

MURALS OF PLACERITA CANYON



By Herb Broutt

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The murals of Placerita Canyon were painted by Rudy Pavini under the direction of the Park Superintendent Frank Hovore in 1976. It is painted on the walls of the under pass. There are six panels that depict the history of Placerita Canyon. The first panel is of the animals that were located in the Canyon before man. The second panel depicts the first human inhabitants which were the Tataviam Native Americans in 450 A.D. The next panel is of the missionaries and the Spanish immigrants in the 1700s. The most talked about panel depicts the discovery of gold by Francisco Lopez in 1842 which was 6 years before the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill. There were not many details on how and why the murals were painted so I interviewed Rudy Pavini. Rudy is now 81 years old and met me at the Newhall Senior Center where this interview took place.

1. Why did you paint the mural?

I was asked to do a painting as I was an artist not a naturalist. I had worked at the Nature Center for nine months. I took kids on trails, identified the plants and animals in the area. I was asked to paint the mural underneath the viaduct. I said that was a good idea as I knew how to get paint that would last and they won't get the infrared rays from the sun. It would stay for a long time. I had to put a protective coating on it. If it got damaged from mud you could wash it off without taking the paint off. I had to use a strong paint an acrylic paint, and I had to use a scaffold.

2. Who asked you to paint the mural?

There were two people above me, Frank Hovore and a man by the name of Ferguson. Ferguson is the one who asked me to do the painting. But he did not expect me to do a painting of a whole mural of six panels. He said he would like a picture there to show the history of the area. He asked me will it last and I said it will. I went to the library to research the history of the area.

3. Who had to approve the mural?

I had to bring it to the City Hall for approval. I had to show them what was going to be on all the panels. It was a rough sketch and I had to explain it to them that when you do a mural there is positive and negative space. When looking at it in small panels you had to add things to it. When you expand it, you have to add dimension, depth and perspective and color to make it work. You had to work fast.

4. Why did you have to do it fast?

You worked one color at a time. You worked the top and did the clouds and then the sky. You had to do all the backgrounds first. Then you went to the next color and then the next color. Each panel was eight feet long. You had to make the sky look smooth and even. You had to work on a rough surface which was the concrete wall of the tunnel itself. It was not an easy surface to paint on. I had to work from background to foreground. Start from the top and work down to the foreground. Had to get a paint that worked and paint animals that were indigenous to the area.

5. What did the panels represent?

The first panel was animals that lived there like the fox. Some were animals that you saw during the day and some were only seen at night. Next panel were the Indians that lived in the area. They were called the alicklick Indians which means mumble. I showed water in the creek even though there is no water now. The third panel was the missionaries and Spaniards. The Indians welcomed the missionaries and the Spaniards. The Indians showed them how to farm. The main drive for Spaniards was to find gold. The last panel was the discovery of gold. Francisco Lopez was out with his buddies looking for stray Indians. He took a nap beneath a big oak tree and dreamed of finding gold. When he woke up he pulled up wild onions for a stew. When pulling up the onions there were particles of gold on them. They started mining in the river and found gold. What had started as a dream became a reality. That is why it is called the Oak of the Golden Dream.

6. What do you hope people will get out of it when they come to see the mural?

It is about them. The whole mural is about the history of Placerita Canyon and the people who lived there. It is their legacy. Graffiti could be washed off and it would not take the paint off because it had a protective coat on it. The panel on the front has faded a bit since not under the tunnel. If the mural got mud on it could be cleaned. Fire Department use to hose it down.

7. Can you tell me about your background?

I was born in Massachusetts. I went to Art School in Boston. I taught art for 25 years in local elementary schools and after school programs. I had 450 students a year taught art and drama. Always worked with acrylics did not work with oils with the kids because it was too toxic. Some of the trees in the mural have sawdust behind it and then the colors on the top.

8. Did anybody help you paint the mural?

Some of my students did. They never got up on the scaffolds because I would never let them get up there. But they would help paint on the lower areas. They would paint flowers or rocks. Anything that was detailed I had to do myself.

9. How long did it take you to paint the mural?

Three months but not 8 hours per day. I still had to take kids on trails. I had to work fast so I was able to do it in 3 months. But I was doing other things like feeding the animals as a naturalist. I did not go into training as a naturalist. Somehow I got there through a government program. I had a family to feed. There was a government program that put me there.

10. Who paid for the supplies?

The docents helped raise the funds for the art supplies.

11. How much did it cost?

I would say three hundred dollars. I did not get paid. I was paid a salary as a naturalist and spent part of my time painting the mural.

12. When the mural was completed was there any kind of dedication?

Yes there was a dedication ceremony. Dignitaries from the city came out as well as Naturalists and people from the Parks and Recs. It was probably in the Signal. My name is in the last panel, and the date it was completed May 23rd 1976.

13. What would you like people to think about when they see the mural? Is there a message you wanted them to get from it?

The culture and time span from early time to gold miners days. The time passing from one generation to another or one era to another. At the same time it shows the history of Placerita Canyon. I wanted them to be inspired by the culture and colorful history of this canyon. It was a beautiful canyon and it still is today. I know a lot of people took pictures of it and they can bring home a memory of the canyon and how it grew and flourished.

14. Have you ever thought of going over there and refurbishing the mural?

Nobody has asked me to fix anything. I don't know if they don't have the money. Maybe they have not found me. I am 81 now but I can still climb buildings. I would like to come to the nature center and tell the docents my story.

15. Do you still paint?

Yes I have other paintings around. I painted another mural in Canyon Country on Oak Ave between Soledad and Oak. It was 600 feet long by 40 feet high. It is a landscape of Canyon Country Area. I am a Landscape Artist not a portrait artist.







