



# Tempe Public Art

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## *Tempe Roots*

Oliverio Balcells

Acrylic Paint

2012

**Location:** Southwest corner of  
5<sup>th</sup> Street and Mill Avenue

**Artist website:** [www.oliveriobalcells.com](http://www.oliveriobalcells.com)

**Description:** *Tempe Roots* represents the ancient history of the city of Tempe. It honors the Hohokam people, their native place and their community for being the builders of the water canals that have a direct connection to the Rio Salado. The Hohokam people are represented through petroglyphs and the classic Toltec symbols of corn, beans and squash. The concentric circles represent their world, and the symbol represents the origin of the water of the Rio Salado. Also depicted are three Mexican farmers who dug out the irrigation canals and built new ones to carry Salt River water to their fields, supplying food for Fort McDowell and the mining towns. These Hispanic families were the first settlers to the Tempe area and founded the town called San Pablo, east of Tempe Butte. The prominent image of Tempe Butte represents the unique characteristics of the city. The sun is drawn from classic Mixtec cultural images with original colors that reflect the Valley of the Sun. The desert plants and the rattlesnake along the bottom represent the natural environment that complements the concept of the place.

**Artist biography:** Balcells is a scholar of the ancient Mesoamerican cultures, a photographer, a painter and a self-taught musician. He received his Bachelor's degree in Graphic Design from Universidad del Valle de Atemajac in Guadalajara, Mexico, his hometown. Balcells relocated to Arizona in 1999. He draws much inspiration from his extensive travels through his home country and has been painting in diverse mediums since 1988. Recently, he has been creating mixed media works utilizing photographs and acrylics on canvas, transferring his vocabulary from the commitment of being a social artist into a series of themes that he calls collections. Balcells' purpose is to educate and raise people's consciousness through native Mexican cultural teachings, which ultimately enrich the world's cultures. His influences stem from ancient Mexican manifestations, Wixarika Art (Huichol art) and the Mexican master muralists.

**Funding:** The project was funded through the city of Tempe Municipal Arts Fund and Downtown Tempe Community.