

## Michelle Angela Ortiz

**Age:** 32

**Roots:** Puerto Rican  
and Colombian

**Occupation:** Visual artist  
and muralist

**ON BECOMING A MURALIST:**

I was one of three Latinas out of 109 kids in my graduating high school class in South Philadelphia, and a racial incident happened with a nun at school. I felt completely powerless in that situation. And my mother was like, "Don't make a big deal about it." But I had an overwhelming feeling, like, "No. I need to do something." I had the idea of creating a mural that celebrated the diversity of the students. It was also a way to counteract this negative situation. So that's when I created my first large-scale mural, at 17.

**ON WHERE SHE FINDS INSPIRATION:**

I want to tell the stories of people who feel their existence isn't that meaningful—my grandmother's stories are as important as reading about an American hero in a textbook.

**ON HER ARTWORK:**

My murals are very vibrant, and the people that are being represented are full of life. I'm interested in supporting local artists who can become leaders and ignite change in their communities. For me, it doesn't end with the mural.

“  
*I can wear  
high heels and  
at the same  
time create  
amazing,  
powerful work.*  
”

