

Unity/Diversity Public Art Project Fact Sheet



City of Tempe
Cultural Services
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Photo: Craig Smith

Title: Unity/Diversity

Location: Marcos de Niza High School on the north side of Guadalupe Road and west of Lakeshore Drive

Artists: John Nelson

Completion: 2003

Medium: Steel, concrete, ceramic tile and knitted polyethylene canopy

Description: Four ethnically and gender-diverse figures sit atop steel poles and work together to provide shade and shelter by stretching a high tension, structural canopy over a semi circular seating area. The canopy is lit at night creating a dynamic, illuminated nighttime presence. The bench and concrete floor of the seating area incorporate handmade ceramic tiles that relate conceptually to unity and diversity. The design process included the collaboration of Marcos de Niza High School students. It is a visual and verbal narrative that captures the positive expressions and identities of this particular group of young Tempe residents, as well as providing a functional, durable shade oasis for those in transit.

Funding: The project was funded through city of Tempe Capital Improvement Project Percent for Art funds made available through the Tempe Transit Tax.

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 John 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.

Artist statement: This project has been especially interesting and challenging for me as I have had the opportunity to collaborate with some very talented student artists and art faculty at Marcos de Niza High School. After discussing many and varied ideas with the administration and faculty, we chose three areas of emphasis:

- Conceptually, we decided on "Unity" as the theme for our project. Specifically, "If Unity were a puzzle what piece would I be?"
- For our design approach, our slogan was, "Think outside the box." Throw out all preconceptions of transit shelter design.
- Create a design that stands as a symbol of solidarity and creativity for the students of Marcos de Niza and also create a unique identity for the surrounding neighborhood.