



Photo by Kurt Ellison

Muralist Guillermo Granizo and Mama Kitty with a recent mural about farm workers

Muralist creates on Olympian scale

By CANDACE ATKINS

He isn't sure where his inspiration comes from — the osmos, maybe.

"I just have an idea to do a painting and I do it," said Olympic muralist Guillermo Wagner Granizo of Ben Lomond.

He makes no preliminary sketches or calculations and refuses to submit drawings for commissioned works.

Even the Olympic Committee went along with Granizo when they commissioned a 24'x90' mural, "Olympic Fantasy," for the gymnasium at Cal State University at Los Angeles.

They trusted the 61-year-old artist with the design of the five-sectioned work — the largest ceramic painting ever completed by one man.

Nobody was disappointed. Granizo said he has received nothing but praise for the work, which is extremely complex, yet deceptively simple. The

mural is really five separate murals that are interchangeable — the first section fits equally well with the third, fourth or fifth section, and so

on. A track circles and unites the work.

Ordinarily, the 2,232-tile mural would represent three to four years work. Granizo completed it in 10 weeks. He worked from six to 22 hours at a time, but said it was enlivening rather than exhausting. Before he started the first section, he said his left leg was in great pain. The pain disappeared as soon as he began painting and did not return until the mural was finished.

"When I work — in this state of relaxation — I'm in another world," he said. "Say you ask me a question. I'll ignore you. You may have to ask three or four times before I hear."

The artist paints quickly and effortlessly. There is no indication of intensity or emotional agony associated with other

artists. His lines are clean and precise and have what Granizo thinks may be Myan or Aztec influence from his early days Guatemala and Nicaragua. Faces have a mask-like, two-dimensional quality similar to Picasso (Granizo can't see this), birds and fish look like those found in Etruscan tombs from the sixth century B.C. and colors are rich and saturated, like many Mexican artworks.

But speculation on his works, even the Olympic mural that ABC television calls "The Great Wall of LA," is pretentious and a waste of time says Granizo.

One critic planned to review a mural Granizo sent to Philadelphia. When the artist heard of the upcoming critique, he told a mutual friend, "Tell him

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to write his review and when he is finished, to shove it."

"How can someone criticize what comes out of me?" Granizo asked. "I can't criticize me, so how can they? One lady saw a piece (a mural by Granizo) that had a lot of nudes. She thinks I'm in to crotches . . . I have to paint what I have to paint. If they don't like it, that's their problem. I'll paint anyway."

Granizo prefers to create murals on a grand scale. He likes life-size forms, such as the Olympic work, and prefers simple designs over detailed. It is his whimsical, busy and almost endlessly-intricate murals, however, that keep people studying and running their hands over the multi-textured tiles.

"Fun is what I get out of it. I

like to throw in a bit of humor," said Granizo.

He pokes fun at the Olympics in the second mural section — a dog with a ball in his mouth sits calmly on the grass while volleyball and baseball players furiously pursue their respective spheres. Below, on the same section, the target shooting with bow and arrow and with pistols are represented — without weapons.

"I've been hit by a gun," said Granizo. "I received the last sacrament four times. That's enough. I don't believe in weapons, it's ignoble, it's inhuman."

Aside from his wit and personal messages, Granizo believes his murals are for enjoyment rather than heavy, underlying messages.

"I paint fantasy, fun, not politics," he said. "Fun is

what I get out of it."

When a piece doesn't satisfy him, Granizo smashes it. He does this, he says, to get rid of it and move on, rather than suffer from disappointment and rage.

To look at Granizo's oeuvre, one would think he is a lifelong artist. He says he is a fluke — he has worked seriously in ceramic tile painting only for the last decade, and prior to that he held a variety of jobs. He worked in radio broadcasting, television and film production and was once was an assistant manager for Wells Fargo Bank. His background in business has served him well as an artist, he said. He knows enough to have two agents, one in northern California and one in the Los Angeles area — this way, he can paint as much as possible.