3 DESIGN APPROACHES

The first section of this chapter, “Design Approaches,” discusses overall thematic and site-based approaches to locating public art in the study area. The second section, “Display Options,” describes a “kit of parts” or set of physical elements which could be applied in any of the design approaches.

3.1 DESIGN APPROACHES

As evidenced in Chapter 2, West Berkeley possesses a very rich history of both Native American and post-contact European settlement. As the site for what may have been the largest Ohlone settlement in the Bay Area, and also the first European settlement in Berkeley, this district and its history deserves to be honored and commemorated through public art.

The choice of design approaches is dependent on the extent of the vision and resources available for art in the area. However, for any commemorative public art project to be seen as “successful” it should:

• Inform, educate, and teach new generations about the history of this site and its peoples.
• Evoke one’s imagination so that viewers are transported back in history in creative ways.
• Unify a fragmented urban environment.
• Recognize those who have lived and died at this location for centuries past.

The site design possibilities for public art commemorating the cultural and natural history of West Berkeley can be generally described as follows:

• Singular Elements
• Episodic Design Approach
• Linear Design Approach
• Outdoor Rooms

However, it is important to note that these four approaches are not mutually exclusive. For example, episodic elements and outdoor rooms could be tied together by a linear element.

Each of these approaches and possibilities for their use in the West Berkeley area is discussed further in the following sections.
3.1.1 SINGLE ELEMENTS

Often, public art takes the form of a single element placed in the landscape. In this case the art is a stand-alone element such as a piece of sculpture, a mural, a kiosk, or sign panel. Advantages to a single element approach are that the production and budget for a project may be concentrated in one object. The success of a singular element in making an impression on people depends greatly on the location, the size, and uniqueness of the work.

Examples of public art that are singular elements include the San Jose Veterans Memorial, the Sonoma Mission Indian Memorial, and the mural at the San Mateo Caltrain Station. The San Jose Veterans Memorial Wall is a singular element placed within a larger park. The Sonoma Mission Indian Memorial consists of a stone sign panel along the sidewalk. The impact of the mural at the San Mateo Caltrain Station comes from its size and location opposite the waiting platform. In addition to the pictures on this page, information about these projects is found in Chapter 4.
3.1.2 EPISODIC DESIGN APPROACH

A collection of individual elements within a larger site characterizes the episodic design approach. In such a design different pieces of public art may be placed along sidewalks, intersections, and local attractions. These “episodes” could be placed in a rhythmic way or a more random way. Such an approach is more akin to a museum where one chances upon exhibits as one walks through the space. Within the episodic design approach it is possible to build the entire design at one time, or for pieces of the project to be assembled over a longer period of time. Ideas for public art in such an approach could include sculpture, kiosks, educational panels, replicas of historical artifacts, history walls etc.

Example of an episodic approach to public art in the study area.
Without a unifying element an episodic approach would have a diminished impact. If such an approach is to be adopted, a rhythmic placement of elements will help unify the area. The public art elements themselves could also be created in a family of materials and forms that is unifying. Kiosks or signs may be placed in a rhythmic pattern to serve as a unifying urban design element.

Examples of public art projects which utilize an episodic approach include Chicano Park, Chitactac-Adams Heritage County Park, Coyote Hills Park, Embarcadero Promenade, Addison Street Arts District, Ohlone Greenway Natural & Cultural History Interpretive Exhibit.

At Chicano Park, a rhythm of individual murals on the pylons of an elevated freeway have been repainted over a period of years. At Chitactac-Adams Heritage County Park a series of sign panels and interpretive exhibits throughout the park describes the site’s history. Similar interpretive exhibits are found at Coyote Hills Park.
At the Embarcadero Promenade a series of sculptural forms at points along the shoreline serve to display images and text which interpret the history of the site. The Addison Street Arts District includes a series of paving treatments, each designed by a different artist. The Ohlone Greenway Natural & Cultural History Interpretive Exhibit is an assemblage of a few independent public art projects along a bike path including a mural and sculpture. In addition to the photos on pages 38-39, see chapter 4 for more information on each project.
3.1.3 LINEAR DESIGN APPROACH

Another approach to the site is to use design to create linear movements through the landscape. Linear designs could include continuous use of paving, walls, banners, or signs along a particular route or length of the project area. The benefits of a linear approach include creating a sense of time and continuity to the space as one moves through the area.
Examples of public art projects which utilize a linear design approach include the Blue Line on Center Street, Addison Street Arts District, and the Embarcadero Promenade. On Berkeley’s Center Street, a simple painted blue line represents the former location of the undergrounded Strawberry Creek. A glass band in the paving along San Francisco’s Embarcadero Promenade reveals the line where land meets water. At Berkeley’s Addison Street Arts District, a band of red concrete in the sidewalk ties a number of elements episodic paving treatments together into a united design. In addition to the photos on this page see chapter 4 for more information on each project.
3.1.4 OUTDOOR ROOMS

“Outdoor rooms” are defined in a variety of ways - through vertical elements such as seat walls, exhibit art panels, and exhibit art poles; through horizontal elements such as paving texture and color; through planting design; and through grade change.

Outdoor rooms could be created at the three key destination points in the area - at the intersections of Hearst and Fourth, at the Amtrak station and at the entrance to Aquatic Park.

While easier to define and implement, such a focused approach would belie the fact that the historical settlements in West Berkeley were widespread and pervasive, especially if only one room was chosen for siting a commemoration. If a room oriented approach was to be selected a more balanced thrust may be achieved by developing all three rooms and allowing each room to address a different subject. For example, the room at Hearst and Fourth could focus on Ocean View, the room at the transit plaza may focus on the Native Shellmound settlement, and the room at the Aquatic park entrance could focus on the original natural features of the site such as the Bay Shoreline and Strawberry Creek.

Potential location for outdoor rooms.
The space available for Room 1 - at the intersection of Hearst and Fourth would primarily be concentrated at the corners of the intersection if the sidewalk was to be enlarged using bulb outs. A circular set of elements - seatwalls or sign panels could define the space, while paving design would unify it. The actual asphalt roadway surface at the intersection could also become part of the project. Such a design could form a gateway into the Fourth Street retail district.

Room 2 on the other hand, has considerable space available for commemoration. As mentioned in section 1.3.2, the proposed redesign for the rail stop / transit plaza has space at the corners for educational, art, or commemorative panels. The sidewalk paving could also be incorporated into the design. However, the prime space available at this room is the currently wasted canvas of the University Avenue overpass columns and concrete abutment wall right behind the Amtrak station. These columns and wall could be used to display images, text and murals in a number of ways that address the historical strata of this site. Such a design would brighten the general area and could transform it into a vibrant, informative, and mass transit gateway into Berkeley.
Room 3, at Aquatic Park, is logically located at the western end of Addison Street. Here, the wetland edge and the ground plane in front of it could be designed to feel like a lookout; not only to the lagoon and the pedestrian bridge beyond (that has for all intents become the symbolic gateway into Berkeley), but also to the past. Photomontages and commemoration sign panels could educate viewers about how this area looked and felt before it was settled by Europeans, connecting them to the Bay and its flora and fauna, thus forming a gateway into Berkeley from the Marina.

A room based approach has much to offer: as mentioned earlier it would be easier to define and implement while creating places to linger & learn with seating and commemorative elements. And with the power of focused design improvements these rooms could also become gateway elements into the City of Berkeley.

Examples of public art projects which form outdoor rooms include the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, Vietnam Memorial, Japanese American Historical Plaza, and Markings, Revelatory Landscapes.

At the FDR Memorial, stone walls and water are used to form outdoor rooms where the stories of FDR’s presidencies are told. At the Vietnam Memorial, a chevron shaped wall cut into the earth forms a long narrow room.
The Japanese American Historical Plaza forms an outdoor room within Portland’s Waterfront Park defined by upright stone pillars, paving, and walls. In Markings, the area beneath a San Jose freeway is transformed into an outdoor room through the use of reflective silver paint on the freeway’s support pylons. See chapter 4 for more information on each project.
3.2 DISPLAY OPTIONS

This section outlines a variety of display options for commemorative public art. The following display options should be seen as a kit of parts that can be applied to any of the previously discussed design approaches.

3.2.1 KIOSKS OR SIGN PANELS

A very traditional approach to commemorative and interpretive public art are sign panels. Sign panels have the advantage of being able to convey a lot of information. Often, sign panels take a direct textbook type approach, with an abundance of drawing and photo imagery accompanied by text. A number of community members have expressed a preference for this type of element since it need not be too esoteric or subtle, and is easily targeted at a school age audience. To avoid a generic-looking signage panel, the signs can be made in a variety of shapes including square or round kiosks that may be illuminated internally for night time display. Media can vary from metal to glass to light, and artists can be drawn from a number of communities, including Ohlone, to contribute to an overall design.

3.2.2 WALLS

With the linear nature of the space available for public art, walls may be very suitable form for public art. Concrete walls could have text engraved or sandblasted into them, and tiles with photo-transferred imagery affixed to them. As in paving, objects can be cast into the walls as well. Glass can be differentially sandblasted to become opaque - with images and text shown on them.

Two very simple ideas for walls stand forth. The first is to use the wall surface to etch the strata of a historical shellmound showing the layers of cultural deposits, when they were formed, and what they were composed of. This idea is inspired by the original profiles of the mound drawn by Nels Nelson, and it has the potential to be very educational. A second idea is to etch the names of bygone residents along with images of what the shoreline looked like historically. A number of community members brought up the issue that past residents have been forgotten and that identifying them by name and image would be desirable in public art.
Examples of wall-based designs:

Wall based on shellmound Nels Nelson's archaeological survey.

Pictorial relief wall.
3.2.3 PAVING

Paving for sidewalks and even road surfaces can be used in abstract or literal ways to convey information. This may be in the way of embossed or sandblasted text or images, textures cast into it using simple materials such as shells, or objects embedded in it such as replicas of historical artifacts (petroglyphs, arrow heads, jewelry). This display option has been used in many commemoration exhibits and is particularly suited to a site that is widespread and where no one historical object or person is being remembered, as in West Berkeley. Such designs would be strong, yet subtle, since the majority of the commemoration would happen underfoot where a persistent user would have to engage with the ideas being conveyed.

The horizontal plane of the sidewalk would be ideal for such a design option especially since the sidewalks would be easy to rebuild or may be already slated to be rebuilt in upcoming Redevelopment projects. The sidewalk could have text embossed into it and replicas of historical objects cast into it. For example, names of Ohlone residents (that can be researched by historians) could be sandblasted into the sidewalk. The same could be done with names of Ocean View’s original settlers. Replicas of objects found in the Shellmound such as pendants, shells, arrowheads etc. could be cast in metal or ceramic and embedded into the sidewalk concrete as well, creating a rich pattern for users to walk on, look at, and discover. Objects such as blue tiles may be set into the sidewalk to indicate the original location of Strawberry Creek and the Shoreline, while poetry could added to the mix as well to create a tapestry of images and messages that address the cultural history of the site.

A completely different yet linear approach may be to place text and graphics (such as impressed outlines of animals, birds, fish, insects, reptiles, plants present historically in the area) in the ground plane in a more organized way, such as a historical timeline, that could tell the story of the Bay formation, its inhabitants arrival and periods of residence on this site, and the changes to the natural landscape that have resulted as the land has been settled.