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Berlin Wall's fall will be memorialized across Wilshire

A wall, painted by pros and amateurs, will stand for three hours to mark the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Cold War era symbol.

By Diane Haithman

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WALLED OFF: An artist's rendering, above, shows what the Wall Project may look like when it is up.

In what government and arts officials are calling the most ambitious commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall outside of Germany, a symbolic re-creation of the wall that once separated East and West Berlin will be erected across Wilshire Boulevard in November.

The Wall Project, painted by professional and amateur artists, will close Sunday afternoon traffic on one of the city's busiest thoroughfares for three hours on Nov. 8 beginning at 3 p.m. The project involves the Culver City's Wende Museum and Archive of the Cold War, the city of Los Angeles, the German Consulate General in Los Angeles and other partners, and will be officially announced Thursday.

In a reenactment of the actual events, invited dignitaries will break down selected portions of the Wilshire wall, which will be placed directly in front of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Project leaders plan a live feed of the events between Los Angeles and Berlin, official sister cities since 1967. (Because of the time difference, it will already be Nov. 9 in Berlin, the day the wall came down in 1989).

Professional artists who will participate include "Obama Hope" muralist Shepard Fairey, L.A. muralist Kent Twitchell and Berlin-based Thierry Noir, noted for painting his brightly colored human figures on the real wall in Berlin. Twitchell said that he plans to create portraits of the two presidents who saw the beginning and the end of the Berlin Wall, John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan.

The Wall Project will be made up of two parts: The "Wall Across Wilshire" will have as its adjunct the "Wall Along Wilshire -- Eastside Gallery West," which will have a somewhat longer life in front of the 5900 Wilshire Blvd. building, remaining in place from Oct. 17 to Nov. 14.

During its short existence, the "across" wall will bisect the "along" wall, with one end of the "across" wall ending at LACMA's outdoor installation "Urban Light."

The location is "highly symbolic," said Justinian Jampol, president and founder of the Wende Museum. "It connects downtown to the ocean, those two cultural anchors to the city. Also, going through an area where there are lots of museums and cultural institutions, it's very reflective of what occurred in Berlin, because when that line was drawn through the city, it divided up the cultural institutions."

Symbolism aside, the location is not random: Wayne Ratkovich, owner of the 5900 Wilshire Blvd. building, sits on the nonprofit Wende Museum's board of directors.

From Oct. 23 to Nov. 7, 40 wall panels, all 11 feet tall and 3 feet wide, will be painted on the grounds of the Page Museum at the La Brea Tar Pits in Hancock Park, adjacent to LACMA. Thirty of those panels will be used to construct the Wall Across Wilshire, and the other 10 will form the Wall Along Wilshire.

The work of graphic designer and political illustrator Fairey will be part of the "across" wall, along with the work of graffiti artists working with ArtStorm LA and arts students at the Otis College of Art and Design, USC, CalArts and UCLA. Twitchell and Noir will paint an additional 10 panels for the Wall Along Wilshire, doing most of their work in front of the 5900 building. The public will have the opportunity to observe the artists at work in both locations.

Jampol said the painting done on the Berlin Wall circa 1989 "was not art, it was a political act. It was not about showing the finished artwork, it was dynamic." He said that so many artists wanted to make their mark on the Berlin Wall they often began painting over another artist's work before the paint was dry.

Los Angeles officials had to sign off on closing Wilshire.

"We do this all the time," said Councilman Tom LaBonge, whose district includes the project site, mentioning a recent NASCAR-related event at the nearby Petersen Automotive Museum

that also required the temporary closure of Wilshire. "Wilshire is the backbone of all the buses in the city, but . . . having had the experience of this closure near Fairfax for the Petersen, I knew it could happen."

Los Angeles German Consul General Wolfgang Drautz, who moved to Los Angeles just weeks ago, said that the Wall Project is the largest Berlin Wall anniversary commemoration that he is aware of outside of Berlin. Germany plans to donate as much as \$40,000 to the effort, which Jampol estimated could cost \$500,000.

"Look at the map -- that we are doing this here on the West Coast, in California, is symbolizing that it's not just a narrow, transatlantic relationship between Washington, D.C., and Berlin," Drautz said. "We are really looking forward to an event where all American cities can celebrate with us."

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