

Above the Crowd Public Art Project Fact Sheet



City of Tempe
Cultural Services
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Photo: Craig Smith

Title: Above the Crowd

Location: In the Plazita de Descanso in the Harry E. Mitchell Municipal Complex, east of Mill Avenue and north of Sixth Street

Artists: John Nelson

Completion: 1998

Medium: Steel, concrete and ceramic tile

Description: This project is a tribute to former Mayor Harry E. Mitchell, who is portrayed as a stilt walker to symbolize his heightened sense of potential, performance and accomplishment. The hands of the figure hold an inverted pyramid, which symbolizes the Tempe City Hall. The stilt walker stands atop a steel, concrete and tile base that acts as a timeline that represents Mitchell's 24 years of public service. The tiles contain representations of fragments of historic news articles, budgets and blueprints occurring during Mitchell's time of service to the city.

Funding: The project was funded through city of Tempe Capital Improvement Project Percent for Art funds.

Artist biography: John Nelson lives and works in Tempe, and received his Master of Fine Arts from Arizona State University. As an illustrator, painter and sculptor Nelson has seen his mixed media illustrations appear frequently in publications like *The New York Times* and *Rolling Stone*. His paintings and sculptures have been featured in numerous solo and group shows including Gallery Materia in Scottsdale, the Carter Center at Emory University and the Tamarind Institute in Albuquerque, N.M. In addition, his work is collected by both public and corporate entities, including Intel and the Perrier Corporation. He has completed commissions for the National Endowment for the Arts, the United States Postal Service and Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, and has many other public pieces in the Phoenix Metropolitan area.

Artist statement: *Above the Crowd* is a portrait of Harry E. Mitchell. It is also a fable, a day dream, a magic portent and a blue sky flight of imagination. On a personal level, it is a symbol and metaphor for one's individual contribution to a community. On another level it stands as a symbol of that community and of all of those who work towards a higher vision of community. If you know the history of Harry Mitchell then you know something of the history of Tempe. He is, after all, a Buffalo, a Sun Devil and a Cardinal. As mayor he was a budget juggler and a ribbon cutter, and for the St. Patrick's Day Parade, at least, a leprechaun. In this story, however, he is neither devil nor leprechaun, but a stilt walker.