



San Francisco is a colorful and diverse metropolis. The City by the Golden Gate is famed for its multicultural population, steep hills, cable cars, fine dining, theater and Fisherman's Wharf.

One of the city's most attractive communities is the Mission District. It features large, brilliantly-colored murals on outside walls, fences and facades that attract visitors from all over the world.

The wall-painting movement in San Francisco has its roots with Mexico's great 20th Century muralists, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Diego Rivera and Jose Clemente Orozco. They were famous for creating the unique form of art in their country as historical, social and political commentary.

Rivera, the most well-known of the Mexican muralists, originally painted fiery depictions of 19th Century revolutionary Mexico. He was invited to come to the United States in the 1930s. In his various projects, he created murals in public buildings in Washington DC, San Francisco and other cities.

Starting in the early 1970s, when Mexican-American families began settling in the city's Mission District, the mural form of public art came with them. The practice continues today, as talented new artists follow the tradition.

A good way to begin to view the mural paintings is to first make a familiarization visit to the Precita Eyes Mural Arts and Visitors Center, located at 2981 24th Street. The center provides printed guides and local volunteers conduct daily lecture tours of the district's nearly 400 murals.

The Precita center is located around the corner from where 30 of the murals can be seen on and around Balmy Alley. Most of the others are in the area of 24th Street, between Valencia and York. Visitors are fascinated by the murals in the Mission District, because they depict many varieties of colorful subjects. The style of art varies from the quality of Renaissance paintings to exaggerated cartoons.

For example, one portrays moments from the eventful lives of Diego Rivera and his wife, the noted Mexican painter, Frida Kahlo. Other subjects include humorous and typical scenes from Mission District life, such as colorfully decorated cars, street dancers and carnival events.

Some murals emphasize serious political and social points of view, including a memorial to San Francisco and Mission District victims of AIDs, as well as those honoring local heroes who served in America's wars.