

Japanese American Internment Memorial

Artist: Ruth Asawa

July 1994

Federal Building / 300 S. 1st St., San Jose, CA 95113 / Council District 3

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Ruth Asawa was selected to create an artwork to honor the over 110,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans who were forced to live in internment camps in the United States during World War II. Her bronze bas-relief, located outside the Federal Building, is a reminder of the injustices committed against these people and of their strength of spirit.

Asawa spent several years preparing and constructing this memorial. She researched Japanese immigration, the history of internment, and how internment affected Japanese living in Santa Clara County. She also drew from her own experiences of living in one of camps from 1942 to 1943. With the help of family members and painter Nancy Thompson, it took over a year to design the layout of the memorial and sculpt the bas-relief out of dough. The relief was then cast in bronze by the Mussi Artworks Foundry in Berkeley.



Below: Detail of panel depicting life at the camps.



Above: View of memorial outside the Federal Building.

Right: Close up detail of bronze panel.



On one side the panels depict life prior to the internment, showing a robust, prosperous community. The other side portrays various aspects of the history and reality of life in the internment camps. There are images of Franklin Roosevelt signing Executive Order 9066 issuing the internment policy, notices for internment being sent to people of Japanese ancestry, the daily life of the camps, and adjustment after the war. The final panel portrays the 1988 Redress in which a formal apology and compensation was issued to every survivor. In a column at the end of the wall, many *mon* or family crests sent in by community members are also displayed.

The memorial visualizes the inhumanity and strife of the internment camps and reminds the public that fear of the “other” can lead to broad spread racism, prejudice, and discrimination.

More about this artwork may be found at http://www.ruthasawa.com/mem_gallery.html

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Ruth Asawa is a nationally recognized artist based in San Francisco. During World War II, her family of nine was separated and sent to different internment camps for four years. Drawing was one of the main activities she used to pass time in the camps. Soon after being released from internment, she started showing her work in exhibitions. Today, her art is included in the collections of many museums including the Guggenheim, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Oakland Museum of California. She is also well known for her many public art pieces such as the *Andrea Mermaid Fountain* at Ghiradelli Square and the *Buchanan Mall Fountain* in Japantown, San Francisco. Asawa is represented by Rena Bransten Gallery.

More of her work may be seen at <http://www.ruthasawa.com>.

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 1984 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.

