

# Leaving a Legacy Through Street Art

Local Bay Area muralist promotes social change through the use of street art and graffiti

By Sarah Rodriguez  
COPY EDITOR

Born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, she started with a can of spray paint and a rebellious nature. Through her vibrant display of intentional and relevant art, Vanessa Solari Espinosa, known as Agana, creates a space for social change through her artistic endeavors.

Exposed to the world of art and graffiti at an early age, the multi-dimensional artist was born into a family with a mutual admiration for all things creative. Despite the artistry ingrained in her DNA, it was through Agana's rebellious nature that her interest in graffiti really took flight. "[Graffiti] is very much against the system and against corporate consumption, and I think that's what drew me to it in the first place," she recalled.

With spray paint in hand, she took to street art as a way to reclaim public space and visually communicate the importance of culture, public issues, and creative expression. After the young artist was caught quite literally red-handed while tagging in her teens, she received community service, landing herself in a mandatory graffiti course titled "Visual Element."

After the course, Agana recalled a lingering sense of incompleteness. "[The instructors] told me I was done, and I said I'm not done, this is my family now, I found my people." Shortly after, the aspiring artist was offered the opportunity to teach the course herself. "I was fresh out of high school, teaching other high school students."

Her career as an artist reached a turning point during her time in Visual Element, where the cultural depth behind her work gained momentum. As a proud Latina artist, she says it is imperative that she stress the importance of cultural preservation within her work, often in the form of artistic crossovers through sym-

bolic references to her Latin roots.

"Because we have this responsibility to keep our culture alive, what better way than to keep it alive through a visual representation... when I paint, I try and keep our legacies and culture alive through the imagery," she said.

As a founding member of Few and Far, a growing community of empowered female artists reinventing the stigma behind street art, Agana aims to visually tell a story while uniting women alike. What started in a few casual get-togethers with fellow artists ended in a sisterhood of women, all with a common goal to redefine the streets with elaborate illustrations that foster creativity, social justice, and healing.

In efforts to do so, her recent collaboration with the infamous San Francisco Giants in their "Resilient" campaign captures the strength of our beloved Bay Area residents. As one of five commissioned artists, Agana embraced the concept in a stunning use of the team's iconic orange and black lettering, while of course, including her own twist through cultural references.

Located in the Mission District, a community notorious for its rich Latin identity, the centerpiece of Agana's mural lies La Dofia, a Chicana singer-songwriter, and San-Francisco native.

The vibrant display of the singer had a double meaning; it served as an ode to her heritage while honoring the rich culture that exists within the mural's surrounding community. During the mural's process, "It was just such an amazing experience, to see so many people come together and give so much love- little kids, the grandmas, abuelas just driving by screaming her name," she added.

The piece, one of the artist's favorites, aims to honor the ongoing legacies of the living. "It was so beautiful to see that [reaction] and give people their flowers, love, and respect while they're here and not wait till they're gone to pay homage to them."



PHOTO BY SARAH RODRIGUEZ

Due to the outpour of positive response from the community, Agana stated, "It just makes me want to paint more and uplift other amazing sisters in the community that are really putting in work...women that are not just fly, not just talented but are connecting with youth and lifting up other young women while being that positive role model that we really need."

Throughout the creative process, she often asks, why am I creating this art, and what relevance does this have to the next person that sees it?

"Really dig deep into whatever reflections you need to reflect on [in order] to figure out

exactly what you want to say with your art, and just keep pushing it. Not everything is a masterpiece, not everything has community success, not everything is going to pan out exactly how you expected it to be, you got to just keep pushing it and trying, and eventually, one of those projects are going to break ground and open up new possibilities for your career."

One mural at a time, Agana is an inspiration to like-minded lovers of art, advocates of social justice, female artists, and communities united by the presence of her captivating street art. To get a closer look at the local artist's stunning work, you can find it at [djagana.com](http://djagana.com).



PHOTO BY SARAH RODRIGUEZ



Enjoying The Pioneer?

Help support our Student-Run Newspaper, *The Pioneer* by donating at:

1. **Credit Card (Online):** <https://www.csueastbay.edu/giving/class-giving/Communication.html> (Please designate your gift to "Other" then "The Pioneer".)
2. **Check (Mail):** Please contact Pioneer Advertising at 510-885-3526 or [pioneer.advertising@csueastbay.edu](mailto:pioneer.advertising@csueastbay.edu) for more info.

With your support we can continue to enrich the minds of the youth of tomorrow with breaking news, and quality content that touches the lives of our Students and Local Communities. We appreciate and thank you for your support and generosity.