

Art in the Cities

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CHICAGO, IL

Transforming Space and Structure: The Art of Rubén Aguirre



Walking through the National Museum of Mexican Art on 19th Street in Chicago reveals art of various types and media. Latino cultural heritage is the common denominator, both ancient and modern. Among the various pieces on display, the works of artist Rubén Aguirre call

attention to the structure and space of the gallery itself. Using vibrant colors and vaguely familiar shapes, the artist has fashioned a bridge between the observer and the structure itself, creating a joyous and inclusive environment to behold.



Image by Ruben Cantu via <http://www.theshiftchange.com/>

When Aguirre began practicing art in the early 90s, his medium of choice was spray-paint liberally applied to public fixtures, mainly brick and concrete walls. As a practitioner of graffiti art, Aguirre found voice with urban expression.

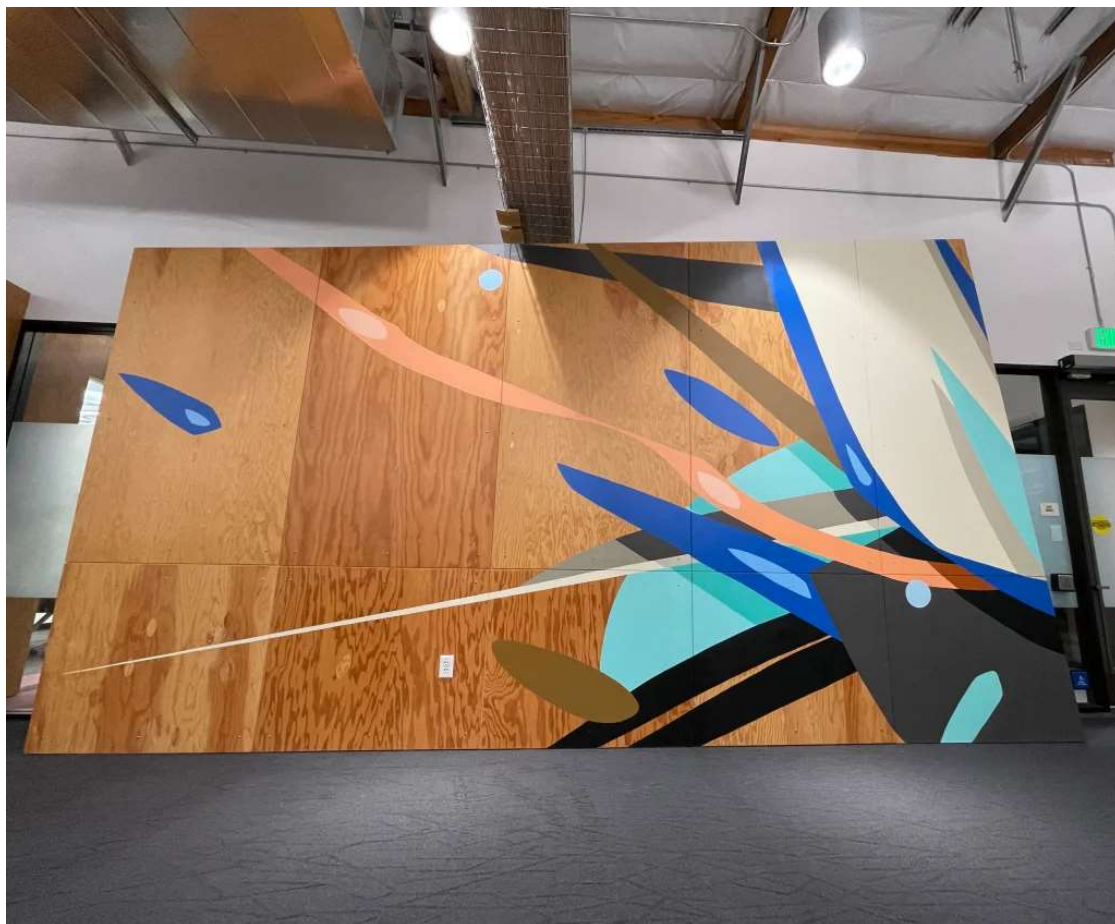
His work transformed dilapidated structures and rundown buildings into colorful explosions of street culture. Any passerby was treated to a visual feast for the eyes, rather than the eyesore of urban decay.

Quite a bit of time has passed since those early days. Now, Aguirre experiments with abstracting the stylized lettering he once emphasized in his graffiti phase. These days, he draws inspiration from hiking the forest preserves of Cook County. In several pieces, the influence of nature is evident in brightly-colored shapes that immediately call to mind the hot summer sun in July. Geometric shapes of green outline and border that center, putting the observer in mind of spring grass that has been freshly mowed. Yet, in other works, his sparse detailing and washed-out colors seem to draw the viewer into a hot western desert that is scrubbed clean of life by the endless heat.

Aguirre's art becomes all the more kinetic when it uses textures from the local structures as part of the medium. At the gallery on 19th, he has utilized the wood grain and rough feel of concrete to add yet another dimension to his forms. Pebbly and patchy, his work on a cement wall seems to suggest a beach texture. By using blue, brown, and white figures in a frenetic splash, he invokes the churning motion of a coastal beach.



Across a bare plywood surface, his shapes call to mind a brightly colored splash of water over canyon walls. His use of space between suggests water droplets aloft in a sea breeze. The effect of his work is astonishingly transformative. Rounded shape and tropical colors seem to make the observer feel as though nature is present in even the most austere material, adding a whole new dimension and warmth.



Now in his forties, Aguirre's art reflects his worldview as vibrant, surreal, and suggestive. I can't speak for everyone, but I find myself looking forward to what his view might look like a few years from now. Will he be able to convey the beauty of age with colors representing wisdom and light, or will his muse take him in another direction entirely?

That's the hallmark of a great artist: you keep coming back to see what tomorrow's reflection looks like.

Images Courtesy of Rubén Aguirre

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