

*The Multicultural  
Murals at the  
Memorial Union*

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University of Wisconsin — Madison

**H**istorically, the multicultural murals, located on the first floor of the Wisconsin Union's Memorial Union building, contribute one more piece to the Union's tradition of artistic expression of various cultures.

That expression began with the Indian Pipe of Peace, the Wisconsin Union's emblem, as noted in its constitution and painted on the second floor ceiling. It includes the Germanic murals of the Rathskeller and Stiftskeller as well as the Paul Bunyan murals. It is now strengthened with the richness of the multicultural murals depicting Asian Americans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, African Americans, Native Americans and Anglo Americans.

The multicultural murals add to the tradition of muralism at the Memorial Union and make significant contributions to the Wisconsin Union's art collection. Together the murals convey a message of unity through diversity and are constant, stirring reminders of the Union's role as a gathering place for all members of the University community.

*Background image:  
Ceiling — 2nd floor, Memorial Union*



# VISION

## From a Vision to a Reality

Enthusiasm for the idea of a multicultural mural swelled within students involved at the Wisconsin Union in 1993. Sensing the urgency for a lasting representation of students of color at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and specifically at the Wisconsin Union, students secured support for the idea of a mural from Union Council, the governing board of the Wisconsin Union. They then formed the Multicultural Mural Committee.

Student representatives of the Wisconsin Union and the Interim Multicultural Center comprised the committee, providing the energy and enthusiasm to ensure an accurate representation of students of color both within the mural planning process and in the murals themselves.

Students obtained the necessary funds and support from the Memorial Union Building Association, the Anonymous Fund, the Associated Students of Madison, the Multicultural Council and the Latin American & Iberian Studies Program.

The commitment of the students on the Multicultural Mural Committee was sustained for three years. From securing a location for the murals and writing grants to fund the project to conducting a national search for an artist, making suggestions of content for the murals and planning the dedication of the murals in March 1996, the students provided the driving force.

Muralist Leo Tanguma was selected as artist because he best captured the committee's vision with his jewel-like tones, artistic philosophy and creative process of interacting with the members of the community who would come to "own" the murals he created.

Vibrant with color and storytelling imagery, the murals portray historical events and specific individuals from various ethnic groups whose lives have served as inspirational models for students at UW-Madison. The murals do not dismiss the honest truth of the often painful contributions made by these people to the United States, but emphasize their courage.

# “The Nourishment of Our Human Dignity”

*east mural*



# The Stories of the East Mural

1. **The oak tree seedling** at the focal point of this mural rests in the outstretched hands of a young UW-Madison student, chosen by Tanguma to represent multiculturalism because her father is Mexican American and her mother is Anglo American. The seedling symbolizes human dignity and is nourished by the blood of historical figures who have died in the struggle to maintain their cultural and individual dignity.

2. **Margaret Garner:** In a desperate and final attempt to elude her would-be captors and to keep herself and her children from being returned to slavery, Garner killed her children and then herself in 1856.

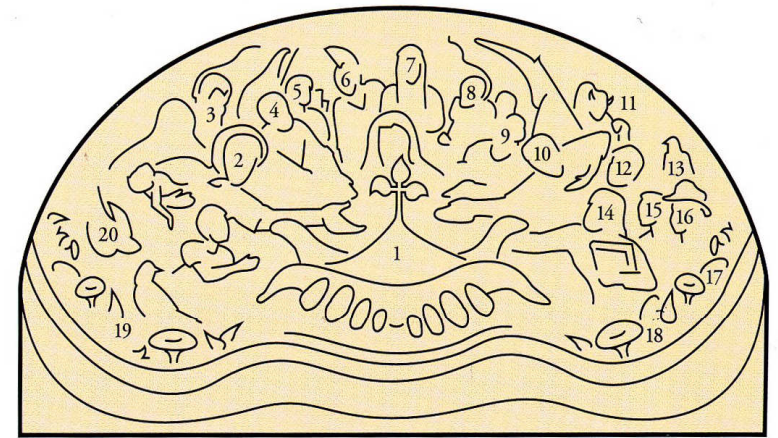
3. **John Brown:** He battled as an abolitionist against the expansion of slavery. His raid to supply slaves with weapons at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, resulted in an 1859 trial, where he refused to plead insanity and was hanged.

4. **Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos:** Known as the father of the Puerto Rican Independence Movement, Campos earned great respect throughout the Americas by his golden oratory. His unwavering support for Puerto Rican independence led to his imprisonment in the 1950s.

5. **Luisa Capetillo:** Women's suffrage and workers' rights crusader Luisa Capetillo was a social activist. Born in Puerto Rico, she led campaigns in various parts of Puerto Rico, Cuba and the United States. As a civil disobedience tactic, Capetillo commonly wore pants in public, an action which caused her arrest by the Cuban government in 1915.

6. **Chief Black Hawk:** In 1832, having been forced west across the Mississippi River by the United States government three years earlier, fifteen hundred members of the Sauk and Fox tribes returned east in search of a new homeland, led by Chief Black Hawk. The legendary Black Hawk and his people were pursued through the territory that is now northwestern Illinois into southwestern Wisconsin. During a battle about 30 miles west of Madison, Black Hawk and his warriors held U.S. soldiers at bay, allowing women and children to escape across the Wisconsin River. Despite their efforts, the band was eventually defeated at the Battle of the Bad Axe.

7. **Chief Joseph:** Leader of the peaceful Nez Perce tribe, Chief Joseph led his people on a desperate 1,700 mile flight from American soldiers in 1877. Joseph and his band were captured 40 miles from the sanctuary of the Canadian border, having been defeated in their attempt to escape reservation life.



*east mural legend*

8. **St. Patrick's Battalion:** This red-headed Irishman with a noose represents a group of U.S. deserters who joined forces with the Mexicans in the Mexican-American War (1846-48). The deserters empathized with the Mexicans because they saw Mexico as a small, Catholic nation being attacked by a large, Protestant nation, similar to the English domination of their Irish homeland. When caught by the Americans, the deserters were deported, imprisoned or hanged.

9. **Andrew Goodman, James Chaney and Michael Schwerner:** These young civil rights workers were murdered by the Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi in 1964. Goodman was a former UW-Madison student.

10. **Anonymous:** According to Tanguma, the Mexican cadet embodies intense Mexican pride. Pursued by Americans to the top of Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City, two cadets wrapped themselves in the Mexican flag and jumped from the castle onto rocks below to escape capture.

# tabric

11. **White buffalo calf:** Born near Janesville, Wisconsin in 1995, the calf is a sacred, powerful figure for Native Americans.

12. **Rudy Lozano:** The father of a UW-Madison student, Lozano was a prominent Chicano community activist from Chicago who was murdered in 1983 because of his inciting politics. He organized boycotts and unified African Americans, Latinos and Anglo Americans against local political corruption.

13. **Eagle:** The eagle finds a place in the mural because of its significance in Native-American culture and because it inhabits nearby Prairie du Sac, Wisconsin. The eaglets testify to the power and continuation of life because the eagle has been taken off the endangered species list.

14. **Amy Ling:** Amy Ling is a UW-Madison professor of English and director of the Asian American Studies Program, the first in the Midwest. Her pioneering book on Chinese-American women writers created a new field of literary study. She has edited numerous anthologies expanding the traditional canon by including the work of women and multicultural authors.

15. **Yuri Kochiyama:** A Japanese-American activist, Kochiyama spent decades working closely with African Americans, particularly Malcolm X, for equality and justice for all peoples of color. She was the subject of a documentary, "Passion for Justice."

16. **Carlos Bulosan:** Labor organizer and writer Bulosan was the first to give voice to the Filipino agricultural and cannery workers in the United States. Self-taught, he published short stories, poems and non-fiction including his best-known work, an autobiographical novel, *America is in the Heart*. He died of tuberculosis in 1954.

17. **Bucky Badger:** A green and black version of this UW-Madison mascot is hidden in the foliage of the wood violets. Included for levity's sake, it was tucked away to provide a visual challenge.

18. **Frog:** Nestled in the lush greenery near the mural's base is a small reddish-brown frog or "coqui." Abundant in Puerto Rico, the coqui chirps all night long. The Puerto Ricans who suggested the inclusion of a coqui say that if you were born in Puerto Rico and then move off the island, you will find it difficult to sleep because the chirp of the coqui no longer lulls you into slumber.

19. **Flowers:** The morning glory's early morning opening exemplifies daily new beginnings, and the wood violet is the Wisconsin state flower.

20. **Birds:** Similar to many of the persons depicted here, the now extinct Carolina parakeet and the passenger pigeon were killed at the hands of others: the parakeet for its exquisite feathers, the pigeon for its meat.

## The Quilt:

The symbols in this bottom border represent the intricate, beautiful details "borrowed" from cultures and peoples around the world to arrive at "American." Most of the symbols represented were suggested by community members who brought images to be included, providing the threads that contribute to the whole fabric of our society.



## From left to right the patches include:

European  
Edelweiss flower  
Peruvian pre-  
Columbian symbol  
Chilean flower  
“copihues” resting  
on the Chilean flag  
Polish eagle  
Pakistani flowers  
Scottish plaid

French fleur de lis  
Norwegian rosemaling  
United Farm  
Workers eagle  
Mexican Virgen  
de Guadalupe  
Aztec green &  
orange designs  
African-American blanket  
with crosses & coffins

Pan-African colors  
(red, green, yellow)  
of a tent covering  
African slave quilt with  
three crosses by Harriet  
Powers who told biblical  
stories through quilts  
African pattern  
Nigerian blue patch that  
conveys the story of the  
“wisdom of the leopard”

American quilt: Europeans  
are stitched in, included;  
Native Americans and  
African Americans remain  
unstitched, excluded.  
Native-American designs  
from various tribes  
Japanese blue pattern  
with birds

Korean bands of color  
Chinese dragon  
Indian design  
Israeli flag  
Peace dove connecting  
Jews and Palestinians  
Palestinian flag

Arabic writing  
“In the name of Allah,  
the most gracious, the  
most merciful”  
Rose, a symbol of  
the Nazi massacre at  
Lidice, Czechoslovakia  
Greek flag  
Central American  
Quetzal bird



# “The Inheritance of Struggle”

*west mural*





# The Stories of the West Mural

Similar to the east mural, this mural portrays the contributions made by people of various ethnicities and cultures in the form of tears, sweat, blood and life to the building of the United States. While the east mural identifies specific individuals, the west mural recalls the collective contributions of groups of people. And while many of the individuals in the east mural consciously and willingly suffered for justice, the people of this mural were almost always forced to give of themselves due to political or economic circumstances.

1. The Native Americans wrapped in blankets represent an incident in which Ottawa Chief Pontiac led tribes into war against the British. To halt the Native Americans, a British general distributed smallpox-infested blankets among the Native Americans.

2. A woman holds the Great Chain (or Covenant Belt), a traditional Native-American wampum belt. Such belts were created to commemorate special events; in this case, a treaty between the Iroquoian confederacy and the thirteen U.S. states. The woman is a Cheyenne Native American and great-grandmother of a UW-Madison student.

3. The soldiers represent veterans from America's 20th century wars: World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam and the Persian Gulf War.

4. The Chinese worker represents the thousands of Chinese who, as virtual slave laborers, constructed U.S. railroads in the 1860s.

5. A tree with government documents pierced by a sword testifies to the American government's treaty violations with Native Americans.

6. The Mexican farm worker stands before the fields she labors in, but does not own.

7. A Ho-Chunk grave marker or "spirit house" made of logs is represented. According to Tanguma, when the logs deteriorate, the spirit becomes "freed."

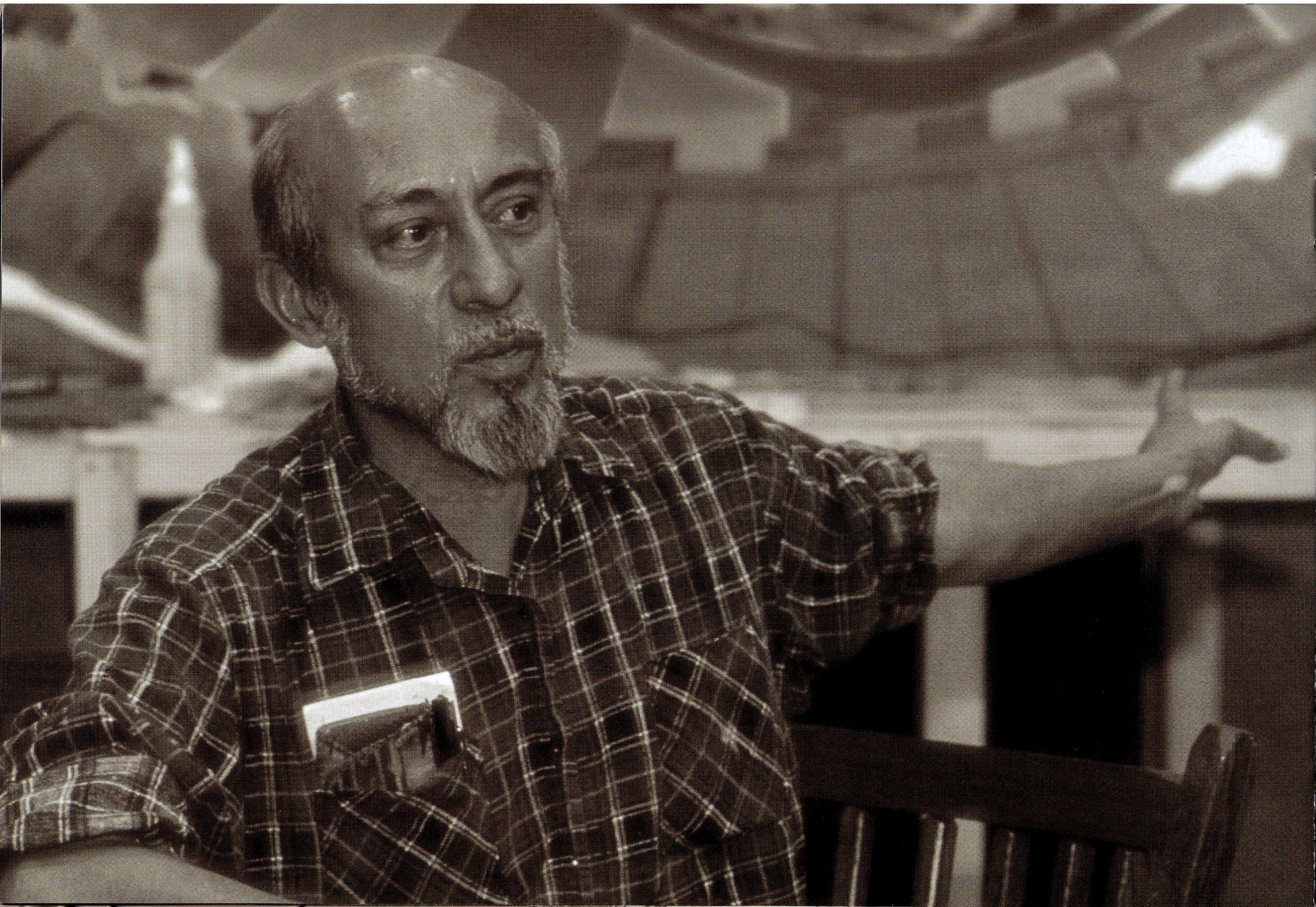
8. The graveyard specifically expresses the "inheritance of struggle." A student's grandfather, a former slave, rises to pass along a symbol of injustice, which the next generation is charged with the duty of correcting. The symbol is the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States. Tanguma deliberately altered it to read "All people ..." instead of "All men..." to illustrate the sexism inherent within our country's beginnings.



*west mural legend*

9. Hands erupt from the graveyard, which includes Native-American, Jewish, Islamic and Christian tombstones, to pass along the inheritance of struggle. Students, faculty, and staff from the university community are portrayed with arms outstretched to receive the challenge. The cemetery weeds indicate that our ancestors are too often "buried" and forgotten, their contributions neglected in history books and classrooms.

10. The mestizo at the center of the mural is a symbol which merges two faces: one Spanish, one Indigenous, together creating a third face, a Latino face. Tanguma included several layers of faces and colors to show a new personality, or nationality, that comes from the blending of cultures. As a child growing up, Tanguma thought that only a person with light hair and light skin could be an American. He hopes to correct that perception with his take on the mestizo symbol. He included mirrored pieces so a viewer might see her or himself as part of the new inclusive American.



# tanguma

## The Artist

Wherever he works, Leo Tanguma sees himself as a vehicle for a community's collective expression. Interacting with the community members at the site of his work is part of his creative process. Tanguma included the suggestions, ideas, and even the faces of UW-Madison students, faculty and staff, passersby, and Madisonians who became his friends during his residency at Memorial Union.


In the mural titled "The Nourishment of Our Human Dignity," Tanguma portrays the violence and pain endured by various heroes and heroines. Tanguma says that when we, as a society, are not conscious of our shared history and beginnings, we repeat racial injustices.

To illustrate that shared history, Tanguma created the mural titled, "The Inheritance of Struggle." He hopes that people will recognize their own race, ethnicity, culture, and history within the faces, figures and symbols painted there. Tanguma also hopes this mural will help people realize how the blending of cultures and races makes the United States truly unique in the world.

Tanguma has created murals at private homes and in public spaces, exhibited his works at universities and museums, and lectured at high schools and colleges. His career highlights include murals at the Denver International Airport, distinction as

Hispanic Artist of the Year (1974) from the Institute of Hispanic Culture, and a fellowship award from the Denver Commission on Cultural Affairs. He is also active in organizing community cultural and arts events. Tanguma resides in Denver, Colorado.



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