

## **BART Restoration Project 2011** text by Regina Almaguer

Alfonso Pardiñas (1924-1975)  
American, born Mexico  
*Untitled*, 1973  
Vitreous Glass Mosaic

Since 1973, when the El Cerrito Plaza and El Cerrito Del Norte stations opened for service, passengers have enjoyed the glass mosaic murals that adorn the walls between the concourse and platform levels. The murals, designed and executed by artist Alfonso Pardiñas, are made of *smalti*, or small pieces of colored glass formed from a glass paste that is poured and cut into irregular shapes. Numbering in the thousands, the smalti used in these murals were produced by Mosaicos Venecianos de Mexico in Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico, the first glass mosaic factory in the Americas.

Although the murals are nearly identical in design, Pardiñas' skillful use of color brings a unique identity to each station. At the Plaza station, the flowing, abstract design is done in rich earth tones of brown, cream and yellow, while the Del Norte station palette is rendered in cool, watery shades of blues and greens.

Alfonso Pardiñas was born in Coyoacan, Mexico on August 24, 1924. Early in his career he worked with such notable Mexican artists as Jose Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Rufino Tamayo and Juan O'Gorman. Pardiñas moved to California in 1941, enrolled in the Army in 1945, and eventually became a United States citizen.

Pardiñas established Byzantine Mosaics, an architectural mosaic workshop, in San Francisco in the 1950s. He was a prominent presence in the bohemian art scene and collaborated with numerous Bay Area artists, including Beniamino Bufano, Jean Varda, and Ruth Asawa. Examples of Pardiñas' exquisite mosaic work may be seen in San Francisco at the Holy Virgin Cathedral at the Russian Orthodox Church on Geary Blvd, the Sentinel Building on Kearny Street at Columbus Avenue in North Beach, and at the Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Assumption on Gough Street. Pardiñas also executed the mosaic murals designed by Jean Varda for the Union City BART station and the mosaic columns designed by Helen Webber for the Lafayette station.

In 2011, both of the El Cerrito stations underwent construction for seismic safety upgrades, and sections of the glass mosaic walls were removed. The removed sections have been replaced and re-designed with new mosaic tiles that reflect the intent and spirit of Pardiñas' original designs.

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For press materials, additional information on Alfonso Pardiñas or Byzantine Mosaics  
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