

California Bear

Artist: Beniamino Bufano

November 1980

Center for Performing Arts / San Jose, CA 95113 / Council District 3

ABOUT THE PROJECT

California Bear in front of the Center for Performing Arts in Downtown San Jose is one of the best-known artworks by Italian-American modernist sculpture Beniamino Bufano. Bufano's *California Bear*, a large-scale cast granite monument, is an outstanding example of the artist's signature style of elegant and smoothly rounded animal and human forms.

Animals were one of Benny Bufano's favorite and most consistent subjects. The artist thought of his art as a search for innocence, harmony and beauty. The simplicity and self-containment of the animal world was a perfect way to express this idea. Bufano's bears, cats, penguins and walrus are gentle, civil creatures whose natural habitat is the urban setting of city parks and the entryways to civic buildings. Thus, the purity and composure of *California Bear* mirrors perfectly the serenity and innocence that the artist sought to manifest. The sculpture was purchased by the City of San Jose from the Bufano Society of the Arts in 1980.



Benny Bufano's California Bear in front of the Center for Performing Arts in San Jose

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Beniamino Benvenuto Bufano was born in San Fele, Italy, in 1886. His family immigrated to New York when Benny Bufano was three. He studied at the Art Students League of New York and apprenticed with the sculpture James Frasier. Bufano first came to California to participate in the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition. Once in San Francisco, Benny's talents were recognized, and he began receiving regular and lucrative commissions. The artist became highly regarded and his works were much sought after during the mid-twentieth century. Bufano's numerous works can be found throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. In addition, he taught at the San Francisco Institute of Art, the University of California, Berkeley, and California College of Arts. He died in 1970.

ABOUT THE PUBLIC ART PROGRAM

The City of San José Public Art Program seeks to build community identity by initiating artworks and exhibitions that enhance the civic landscape. Through active community engagement, public art strives to reflect the City's diversity, historic richness, and envision its present and future.

The Public Art Program is part of the City's Office of Cultural Affairs, a division of the Office of Economic Development. The Public Art Program was established by a 1992 municipal ordinance that provides public art through funding from City capital improvement projects and eligible private development.

For further information and photos, please contact the San José Public Art Program.

