

Untitled Works, at Mexican Heritage Plaza

Artists: Ann Chamberlain and Victor Maria Zaballa

September 1999

Mexican Heritage Plaza / 1700 Alum Rock Ave., San Jose, CA 95116 / Council District 5

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The main theme of the artwork is *Cemanahuac*: the location of the individual within his/her community as well as within the cosmos. According to Mesoamerican indigenous cultures and oral traditions, each of the four cardinal directions (north, south, east, and west) corresponds to an element, a community memory of value, a time of day, and a color of corn -- a fundamental agricultural symbol:

- East is fire, family, sunrise, and red corn
- West is wind, local heroes, sunset, and yellow corn
- South is earth, work, noon, and blue corn
- North is water, history, night, and white corn

These symbols honor the Mexican community in various forms throughout the plaza:

- Four patterned metal grilles in the windows of the tower introduce traditional ironwork with pre-Columbian designs.
- Metal work is continued in each of the gates into the plaza.
- Mosaic thresholds inside the gates explore the theme of location and direction. The thresholds were inspired by mosaics commonly seen in Mexican colonial cities such as Taxco, Puebla and Tlaxcala and mosaic work in San Jose.

The garden alcoves are offering places linked by thematic press tiles to the cardinal directions and dedicated to a community value. The tiles were created by community members during a series of public workshops. The photographic tiles were translated from family albums and personal collections contributed by the local community.

A recurring image of the hummingbird, derived from Mesoamerican motifs, can be seen at the water fountain and on two accent walls at the south and east entrances. The hummingbird, an ancient Mesoamerican talisman, is a symbol of love and the warrior spirit. It is common in San Jose, a tiny but tenacious bird that migrates thousands of miles from Mexico to



Top to Bottom: Metalwork fences; Community photo tiles; Fountain

California every year and plays a role in shaping the landscape by pollinating the plants from which it drinks nectar. The hummingbird motif is intended to speak to the spirit of immigrant citizens, their endurance, strength, tenacity, and their contributions to the culture and nature of California. The choices of planting materials in the garden were selected to attract hummingbirds.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Ann Chamberlain was an important Bay Area artist engaged in both public art and studio practice. Her work includes public installations, numerous small books, and museum and gallery work. She lived in Mexico through a Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Fellowship and a Fulbright Fellowship, and her experiences there have significantly informed her work. Ms. Chamberlain was on the faculty at the San Francisco Art Institute for many years. She passed away in 2008.

Victor Mario Zaballa, is an artist of Mexican descent and a Bay Area resident. His work expresses a deep connection to the myths and folkways of Mexico. In addition to his installation art, Mr. Zaballa has designed and built sets for theater and film, and designed art for traditional celebrations in Mexico and his broad experience of Mexican culture has enabled him to teach indigenous music, Mesoamerican mythology and Latin American art history in colleges throughout the Bay Area.

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.

