

Aztec Underpass

Artist: Jesse Hernandez aka Urban Aztec

November 2020

Dupont St Underpass (beneath West San Carlos St. bridge), San Jose, CA / Council District 6

ABOUT THE PROJECT



Jesse Hernandez, who also goes by his artist moniker Urban Aztec, brought his bold vision inspired by Mexican (Aztec/Mexica) and Native American cultures to the Dupont Street underpass (beneath West San Carlos Street bridge). The artworks draw on imagery and many powerful cultural symbols. With intention to honor and connect the community with the First Peoples, these four murals, comprising 3500 square feet, create a threshold to the past, through the lens of the present.

As part of the City's Right the Blight pilot program (see below) Jesse was selected by a group of stakeholders and assigned one of the most challenging locations in the city. In the 80's and 90's this location was known in the Bay Area as the Walls of Fame because during that era it was where graffiti artists went to make a name for themselves. In the past 20 years, the art of graffiti has waned and technical virtuosity has mostly disappeared in favor of unskilled marking that does not reveal an aesthetic identity; walls that were once covered in interesting graffiti art became chalkboards for bland monikers that lacked the style and explosion of color of preceding graffiti artists. With this in mind, Jesse worked with the City team and met on site with businesses, residents, and youth who hang out at the site to help inform his design.

This project is part of the City's Right the Blight program, a pilot beautification mural project developed as a result of the City tracking specific sites that are chronic hotspots for graffiti. Using tracking data from the City's graffiti-reporting app, key hotspots were identified, and a

dialogue began on how to mitigate them. This led to City Council-initiated funding to support bringing artists on board to create murals in these hotspots. The thinking is that when a mural of high quality – one that goes through a good community process - goes in, blight is reduced.

Enter local artist Urban Aztec who worked with the community to develop his suite of mural designs that honor the cultural heritage of a major sector of the San Jose's community . This project, a chance to test the Right the Blight theory, has proven the idea works.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jesse Hernandez (@UrbanAztec) is a visual artist born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area. He is most widely recognized for his street art murals, vinyl toys, and diverse Illustration work. His style is known as Urban Aztec, a combination of graffiti and ancient indigenous culture imagery and style. Hernandez's artwork has been featured by Marvel, Warner Bros, DC Comics, WWE, Gears of war 4, San José Sharks, The Oakland Athletics, X-Box, Playstation, Sideshow Collectibles, Rockstar energy drink, Rolling Stone, Fandango, Juxtapoz, Run the Jewels, Oakland Museum, and the Cosmopolitan Las Vegas. Hernandez has shown art in galleries and museums around the world. He has also painted murals in Oakland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Mexico City and Amsterdam.

ABOUT THE PUBLIC ART PROGRAM

The City of San José Public Art Program seeks to build community identity by initiating artworks and exhibitions that enhance the civic landscape and experience. Through active community engagement, public art strives to reflect the City's diversity, historic richness, and envision its present and future.

The Public Art Program is part of the City's Cultural Affairs, a division of the Office of Economic Development. The Public Art Program was established by a 1984 municipal ordinance that provides public art through funding from City capital improvement projects and eligible private development.

For further information and photos, please contact the San José Public Art Program.

