

East Bay Express Oakland's New International Icon

By Sarah Burke, June 17, 2015.



Courtesy of East Bay Express

On June 26, 1945, the United Nations Charter was signed in San Francisco. As the creation of the UN approaches its seventieth anniversary this month, the UN Foundation wanted to commemorate it in the city where the charter was signed. The foundation also wanted to partner with a local artist to create a mural, paintings, and merchandise based on its new global goals that are also a focus of the celebration. Zio Ziegler became that artist, thanks to a recommendation from one of his collectors, and then the plan got tweaked. Last week, that UN inspired mural went up in the middle of downtown Oakland.

Ziegler is a 27-year-old Marin County native who has catapulted into street art stardom in the last few years. He specializes in bold, multicolored imagery that vaguely evokes the work of cubist and expressionist luminaries of the past. Conceptually, he aims to illustrate allegories, archetypes, and fundamental elements of the human condition.

For that reason, he's the perfect artist to translate the UN's new global goals — such as tackling extreme poverty and curbing climate change — into something easily accessible. "People our age are relatively disconnected with the UN, and I think it could be very relevant again," said Ziegler in a recent interview. "But it would take an encouragement of something graphically intriguing enough so that someone would actually want to participate, wear it, endorse it, share it."

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Ziegler wanted the mural to be somewhere relevant to the causes that the United Nations fights for. So instead of doing it in San Francisco, he decided to reach out to his frequent collaborators at Athen B gallery in downtown Oakland, who have organized Oakland murals for him in the past. Ziegler and Athen B director Sorell Raino-Tsui were able to convince UN representatives to move the mural to Oakland and put it on one of the most iconic buildings in the city: the flatiron building at the foot of Latham Square, where Telegraph and Broadway merge, referred to as the Federal Realty Building in the National Register of Historic Landmarks. "I think it's really important to make something in a hotbed of change and equality, like in Oakland, not in San Francisco, where it's not necessarily as diverse anymore economically or creatively," said Ziegler. "You're pulling all these divergent threads together into one melting pot and that's really present here — that's what I want to do with my work."

Ziegler and his painting partner Velia De Luliis started the 135-foot mural on Wednesday, June 10 and finished it last Saturday. The seated figure and birds that it depicts have a personal meaning to Ziegler, but he often prefers that his paintings be left to interpretation. An unveiling event will take place on June 26 at 2:30 p.m., at which time the United Nations Foundation President and CEO Kathy Calvin will speak about the UN's goals and cut a ribbon with Ziegler. Athen B will be selling limited edition T-shirts and prints with original artwork by Ziegler at the event, with profits going to the Eleanor Roosevelt Fund.