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The Esplanade gets its first mural



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CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

Local artist Silvia López Chavez painted the mural “Patterned Behavior” along the Paul Dudley White bike path on the Charles River Esplanade.

By Bethany Ao | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT SEPTEMBER 06, 2017

Bikers and joggers along the Charles River Esplanade may have noticed some new additions to the pillars just west of the Massachusetts Avenue bridge — a heron spreading its wings

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over red and orange stripes, a turquoise cloud bursting with black dots and a yellow paper airplane soaring under Charlesgate.

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And finally, around the corner — an explosion of colors, impossible to ignore.

The mural, titled “Patterned Behavior,” is the Esplanade’s first commissioned work of public art. The Esplanade Association, a nonprofit dedicated to improving the Esplanade, worked with nonprofit Now and There to identify an artist for the job. The organization eventually selected Silvia López Chavez, a local artist, to paint the mural along the Paul Dudley White bike path.

“We really wanted to bring color, vibrancy, and energy to this section of the Esplanade,” said Jessica Crimmins, executive director of the Esplanade Association. “This section of the bike path used to be plagued by graffiti, which caused people to rush through it.”

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Chavez said she conceptualized the idea for the mural, which is 120 feet by 13 feet, from the rhythms and patterns of the space. She wanted to reflect the speed of the cyclists, the bolts underneath the overpass, and the birds along the river in the mural.

“I wanted to have abstract shapes represent those elements, like triangles and arrows,” she said. “And color is very much a part of who I am, being from the Dominican Republic. This

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The pillars leading into the mural were not supposed to be a part of the artwork, but Chavez said she knew she had to incorporate them as soon as she saw the spot for the mural. They seemed like a natural extension to the wall, so Chavez got permission to add them to the project.

Chavez said she also wanted to hold a community paint day, but the scheduling didn't pan out. Instead, to her delight, passersby began asking if they could help with the painting process. Even though the mural was supposed to take three weeks to complete, Chavez said the project was ahead of schedule because so many people have helped.

"One woman told me how peaceful and calming it was to paint," she said. "I want them to remember this process of creativity when they walk through the mural. It's so much more meaningful that way."

The entire project cost \$40,000, according to Crimmins. The Esplanade Association funded the mural using private donations. "Patterned Behavior" will be up for a year, with the possibility of renewal next September.

Kate Gilbert, the executive director of Now and There, said that she had been waiting for a chance to showcase Chavez's talent through a mural. When the Esplanade Association reached out to her about the project, she thought it was the perfect opportunity for the Boston artist.

"I knew the project had to go to a local artist because the spot is so intimate and local," Gilbert said. "You can see the icons of Boston from this spot, like the MIT dome and the Citgo sign. When people pass through now, they have this fun moment of recognizing where they are, thanks to the mural."