A Love Letter to Santa Barbara

PASEO NUEVO Installs New Mural

LONGTIME SIGNATURE OF SANTA BARBARA STYLE and a retail haven, Paseo Nuevo has partnered with the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara and commissioned Cassandra C. Jones to create Love Letters, a tile mural inspired by Santa Barbara’s heritage, architecture, and surroundings which are known to draw from Spanish and Mexican influences. The mural is part of Paseo Nuevo’s continued commitment to community art programming as well as engaging visitors with new and reimagined experiences. Love Letters is a 600-tile mural that spans two walls in Paseo Nuevo’s lower north court entrance.

The artist was inspired by her surroundings, by the architecture and tile that is seen throughout Santa Barbara, and the mural is a reflection of the area’s landscape. Love Letters embraces the aspects of Santa Barbara that are already a part of this place and the mural is meant to engage the community and offer moments of reflection. The entire mural is a kaleidoscope of collaged photographs printed on white ceramic tile, with 36 unique compositions repeated throughout.

Upon closer investigation, each tile is its own element: the work is a series of separate, small images collaged together to create a larger pattern. Small elements can make up ensembles that resemble the sun, agave plants, and pinatras. All imagery deeply reflects Santa Barbara’s heritage and culture, providing a visual narrative that is truly a love letter to the community. The mural “explores and embraces the nuances and poetry of such imagery. Like stringing beads together to compose a love letter, I weave and layer potent objects in such a way to express affection for the Central California Coast, and this place that I call home,” shared Jones, an Ojai-based artist.

This project was always intended to be a love letter to Santa Barbara. The result is a narrative that invites the viewer to explore the mural on both macro and micro levels. One can experience it as a whole at a distance, or up close, focusing on single tiles. No matter where someone stands, Love Letters is intended to be an uplifting space that offers something new to discover from every vantage point.

By activating public spaces, art plays a vital role in deepening the engagement with our local community. “By initiating a dialogue about the human experience, public art has the opportunity to enhance our physical environments and inspire critical thinking,” explained MCASB Curator Alexandra Terry. “Paseo Nuevo is at the heart of downtown Santa Barbara and thus provides the ideal backdrop for a project such as Love Letters that will encourage passersby to contemplate more deeply the environment they inhabit.”

Paseo Nuevo’s renovation updates the 30-year-old center with enhanced lighting, decorative features, and much-needed infrastructure as part of its $24 million dollar redevelopment.

As a way to introduce the mural to the community, the Paseo Nuevo team developed the Love Letters to Santa Barbara Art Contest and a social media-driven scavenger hunt. The owners, Pacific Retail Capital Partners, have a dedicated mission to advancing accessible, public art programming throughout its portfolio. In doing so, they prioritize installations in creative and open spaces, and commission works like Love Letters. Love Letters is one of many art initiatives planned within Paseo Nuevo’s current, privately funded, $24 million redevelopment project, to be completed Summer 2024.

Paseo Nuevo has also planned ways for the community to engage with Love Letters, while maintaining safe social distancing, through the Love Letter to Santa Barbara Art Contest, installation videos, and interactive experiences, all driven through social media.

“Now, more than ever, we want our community to feel connected,” related Senior Marketing Director Mary Lynn Harms-Romo regarding this engagement. “As part of the heart of downtown Santa Barbara, Paseo Nuevo has always been a natural place to gather. While we cannot currently gather in the ways we are used to, we can still form connections and share experiences.”

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