and present them to the Bishop as a sign. He picked the flowers and carried them in his cloak. As he dropped the roses before the Bishop, an image of “La Virgen Morena” (the Dark Virgin) was revealed on the cloak.

The cloak of Juan Diego is kept today in a Mexico City Basilica built nearby the location where the Virgin is said to have appeared. It has been studied extensively by religious experts and scientists.



Tomi Cunningham’s house on Genessee Ave., a block north of City College’s Phelan Campus, stands out with vibrant colors and patterns. Artist Rick Price (left) volunteered his time and talent.

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*Tomi Cunningham,
faculty member*

