

Plumed Serpent

Artist: Robert Graham

November 1989

Plaza de Cesar Chavez / San Jose, CA 95113 / Council District 3

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Robert Graham's *Plumed Serpent* is a stylized cast concrete sculpture of Quetzalcóatl (from Nahuatl quetzalli, "tail feather of the quetzal bird [*Pharomachrus mocinno*]," and coatl, "snake"), one of the major deities of the ancient Mesoamerican pantheon. In Toltec civilization, Quetzalcóatl was venerated as the god of learning, of arts, crafts and knowledge. He was also the patron god of Aztec priests and scholars, which inspired ideas of priestly rule and peaceful behavior.

For Graham, this artwork was created "to symbolize the spirit of social harmony and diversity." Growing up in Mexico City, Graham was influenced by Mexico's magnificent public monuments, such as Chapultepec Castle and the pyramids, Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros's murals. "I don't remember ever going to a gallery," the artist once said. "The things that were important were those murals and what people saw all the time. They were my history books. I never looked at it as art -- it was part of your experience as a Mexican."



Plumed Serpent located at Plaza de Cesar Chavez

The monochromatic sculpture of the mythological plumed serpent is located at Plaza de César Chávez in downtown San José.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Artist Robert Graham was well-known for his prominent civic monuments across the United States including the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial in Washington and the Duke Ellington Memorial in New York. His work is represented in numerous public collections across the U.S and worldwide. Born in Mexico City in 1938, Mr. Graham moved to San Jose, CA at the age of 11. He started his university studies at San Jose State University and graduated from the San Francisco Art Institute. In 2008, Graham was inducted into the California Hall of Fame. He passed away at the age of 70 in Venice, California. Another of his artworks can be seen at the Federal Building in downtown San Jose (300 S. 1st Street).

More about Robert Graham's work may be seen at <http://www.robertgraham-artist.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 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.

