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Visual Analysis of The Chicano Mind

The Chicano Mind is a work of art by Guillermo Martinez, it is located in the C Building at Pasadena City College and was created in 1973. You can easily spot it as you walk up the stairwell onto the 3rd floor on the west side of the building. This mural evokes a lot of emotion as soon as you lay your eyes on it. The piece itself is that of a struggle experienced by the Latino community in America, of a troubled mind struggling to find their place, the generational trauma that is passed down and attempting to release oneself of that. At the center of the mural is a man painted onto the canvas in circular strokes, the style of the piece itself is common in Latino Muralism. His arms are stretched out upwards to either side, appearing to be bound and as if he is attempting to release himself from being bound, evident by what appears to be ribbon spiraled around his arms, loosening.

The look on his face is that of anguish, either as a result of being restrained or from an internal battle to free himself of what is hindering him. Both of his fists are clenched and on one of his arms, there are multiple fists shaping the silhouette of the arm, all of them also clenched. I believe this emphasizes the weight of the internal turmoil the main character of the artwork is experiencing and the anger and frustration he is feeling. At the same time the fists could also symbolize resilience and strength. The man's torso is also illustrated, it is naked, but not only showing skin, his insides are also exposed symbolizing his vulnerability and the baring of his soul. Above his head is what looks like an extravagant circular crest. It is adorned with the

design of the American flag all throughout and especially all around the border of the crest. In the center it appears that there is a hand holding a sword and penetrating an abstract figure that is laid upon the American flag. I feel that this symbolizes how one can surround themselves and build a life upon typical American ideals; so much so that it will eventually feel as if they are imprisoned, and it'll still never be enough, they will never be American enough. The very same society that one has conformed to will still stab you in the back. Furthermore, surrounding the man are various heads. These heads are wearing sombreros, field hats, and headdresses, all with facial expressions that appear to be anything but happy or content. Their facial expressions are largely stoic, but a few appear to be angry or in despair. Because of this, I feel that these heads symbolize the generations of Latinos that came before the Chicano main character of the piece and I believe they are putting an emphasis on generational trauma.

Generational trauma has a tremendous impact on the way one leads their life and it is extremely hard not to pass it on. It takes a lot of effort to break free of it and the internal struggle is extremely exhausting and debilitating. These heads of past generations in the mural all had the same struggle, it was experienced differently in a way that was unique to them, but it is something that was strong enough to persist throughout an entire bloodline. Generational trauma in Latin American communities has themes of oppression, of financial struggle, of limited opportunities and resources, and how it affects several areas of their lives. Breaking free of this would mean to change the trajectory of one's life, of what has already been laid out for you, it means saying "no" and going against the grain, forcing yourself into a different mindset and working hard to be "better" and to succeed in areas that generations before you weren't able to. It is one of the hardest things a person can do, but it is worth it to ensure that you and the generations that come after you have a better quality of life.

As a Mexican American myself, I resonate with the message of this mural deeply, and feel that I could tell what it was attempting to convey almost immediately. There is so much pain passed down from generation to generation that is hard to overcome and that is a result of a lack of opportunities due to systemic oppression. The mural is extremely moving and motivates me to keep working hard at pursuing a career that will bring my dreams to fruition. It also motivates me to prioritize my mental health since that is something that is often ignored or denied in Latino communities and swept under the rug when brought up. I am very passionate and very appreciative when it comes to my culture, I absolutely adore it, but I am also able to recognize how much work needs to be done to create a more healthy environment for generations to come.