
Remembering Agriculture

Artist: Tony May

1998

Guadalupe River Trail / W. Santa Clara St. and Guadalupe Parkway, San Jose, CA 95113 / Council District 3

ABOUT THE PROJECT



Remembering Agriculture, by artist Tony May, recalls the rich agricultural history that was the driving force in San Jose's economy for more than 150 years. The project recreates the distinctive shapes of those once familiar archetypal clusters of farm buildings that are seen less and less frequently in the Santa Clara Valley. Once prolific, they are now most often decaying and abandoned, glimpsed only briefly from a distance by motorists on the freeway.

The structures, a water tank tower, a windmill, a barn and a small shed, are intended to be somewhat ghost-like in their near transparent appearance. The structures also function as arbors for a carefully chosen selection of ivies and other perennial climbing plants. Within the brick paving are set iron tablets that reflect upon significant aspects of the valley's agricultural past. The project elements are intended to transform with time: the tablets will rust, the plantings will mature, and the structures themselves will disappear beneath the vines, all recalling the image of an farm, long abandoned and overgrown with time.

The project site, at Santa Clara, between Highway 87 and the Guadalupe River is an integral influence on the project design. Though the structures are normal in shape and appearance when approached from the north and west sides, when viewed from the east and south sides, they appear as if cut off at the edge of the right-of-way. In this way, the artwork uses the freeway as a metaphor for the urban growth which, over the past 50 years has been largely responsible for the almost complete disappearance of agriculture from the area. Included in this loss are the canneries, packing plants and fruit drying operations, as well as the work force, which made this one of the most productive agricultural valleys in the world.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Tony May is a San Jose artist and was an instructor at the San Jose State University for about 40 years. He has extensive experience with public installation throughout the Bay area, and since the seventies has been responsible for numerous spontaneous collaborative public art projects undertaken in conjunction with his students. His art has been shown widely in California including shows at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco Art Institute, 80 Langton (now New Langton Arts), Capp Street Project, San Jose Museum of Art, and the de Saisset Museum. He has also exhibited in other parts of the United States, England, France and Japan. More of his work may be seen at <http://tonymay.net>.

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.

