

Words Over Water Public Art Project Fact Sheet



City of Tempe
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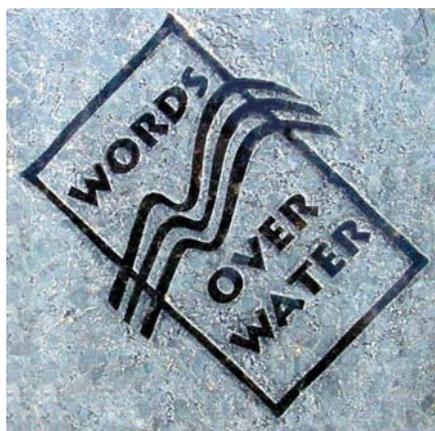


Photo: Craig Smith

Title: Words Over Water

Location: On the seat wall around Tempe Town Lake

Artists: Karla Elling, Harry Reese and Alberto Ríos

Completion: 2001

Medium: Granite tiles

Description: The artists' words and images are carved into more than 600 granite tiles installed in the seat wall around the Town Lake, creating a "book" that is six miles long. The artists collaborated to bring words to public art for a project that would create a sense of history and community. They collected memories and stories to inspire this artwork

that could reach out to anyone who visited the lake. Images of birds, caliche and fish are combined with *greguerías*, a form of writing that mixes metaphor and humor to create new insight.

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

Artists' biographies

Karla Elling is a graphics artist and letterpress printer – the proprietor of Mummy Mountain Press and Papermill. Elling, who specializes in the literary arts, has printed the broadsides of the work of more than 100 contemporary writers including Alberto Ríos, Robert Bly, Rita Dove and Carlos Fuentes. Her typography appears in public spaces such as the wall of the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art as well as in portfolio editions from *Hand Papermaking* magazine, the Minnesota Center for Book Arts and the University of Wisconsin *Silver Buckle Press*. Elling is coordinator of the Arizona State University Creative Writing Program.

Alberto Ríos is the author of nine books and chapbooks of poetry, three collections of short stories and a memoir. His poems include *The Smallest Muscle in the Human Body*, *Teodoro Luna's Two Kisses*, *The Lime Orchard Woman*, *The Warrington Poems*, *Five Indiscretions* and *Whispering to Fool the Wind*. His collections of stories include *The Curtain of Trees*, *Pig Cookies* and *The Iguana Killer*. *Capirotada* is a memoir about growing up on the Mexican Border. He is a Regents' Professor of English at Arizona State University.

Harry Reese, Chair of the Department of Art Studio at the University of California (Santa Barbara) from 1996 to 2000, began the UCSB Book Arts program in 1978. His work is archived at the Getty Research Institute and has been exhibited internationally in Germany, Argentina, Venezuela, Columbia and widely throughout the United States. His public art projects include works at the Los Angeles Central Library, the Penland School of Crafts and in the city of Pasadena, Calif.

Artist statement: Alberto Ríos: The form I generally modeled the writing on is something called a "*greguería*," a very short form developed by the turn of the century Spanish writer Ramon Gomez de la Serna. In the tradition of Spanish literature, it makes a surprising connection, using both high seriousness and humor to make its point. For example, "To visit the river quickly, cut an onion," or "Nobody owns water—drink some and try to keep it." The form is similar to some others, such as epigraphs and gnomes and so on, but its use of humor as a serious component is what distinguishes it from the others generally.