

"Nurturing the Dream"
by
Susan Shelton

The ceramic mural, "Nurturing the Dream", celebrates the Student Community Center at the University of California, Davis, and draws attention to the beautiful and tranquil natural setting of the north entrance to the building. To this end, the mural is composed of two distinct elements in the physical design, and the symbolic importance of these two components is integral to the conceptual design of the artwork.

The Student Community Center is a very tangible symbol of goals set, struggles fought, and dreams realized. The SCC is represented by the architectural element in the mural design. This feature reflects the framework around the windows of the building, such that the mullions of the building windows are echoed by the pillars in the mural. The pillars of the mural make up the very important "Community Build" component of the design. They showcase the conceptual and artistic participation of the students and staff of the SCC, and other members of the university community, who were invited to contribute their suggestions for the imagery featured, and who also participated in painting the beautiful tiles of many sizes, shapes, colors and designs that form the pillars. The tiles represent the various paths, goals, causes, and struggles of the students—academic, social, personal, and political. They reflect the multiple cultures, intersecting identities, and rich diversity of all those welcomed in the center. Further, the strength of that diversity is evident as those tiles assemble together to form the pillars.

The second component of the mural, a representation of the natural setting of the SCC, is a triptych view of an oak tree and plantings seen through the pillars, as if seen through a window. This feature also has symbolic importance in the design. The Oak tree and background represent the original native landscape upon which the university was built, and is a respectful acknowledgement of its indigenous inhabitants. Surrounding the Oak tree is a World Garden, composed of plants from all over the globe, a botanical celebration of diversity and unity. Furthermore, the natural imagery represents the importance of a place for reflection, nourishment of the spirit, and restoration of strength, which can be found in nature.

In order to continue the work we do in our lives as students, workers, activists, and caregivers, we must take time to care for ourselves and our environment. We must Nurture the Dream.