



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jose M. Serrano

## East Harlem Elected Officials Denounce the Defacement of Public Art

JOSÉ M. SERRANO June 29, 2009

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East Harlem, NY - Elected officials and community leaders spoke out against the defacement of a local landmark, and declared a united front to protect the cultural heritage of East Harlem.

On June 13, the four-story Spirit of East Harlem mural, at 104th Street and Lexington Ave., was defaced.

"I am outraged that this East Harlem landmark has been so casually defaced," said Senator José M. Serrano (D-Manhattan/Bronx). "Landmarks such as this reflect the hope and cultural pride that has been passed down in this neighborhood for generations. The individuals who committed these deplorable and senseless acts have let down their community."

The Spirit of East Harlem was created in 1973 by artist Hank Prussing, and was later restored by local muralist Manny Vega Jr. in 1998. The mural, most prominently, depicts images of local East Harlem residents at the time of the murals creation.

The neighborhood of El Barrio, home to "mural row," is well-known for the many culturally themed murals that adorn the external brick walls of its businesses, residential buildings, and school playgrounds.

"East Harlem/El Barrio is a unique community with a beautifully diverse and spirited population," said Councilmember Melissa Mark-Viverito. "Mural painting is a tradition that has long been a part of this community's expression of our culture, diversity, and love of art. As such, I am extremely saddened and alarmed by the recent defacing of one of our beloved art works, the mural on 104th Street known as 'The Spirit of East Harlem' which dates back to 1973. The mural on 104th Street is appreciated not only as the beautiful piece of art and history that it is but also as a memorial to the local residents it depicts.

"I call upon our community to send a collective and forceful message to the person(s) responsible that we will not tolerate these cowardly acts of vandalism and intolerance. I also challenge our community to help educate their children, friends and fellow residents to be respectful of our history, our diversity and our community treasures."

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*This press release has been amended*