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### Leaving Her Mark

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# Leaving Her Mark

In designing a wall mural for IWU's Multicultural Center, Lucy Sanchez '17 reflected on all that it means to be a part of the campus community.

**Story by KIM HILL**

**Photos by ROBERT FRANK III '14**

Lucy Sanchez '17 thinks big, whether about her art or the world around her.

An art major at Illinois Wesleyan, Sanchez has designed and painted a mural entitled "La Lucha de Colores" ("The Struggle of Colors") for the Multicultural Center on campus. The 15-foot-long and 8-foot-high work depicts the journey of a student of color as he or she progresses through the IWU experience, while also acknowledging the current atmosphere of racial relations in society.

Sanchez has long admired street art, and as a Chicago native was well acquainted with the city's Pilsen neighborhood and its many murals. She was deeply influenced by her study of Mexican muralism, which typically conveys social and political messages.

"I've always felt murals were art that belonged to a community," she says.

"It's more accessible in comparison to a lot of art that is very fine art, making fine art a privilege because it's expensive. Street art tells you what's going on in that community, even if it's angry. Street art is reality."

The idea for the mural was an outgrowth of Sanchez's experience in Ireland, where she studied on an IWU Study Abroad Scholarship through a fund established by Betty Ritchie-Birrer '47. Sanchez chose to document her time there by creating original works informed by her experiences in the Emerald Isle.

Her artwork focusing on identity "was my way of finding my place in Ireland, a very different culture than I'm accustomed to, coming from a Mexican-American household. All the pieces were my way of figuring myself out and trying to establish myself in this new environment while struggling with culture shock and homesickness."



Using a Kente stole as a unifying element, Sanchez painted the mural with pathways starting at The Ames Library.



For the wall mural she designed, Sanchez (above) drew on her study-abroad experiences and a desire to say "something big."

After her study-abroad experience, Sanchez began to see her work "as saying something," and shared her desire to create something 'big' in a conversation with Brandon Common, then the director of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI). Dialogue involving a reimagining of the space in the Multicultural Center was already underway, so Common suggested Sanchez brainstorm some ideas for a mural to adorn the focal wall of the center, which is a gathering place for all students to study and socialize.

"As an administrator, I believe it is our responsibility to support students in their aspirations, so I saw the creation of the mural as a way to showcase Lucy's talents because she is a phenomenal student and woman of color," says Common, who is now assistant dean of students for campus life. "I also thought the mural would enliven the Multicultural Center and capture what is happening at this moment in time, and I wanted future students to see what one of 'their own' did while a student at IWU."

Using a Kente stole denoting multicultural pride as a unifying element, Sanchez designed the mural with pathways beginning at The Ames Library and the Sesquicentennial Gates. These locations are included in campus tours and quickly become cultural icons for new students. “The stole works as a pathway leading your experience around Illinois Wesleyan,” Sanchez says, noting the stole includes elements of national flags representing the cultural backgrounds of Illinois Wesleyan students. Activism is portrayed, both on campus and in the world.

She also included depictions of dancers to illustrate the importance of joy and celebration in the face of oppression. “We try to celebrate our cultures in multiple ways, and I wanted to include that.”

The pathway ends with a graduation cap, the symbolic end of the journey. A panel near the end of the stole celebrates the Class of 2017; Sanchez used chalkboard paint for this panel so that it can be changed each year to celebrate a new graduating class.

Sanchez’s own college experience began as a junior at Chicago’s John F. Kennedy High School. Her counselor recommended her for the Chicago Scholars Foundation, a nonprofit that helps high-performing, first-generation Chicago students navigate the college admission process. Chicago Scholars sponsors workshops on applications and financial aid, one-on-one mentoring and networking. Dozens of colleges and universities recruit at the annual Chicago Scholars Onsite admission forum, where an IWU admissions counselor requested a meeting with Sanchez.

Helping her “through every step of the process,” the counselor also urged Sanchez to visit campus during Multicultural Weekend and *¡Tu Universidad!*, an event designed to help Latino/a students and their parents learn more about the University community, the admissions process and financial aid resources.

At IWU Sanchez has thrived as an art and business administration double major. She is president of Kappa Pi honorary art fraternity and a student programmer for the Office

of Diversity and Inclusion, and she previously served as an officer in the Spanish and Latino Student Association (SALSA).

“Illinois Wesleyan offers opportunities to become who you want to be, and to fight for what you believe in,” she says. “There are some great people here who constantly support students in their fights against injustices, not only on this campus but in the world.”

While the mural she created for the Multicultural Center reflects Illinois Wesleyan’s sense of community, it also illustrates frustration students of color can feel on a predominantly white campus.

“When I started the project, I think one of my goals was to empower people,” says Sanchez. On one of the mural’s panels, she utilized a quote from activist Yareliz Elena Mendez-Zamora. Sanchez wanted to make a statement that people of color are not alone and they’re not going anywhere. “We’re here because we earned it,” she says, referring to students of color on college campuses and people of color as leaders in industry, the private sector and public office.

Common says Sanchez has left an indelible mark with the mural’s completion. “I hope the mural speaks to marginalized students and lets them know they matter and that they are valued at IWU,” he says. “I also hope that it tells a story of perseverance and determination and also challenges those who look at it to reflect on where we are as a community and where we can be if we continue to support each other.

“I hope this mural will continue to promote the Multicultural Center as a space where all students matter, while also challenging future students to leave their mark somewhere else, in some way, on campus.”

**Learn more about the University's [Office of Diversity and Inclusion](#).**

**Learn more about the University's [Ames School of Art](#).**



A self-portrait by Sanchez.