
Water Story/ Wastewater: A Post-Consumer Wetland

Artist: Mark Brest van Kempen

Completed August, 2022

Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge / 1751 Grand Blvd., Alviso, CA / Council District 4

ABOUT THE PROJECT



Water Story - Wastewater, artist Mark Brest van Kempen's environmental artwork at the Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge (DENWR) in San José's Alviso community, explores the journey of water through San José's sanitary sewer system through its release into the San Francisco Bay. The artist's intention is to raise awareness of the importance of the unseen system of waterways that are critical to daily life in the urban community. ***Water Story - Wastewater*** explores key parts of the region's system to channel, treat and release water that flows through the extensive sanitary sewer system. The artwork's location is adjacent to the Artesian Slough that runs along the east side of the DENWR, part of the major outflow system into which water is released after it is processed at the nearby Regional Wastewater Facility.

The artwork is a 40' long curved sloping form that serves as an active biofiltration system. It descends in height from 3½' tall at one end to below grade at the opposite end. The base is constructed of recycled concrete blocks, obtained from the region's nearby recycling facility; the use of recycled materials underscores the fact that DENWR is built on landfill. It's built to encourage the growth of natural mosses and plants and to create habitat for lizards and other small creatures.

Recycled water, drawn with a solar-powered pump from the nearby Artesian Slough backflow from the Bay, trickles down the length of the piece mirroring the water's larger journey from wastewater to Bay. The upper section of the artwork's top surface maps San José's sanitary sewer system, etched into a polished concrete slab; this conveys water into an area of abstractly arranged channels, suggesting the progression of the treated wastewater into human built sloughs. The water continues down the slope finally into a reed bed suggesting the water's outfall into the Bay.

Located adjacent to the where the main entrance road turns into the Education Center parking lot, the project is highly visible as an aesthetic feature of the facility; it's adjacency to the main parking lot makes it accessible to the public including the frequent visits by school children throughout the school year.

A companion piece, *Water Story – Stormwater*, which similarly explores the City's stormwater system, is nearing completion near the Children's Discovery Museum and Guadalupe River Park.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Mark Brest van Kempen has created a variety of artworks using the landscape itself as sculptural material. From the Free Speech Monument on the UC Berkeley campus to Land Exchange at the National Academy of Art in China, his work explores the range of emotions and issues that are embodied in our complex relationship to the environment. He has spoken around the country and abroad on the possibilities of creating artwork that functions outside the museum /gallery context and that brings aesthetic and symbolic meaning to everyday situations.

He has received numerous commissions for public art projects including the San Francisco Art Commission, the City of San José, the City of Seattle and the Haas Foundation.

In 2012 Brest van Kempen was one of three Americans invited by the German Government to submit designs for a national Reunification Monument in Leipzig.

His work has been presented in several books including Lucy Lippard's *The Lure of the Local* and Peter Selz's *Art of Engagement* as well as many publications including *Time Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *Art in America*, and the *LA Times*. *Exit Art* in New York, *The Armory Center for the Arts* in Pasadena and *The Richmond Art Center* featured his performance project *Living From Land* in which he lived entirely from the land in a wilderness area for one month.

Brest van Kempen has been Artist in Residence in several institutions including *Dalsland Museum* in Sweden, the *Headlands Center for the Arts* in California and the University of Utah's *Marva and John Warnock biennial residency*. He has received a *California Arts Council Fellowship* and has taught at the *San Francisco Art Institute*, *Stanford University* and *California College of the Arts*.

Learn more about Mark Brest van Kempen and see his work at <https://www.mbvstudio.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 and experience. 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 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 at publicart@sanjoseca.gov.