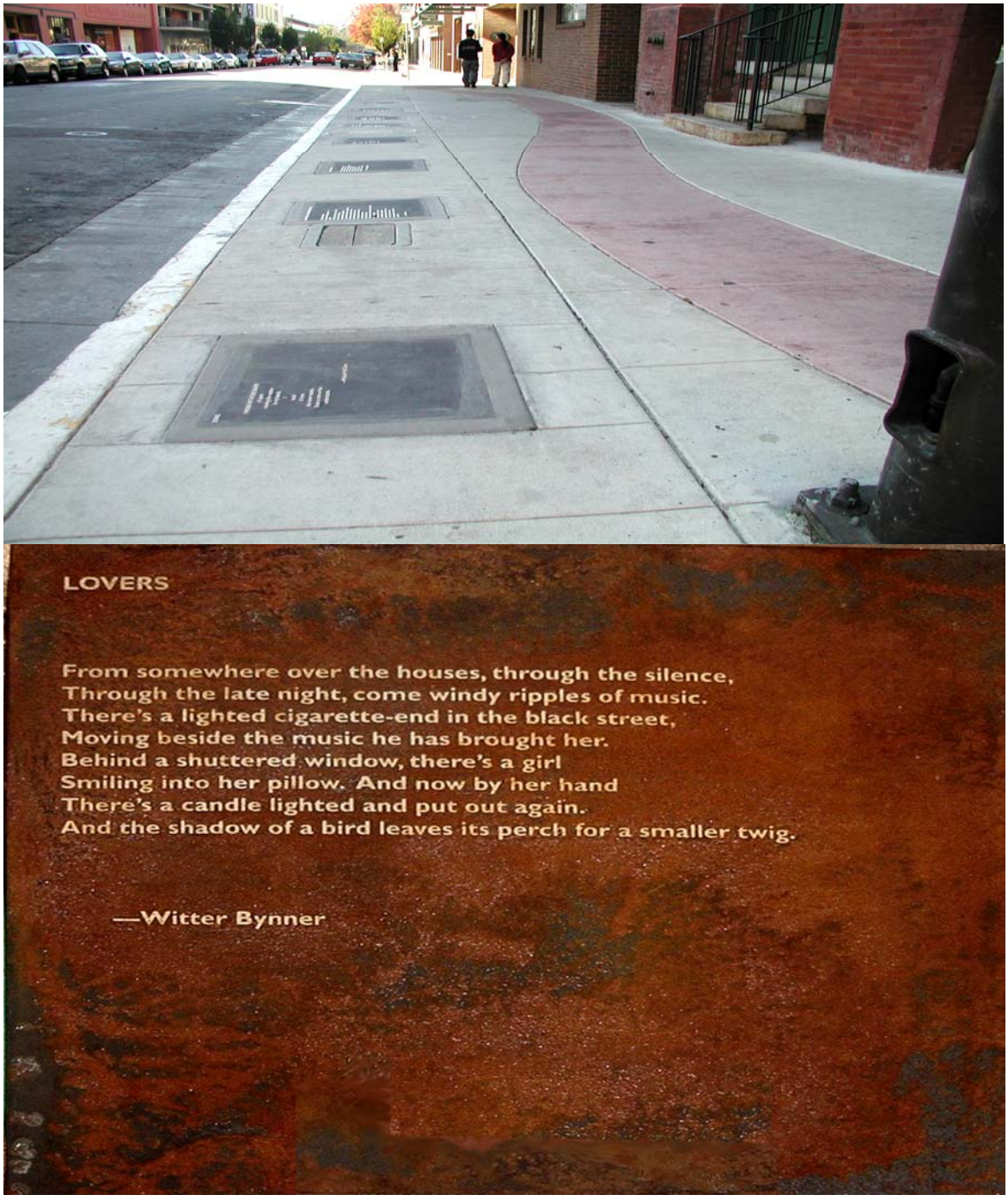
Public Art
THE BERKELEY POETRY WALK AND ANTHOLOGY

A Collection of Essays by the City of Berkeley Staff Team and the Collaborative Community



City Of Berkeley, Civic Arts Program
Office of Economic Development
The Civic Arts Commission And Community Volunteers

Introduction

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A Collection of Essays by the City of Berkeley Staff Team and the Collaborative Community

MARY ANN MERKER, Project Manager, City of Berkeley

Over two tons of poetry in over 120 specially fabricated panels are embedded in both sides of the sidewalk on Addison Street in downtown Berkeley in the area known as the Downtown Addison Street Arts District.

Because the task was so daunting and the results so positive, we have received many inquiries on how this was done. These inquiries are from private companies (Sony Metreon in San Francisco), graduate students writing their theses (University of Texas), other cities, community members, university professors writing books (Stanford) and the press.

As the Project Manager I have asked the team members to each write an essay on their contributions to serve as a response and to continue the spirit of generosity and sharing that made this project a reality. Some of the essays are very technical and some are more personal but all the statements represent the many facets of a single project.

As the City Project Manager I was charged with shepherding the dream into reality. The work involved assembling the team and then working with the team to solve all legal and technical challenges. It was a job that constantly involved problem solving. What we were doing was being done for the first time in both the fabrication of new materials and the number of panels embedded in a pedestrian walk way on a busy street. This was made even more challenging by limited funding. We had to find creative ways to raise new monies and create new materials for fabrication that were durable, beautiful and economical.

We encountered many setbacks and delays. Some involved the infamous "energy crises" that the state of California went through that eventually led us to the Tennessee Valley for an innovative company that specialized in steel enameling and public art. Two companies had previously gone bankrupt before we found Cherokee Porcelain and Steel. This company had previously done restoration work in Grand Central Station and the Statue of Liberty in New York City as well as public art for the Cities of Chicago, Denver and Boston. They were willing to work with us to explore new materials. There were many technical problems that we overcame as a team to complete the project.

Placing materials on a public street required that we meet all the public safety regulations and material "slip tests" as well as meet all the disability access codes. The poetry panel materials had to pass these tests and the lettering had to be readable to all our citizens. Scott Donahue, Technical Consultant, and I attended the conference on disability access in Oakland sponsored by the Western States Arts Federation. The former disability coordinator and I had submitted a paper to this conference and we were asked to be a presenter. Scott and I addressed a room full of arts activists from around the country, many of whom who were physically challenged themselves. They were very excited about the entire streetscape concept and gave us valuable insights on how to make the whole experience user friendly to all citizens. We were happy to receive the Model Site in Public Art

award shared with the San Francisco Asian Art Museum for Disability Access for Public Art in 2000, Best in the West.

The funding for the Downtown Arts District was made possible by a voter-approved bond issue, called Measure S specifically intended for downtown improvement. The fabrication of the poetry panels came from this source. A donated match from private citizens funded the actual installation of the panels. Robert Hass, former Poet Laureate of the United States and Professor at the University of California at Berkeley, volunteered his time as a gift to the Berkeley community and chose the poetry with the oversight of the citizen Civic Arts Commission. John Roberts, landscape architect and initial designer of the streetscape, donated all of his time for the poetry panel project as well. Steven Huss, who was hired to help manage several public art projects connected to Measure S improvements, worked many unpaid hours to help us develop the poetry panels project and coordinate it with the art panels in the sidewalk on Addison Street. His strong recommendation that the City hire a technical consultant led us to Scott Donahue. Scott, technical consultant, continued giving his time even after his small consultant contract ran out, to develop nothing less than a brand new way to fabricate the panels so we could proceed to make over a hundred panels with our limited budget. The list goes on and on of selfless contributions by Berkeley citizens and staff with a great love for the project.

The Berkeley Poetry Walk and Anthology is a truly collaborative team effort of the citizens of the City of Berkeley, the City staff and the Civic Arts Commission. The idea for the Arts District and using poetry came from many meetings with all the above which over time evolved into a structured public art project, collaborative in every way.

This project was the fulfillment of a dream that spanned over a decade of planning. A core group of staff and community kept the vision over the years it took to bring this project to fruition and demonstrates what a creative and collaborative community can accomplish.

Thank you to the citizens of Berkeley and to all involved, as this truly was and is a "labor of love."

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1. **ROBERT HASS,** Former Poet Laureate of the United States and Professor at University of California at Berkeley

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

The appealing things about the Addison Street project, as it was described to me by John Roberts and Mary Ann Merker at my first meeting with the project team, were the boldness and unlikeliness of it all and a sense of initiative, creativity and enthusiasm in the people at the meeting, including John, Mary Ann, Susie Medak from Berkeley Repertory Theater, Archana Horsting from Kala Art Institute, Bira Almeida from Capoeira, Malcom Margolin from HeyDay Press, Scott Donahue, public artist, the Manager of the Office of Economic Development for the City of Berkeley and many others from the community and city staff. It was clear that they weren't just showing up for work. They were excited about doing something to make Berkeley--always an improbable and lively place--more livable and the downtown more attractive and interesting. As for the project itself, I wondered. The drawing showed places for more than a hundred panels. That was an awful lot of poetry. Of course, it was theoretically possible to do anything with it. One could put one word, even one letter, in each panel. It could be an acrostic, a form of verbal hopscotch. It could be an anthology of Icelandic poetry or Trobriand Island magical chants. It could be permanent blackboards for inscribing and erasing graffiti with their mixed impulses of public art and territorial claim staking.

So that was the first question, if one were going to put language in the street, what kind of language would it be, and why. There was also the question of the material from which the panels would be made. Urban spaces are full of language. There is, if anything, too much of it. Each of the materials in which language is displayed--language imprinted in metal, carved into wood or stone, printed on paper, painted or sprayed onto walls and sidewalks, emblazoned in neon, flashing in one electronic form or another, TV screen or computer screen--carries its own expressive message. There is something official about brass plaques. Paper is fugitive and commercial. And so on. So there was the question of whether adding another kind of language was a good idea at all, whether it would not simply add to the verbal clutter and dilute the force that poetry has because it is not the language of advertising or public regulation. And there was the question of what sort of material, what typography could make poetry work on a public street. If one did add language found a medium to put it in, what kind of language should it be, in this particular place? I had recently read Lucy Lippard's book on public art, *The Lure of the Local*, which has a good deal to say about the tendency of artists to ignore local contexts because they are really making public art that can show up handsomely in art journals. So the question of what to do on a street in the middle of the downtown about halfway between the University and the public high school, on a street that included a much-loved theater, a café, a gym, music and acting schools for aspiring young artists, just off a main commercial street with a few wonderful buildings but no very distinctive character. What would best mirror back to the city its liveliness was also intriguing. All the problems were interesting problems.

My hesitation about getting involved had mainly to do with the sheer commitment of time. My daughter, who teaches American Studies at the University of Michigan and has been interested in thinking about the uses of public space in America, liked the idea of the project. She was also a member of the staff of Imagining America, an initiative of the University of Michigan and the White House Millennium Council during the Clinton administration. Imagining America has been trying to encourage universities, particularly the humanities and social sciences in American Universities with its terrific pool of talent, to become more involved with the communities in which their members live their lives. The Addison Street project sounded very much like the kind of thing Imagining America had in mind. It was a local initiative. It was meant to reflect back to the community its own

vitality, and it was a practical effort to make the commercial and public life of the city more appealing. And, of course, in medium-sized cities, downtown renewal is a good idea, for environmental reasons, and especially if it encourages pedestrians and can be linked to convenient public transportation. "Go for it, Dad." my daughter said, and I took her advice and signed on.

In a previous project that I'd worked on, I'd thought about trying to do something with the depth of poetry in the Bay Area, because there is a rich history, one that I came to be aware of, growing up here. And I had felt conflicting impulses about it. One part of my mind said that in an environment full of the alphabet, with lots of signage, that poetry might reside in silence. The shiny mirroring black marble of the Vietnam Memorial, for example, had more eloquence than any words I could imagine being spoken over the American dead in Vietnam. On the other hand, maybe there was a place for poetry, but my first thought was that it would have to be poetry of glimpses--a phrase here and there, half-hidden, with some surprise in it of sudden beauty or some cognitive jolt. Rare is dear, as the poet says. I found myself thinking about how to hide poems in a cityscape so they wouldn't go dead from being seen over and over again until they were meaningless. In this case, though, in John Robert's conception, there was no place to hide. A hundred or a hundred and twenty whole poems embedded in a city street? It seemed, I confess, like a very bad idea. And then, the more I thought about it, the more I realized that the sheer volume of the poetry solved the problem. Because there was so much poetry, anyone who wanted to read it couldn't take it in on a single walk down the block. Because there was so much poetry, people could walk the street every day and still keep discovering something new. It was one of those cases where the problem was the solution.

Then I began to imagine the history of the poetry of the city and its surrounds, as I understood it: Translations by early anthropologists of the songs of the native peoples who had lived along the eastern shore of San Francisco Bay; songs or poems possibly from the Peraltas, the Mexican Californian family that had held the first land grant where Berkeley now is; the coming of the Americans signaled in gold rush songs of which the University library had a well-known collection. I knew of anonymous ballads carved into the wooden walls of a detention center where Chinese immigrants were detained (and harassed) after the 1906 earthquake. And, part of the same history, I remember reading poems by a Japanese-American UC graduate written in a World War II internment camp. I thought about the rather over-rich early sonnets by European American writers, hardly great poems, but interesting because they tried to apply the language that was their idea of poetry to this new landscape, Keatsian sonnets about the local wildflowers, sonnets in a doomed late nineteenth century symbolist vocabulary about the local vulture. I thought about the early poems of Jack London, who had sold newspapers on the streets of Oakland and the cubist poems of Gertrude Stein who had grown up in the Oakland hills. As I started imaging these poems, this story, marching down both sides of the street, whole poems, so that a person, who actually stopped and read them, would have to take in a particular voice and a particular way of seeing the world, I began to see how it could work. Even in the street--there with the gum, cigarette butts, dog and fast food leavings, and the inevitable graffiti, I thought that, if someone had the imagination, for the right physical design, something forceful and understated and simple, it could work.

There was much more in the Berkeley tradition. Several avant-gardes had sprung up around and against the university over the years. Two Nobel laureates had written here, several Pulitzer Prize winners, and because it was a town of salaried and unsalaried scholars, it was also a place that had produced a good deal of translation. One could probably do a history of poetry from ancient Greece to classical T'ang dynasty China to Latin American modernism, just doing Berkeley translators. And there was the song lyric--the Oakland blues scene of the forties begun by black Southerners who had immigrated to shipyard jobs during World War II, lyrics from the folk revival of the fifties, and the protest rock lyric of the sixties. It seemed there was more than enough material. The project team liked the idea of doing a local history. We agreed, immediately, that design was going to make or

break the project and all thought at more or less the same time of the city's most gifted designer, David Lance Goines, and invited him to join us, which he did. The project needed the approval of the Berkeley Arts Commission and got much more than approval from them, especially from poet and Commissioner Adam David Miller who himself carried a good portion of local literary history in his head. And as we imagined the street, the idea of some sort of guidebook with brief biographies of the poets and bits of local lore for residents, for tourists, for curious high school students who would be passing the street daily, seemed like a good idea, and we found another interested citizen collaborator in Malcolm Margolin, publisher of HeyDay Books. All of us understood at this point that there was not a lot of money to make this happen, and we determined--I was coming to understand that this is the way people in the public and non-profit sectors who get things done do get things done--that we would somehow find a way to do it. And the rest was the work and the pleasures of collaboration.

2. **JOHN N. ROBERTS** Landscape Architect and designer of the Addison Streetscape

There was a time not so long ago when a walk in downtown Berkeley was a frightening experience. The sidewalks were dark and dirty. Buildings stood vacant. Windows were boarded up. Strange confrontations and hostile behavior were common, especially at night.

Now, after more than 20 years of hard work, Berkeley citizens have reclaimed the commons and a walk downtown could lead to a sidewalk paved with art and poetry. The streets have trees and well-lit walkways next to richly textured and lively facades of well-proportioned buildings. There are a host of new theaters, jazz in the basements, movies, dance studios, street fairs, window galleries, restored historic buildings, and complementary new structures. There are great restaurants and people living and working here. It is a pleasure to bring a guest to downtown.

The arts, in all their variety, have played a central role in the rejuvenation of the commons. And one of the most unusual developments of all is the Addison Street Poetry Walk, Berkeley's unique recognition of its poetic and cultural heritage. It is hard to imagine another place that would honor its poets as a way of stimulating business in its central district. But in Berkeley, the Poetry Walk is an integral part of the Downtown Berkeley Arts District, an invention of a brave collection of city staff, property owners, businesses, citizen activists, politicians, and supporters of the arts that has brought new life to the downtown.

This change did not just happen. The revitalization of any downtown is a complex and multi-layered community effort. In the case of Berkeley, it has been an act of group creativity, rooted in hope, authentically reflecting local values. The idea of the Poetry Walk evolved from this effort.

DOWNTOWN BERKELEY ARTS DISTRICT

Since the mid-1980's, the community had wanted to create an entertainment or cultural district on Addison Street as a part of a comprehensive renewal of downtown. Berkeley Repertory Theater had settled on the street in 1980, and there was considerable interest in building upon its success to generate complementary activities in the area. The process of creating the Arts District began in earnest in the early 1990's with the City's commitment to help Berkeley Rep expand on Addison Street. There was deep community support and a compelling economic argument in favor of the arts as a tool for downtown revival. By 1995, the City Council formally approved the creation of the Arts District and funded the first of several phases of improvements on the street.

A small volunteer committee worked with city staff and the Civic Arts Commission to figure out what the Arts District would actually be. Nobody knew what it really meant, and this group was charged with the task of invention. It was quickly determined that the District would be a place in which the arts, in all their variety, would be encouraged and displayed both inside the buildings and outside in the public spaces. Committee members John N. Roberts and Susie Medak independently concluded that the language arts and poetry should be part of the mix of art displayed on Berkeley's street. Others soon agreed, so the seeds of the Poetry Walk were sown.

The first phase of urban design work, completed in 1996, created the framework for what was to later become the Poetry Walk. Basic renovations to make the street more pedestrian friendly were put in place, including widened sidewalks, designation of the street as a "Slow Street", and installation of new street trees and pedestrian lights. Arts-related improvements included upgrading the gallery windows in the public parking garage, and installing power outlets for street fairs. In

addition, the future installation of poetry and art into the sidewalk was planned by setting a series of removable two-foot square inserts into the paving just behind the curb. Seven years later, the temporary inserts were replaced with cast-iron panels inscribed with poetry.

A second phase of public improvement was completed in 2001. In addition to the opening of Berkeley Rep's new 600-seat Roda Theater, the sidewalks were re-paved, additional street trees planted, and several abandoned curb cuts were closed. The new paving included a red serpentine band of concrete and 12 additional removable inserts that cut across the entire sidewalk as placeholders for specially commissioned pieces of paving art to be installed in the future.

Physical improvements were coupled with zoning changes to encourage ground floor arts uses in the buildings in the Arts District, and tenants were actively solicited. Arts groups like the Capoeira Arts Cafe, Freight & Salvage, The JazzSchool, The Aurora Theater, downtown Restaurant, and others chose to join Berkeley Rep and make their home on Addison Street. Developers were encouraged to include art on the facades of their new buildings. And the historic Bakery building was renovated to become a theater school. The new uses were generating a creative heat that flowed back and forth between the buildings and the street, and the public/private and volunteer effort was succeeding.

ART ON THE SIDEWALKS

The improvements to the public space in the Arts District were intended to make Addison Street a pedestrian-friendly, rich, and lively experience for all. Art has been layered into the physical structure of otherwise ordinary public facilities and it has become part of the unusual texture of daily life on the street. Artwork that is fully integrated into the space helps to form the impression that this is a place where creativity is valued in all its variety. Sidewalk paving art, sculpture, performance art, temporary art installations, a public window gallery, and poetry/language arts are integral parts of the overall street design.

The ordinary concrete sidewalk is the canvas on which the different expressions come together, linked by a sinuous red concrete ribbon. A large abstract ceramic sculpture anchors the easterly entry to the district, outside a gateway of elegant painted historic lights. On Addison Street, twelve pieces of paving art cut across the sidewalk in roughly equal intervals, segmenting the 600-foot long corridor into a comfortable cadence with the trees, lights, and building entries. Eight local artists, each using different materials and different sources of inspiration created the pieces and installed them throughout 2002. Subtly stitching the whole composition together are 127 dark rust-colored cast iron panels with baked enamel poems on the surface. The two-foot square panels were installed in 2003. The poetry wraps around the entire street in a regular rhythm just behind the curb and slightly out of the main flow of traffic to frame the sidewalk and allow people to encounter a new poem each few steps.

The artwork is by local artists and each poem has a specific relationship with Berkeley. The work on this street is a celebration of the creative energy within this community. Art structures the public space while supporting and extending the cultural activities within the buildings. The integrated design reflects the fundamental value of creativity to this community. The success of the Arts District reveals that revitalization, as a true community-building process, nurtures and acknowledges local creative expression; and that unlike anything else, art enriches otherwise ordinary physical improvements and has unexpected economic power.

THE ADDISON STREET POETRY WALK

One of the most extraordinary experiences in the District is to read an anthology of poems while moving along the sidewalk. Language arts are central to Berkeley's creative and cultural heritage and are embedded in the experience of the Arts District. Robert Hass, the former Poet Laureate of the United States and a Berkeley resident, volunteered to select poems with a connection to Berkeley to fit into the slots in the paving. The poems are either about Berkeley, by poets that have lived in this city, or related to a local institution. This singular display makes poetry from all eras of Berkeley's cultural and literary history readily accessible to everyone.

Individually, the poems are rich examples of language art by some of the best-known poets in the world. As a collection, and arranged in general chronological order, they make an unusual cultural history of this particular city. And as pieces of public art, they are handsome additions to the downtown space. There are translated songs of the local Ohlone people, Mexican rancho era song/poems, love poems, reflections on nature and cities and politics, searching poems, expressions of joy and sorrow, humor, and over a hundred other excellent and diverse works.

The poems honor the literary tradition of this city and the great poets whose lives or work have intersected with this place. As a reflection of the rich resources available in this city, this is probably the densest concentration of poetry in a sidewalk to be found anywhere. It is almost too much to absorb at one time, and it is a strange place to read poetry, but it is deeply compelling and an unexpected complement to the other activities on the street. People read and move on, and then return time and again to read some more or to rediscover a favorite and be drawn into the other activities on the street. When a person stops to read, a little congestion is often created on the sidewalk, disrupting the steady flow, making eddy spaces, and allowing people to encounter things or people they might not otherwise see.

The Poetry Walk adds to the distinctions already given to the District. The Downtown Berkeley Arts District has been nationally recognized as an effective downtown-planning tool. The District won the 2001 statewide Grand Prize for Economic Development from the California Association of Economic Development. Berkeley Rep has won a Tony Award for Best Regional Theater. Major architectural awards have been given to new and renovated buildings on the street.

The Addison Street sidewalks are one of the city's first public art projects. Your feet can now be kissed by large white lips, you can walk on a web of imaginary tree roots, you can read about unique moments in Berkeley's past, and touch nine other unusual artistic expressions along the path. There are ever-changing exhibits in the window gallery. And you can pause to read exquisite poetry from all eras of Berkeley's history. This ordinary sidewalk has become extra and ordinary.

3. **SCOTT DONAHUE,** Technical Consultant, and Public Artist

I was hired as Technical Consultant to:

- Help select artists for the Addison Street Arts District.
- Advise artists on ways to make their esthetic ideas meet the physical requirements of their artwork being installed in the sidewalk: to code and durable.
- Work with Berkeley's Disability Coordinator to insure that the artwork and poetry was accessible and safe.
- Find a cost-effective and esthetic way to install poems in the 130 designated places in the Arts District.

- Find a materials testing company and get all the materials to be used in the sidewalk friction-tested.
- Negotiate a design contract with David Goines for the typography of the poetry panels and present his design to the City of Berkeley.
- Find a supplier of enameling-grade iron for the poetry plaques.
- Find a fabricator to print and fire porcelain enamel poems on cast iron.
- Test durability and make judgments about methods, materials and aesthetics.

My principal role was to find an aesthetic way to install poetry in the Addison Street sidewalks, and at the same time meet all safety, durability and accessibility requirements – within the designated budget.

The selection panel that hired me suggested I look into glazed ceramic tile or cast bronze for the poetry panels. Both of these materials presented significant problems. While ceramic had good color possibilities, there was the danger it would chip, and would not meet the non-slip requirements. It also presented problems since each poem was divided into four parts. However, Berkeley's budget could just barely afford the ceramic tile method.

The cast bronze method cost three times more than the budget allowed, and also had some aesthetic problems. For example, the letterforms cast shadows at certain times of the day, making readability difficult. Also, to get the coefficient of friction high enough to meet Berkeley's non-slip requirements texture had to be added around the letters, making them harder to read. I had to find another way.

The cast-iron tree grates and utility-hole covers on the street gave me the idea of firing porcelain enamel letters on the iron while leaving the rest of the plate to rust naturally, creating the necessary friction to resist slipping. I then got the city to give me the budget to start testing.

I found a reputable porcelain enameller in Santa Rosa named Fireforms, but just after the samples passed the slip test it went bankrupt. The rise in natural gas prices in California forced me to look outside the state. I finally found Southwest Porcelain Enamel Corp. in Oklahoma. This company was able to do the work for the same price as Fireforms. They even found a much cheaper supplier of enamel-grade iron in China. However, they ran into financial trouble and were bought out by Cherokee Porcelain Enamel of Tennessee, which successfully completed the job at the original price.

4. **DIANA AIKENHEAD,** Engineering Inspector, City of Berkeley

The Arts Sidewalk was a formidable task to plan check, since we had absolutely no experience with the artists' materials and proposed installations; the artists, in turn, had relatively little experience in working in a public right-of-way. I would highly recommend to anyone doing this kind of project to have an experienced consultant like Scott Donahue to iron out the differences between the city and the artists.

We defined our goals within the limits of the jurisdiction of Public Works. We did not review the art for its aesthetics or its appeal; the Arts Commission commissioned each piece using their own selection process. Each piece was reviewed for its proposed location, accessibility, slip resistance, and durability requirements.

The Disabled Access Coordinator looked at the art for conformance with ADAAG guidelines -- no relief greater than 1/2" was permitted unless it was beveled at 45 degrees. No art, which presented a tripping hazard, was permitted. We encouraged artists to make their art interactive if possible. Pieces which had relief (Make Art) also had built-in wheel strips for wheelchair users because the chair users informed us that it was often painful to "bump" across these panels. None of the art installed had voids that could trap a high-heeled shoe or a walking cane.

Engineering reviewed each piece for its conformance with known standards for coefficient of friction and durability. The art was expected to meet or exceed standards for concrete sidewalks. This included having a compressive strength of 2500 psi, a slip resistance of .65 in both wet and dry circumstances, and each piece was expected to have the durability of concrete. Thanks to Testing Engineers in Oakland for helping us with the laboratory tests. As a result of testing, several pieces were relocated because they could not meet the test criteria for installation in the sidewalk area. Footings and connections for sculptures were checked to make sure they were engineered to withstand wind loads and overturning moments. We checked to make sure that if something catastrophic happened to a sculpture (such as a vehicle collision), minimal liability would be incurred. We even checked the location to make sure there were no underlying basements below the art and in areas where the building fronts or basement ceilings were waterproofed. We made sure the waterproofing was not compromised. We tried to make sure the proposed locations were not in conflict with utilities such as water, gas, sewer, but we also had to make the artists aware that sometimes the utilities need repair, and the art might be compromised. Lastly, we required that the installer have a professional contractor's license and required each of the installations to obtain a permit from Public Works.

All in all, it was a great learning experience. There were great moments, and some not so good. We all cringed as one of the utilities worked on a water line immediately adjacent to a piece of art. The meandering sidewalk band has not been well accepted by the visually impaired, because they tend to follow the colored band and not walk in a straight line down the street. I also found it difficult to match the color of colored concrete when doing a partial installation -- the concrete masons had difficulty in laying out the pattern.

Many obstacles were overcome as artists and City staff bickered and debated over some very huge and some very tiny details. As my supervisor (and reviewing civil engineer) Ted Zupan puts it, "In Berkeley, its not the “Art of Engineering”, its the "Engineering of the Art".

5. STEVEN HUSS, Public Art Consultant

I became involved in the poetry panels project early on while coordinating a series of sidewalk artwork inserts in the Addison Street Arts District – one of several public art projects I was hired to manage connected with bond improvement projects in downtown Berkeley. In the end, we put 10 art pieces into the sidewalks and two on nearby walls, all by Berkeley artists. The artworks were conceived as part of a streetscape anthology that would include the poetry. I’ve been managing public art projects for nearly 20 years, and in my experience the Berkeley poetry panels are unique for their rich use of locally-based literature in a public art context and for the commitment of the many talented professional who carried out this labor of love.

The addition of artist Scott Donahue, as technical consultant, was vital to my sidewalk artists and the poetry panel’s team. Without Scott, I believe the poetry panels project would still be a grand idea unrealized. Scott did the diligent research, experimentation and negotiation that were essential to discovering the right combination of materials for this application and to getting the panels designed, fabricated and installed.

I was thrilled to manage the downtown art projects because of my fondness for Berkeley, where I lived as a child, and my desire to add something to its permanent landscape. Contrary to rumor, I didn't get the job through nepotism (it's H U S S, not H A S S).

6. MICHAEL CAPLAN, City Manager's Office, City of Berkeley

The Downtown Berkeley Arts District – Arts-Based Economic Development

My involvement with the Downtown began in late 1989 when I was hired by the Berkeley Office of Economic Development to lead an effort to revitalize the City's historic Downtown District. At that time, the Downtown was somewhat nondescript, apart from its richness in early 20th century architecture. Not only was there no Arts District, but local business leaders and City officials felt that Downtown lacked any sense of economic identity. While arts and entertainment institutions had a significant presence in the area, at the time the Berkeley Repertory Theater was planning to move to Oakland. Most of the more than 20 movie screens in Downtown were in seismically unsafe buildings. Downtown retail space suffered a nearly 20 percent vacancy rate and the area's sidewalks and public infrastructure were old and in need of upgrade. It was clear to everybody that the first order of business was to create a compelling identity for the area, one that stood out in the context of the region's competing commercial districts.

The first step in this direction occurred in 1990 when we successfully got the Downtown designated as an Urban Main Street Pilot District by the State of California and the National Main Street Center. The result of a close partnership between the City and the nascent Downtown Berkeley Association (DBA), the Main Street program became the foundation for promoting the Downtown's historic architectural and design assets and collaborating with the City about its economic direction.

The early 1990's were essentially a period of building the Main Street Program's organizational capacity and vision, generating direction and support for a long-term economic development strategy. The City and the business community understood that Berkeley's cultural resources were a valuable economic asset and in the past citizens and planners had mulled the notion of building up the Downtown as cultural center of the City. But questions remained: what form should it take and was it worth the investment?

The serious effort of developing the current Arts District got its first big spark in 1992 when the Office of Economic Development did a detailed market analysis that compared Downtown Berkeley to other commercial districts in the region. We determined that arts and entertainment establishments along with restaurants were the key factors in attracting people to the area. This information was a critical revelation and City staff along with the Downtown business community concluded that the best Downtown economic development strategy was to build on the district's existing strengths -- arts and entertainment.

Around the time of this insight Addison Street became the focus of the City's attention. The Berkeley Repertory Theater was located there and had been planning to expand, possibly in Oakland. To help convince the Berkeley Rep Board to stay on Addison Street, Mayor Loni Hancock engineered a waiver of penalties for a property owner that served to assist the Berkeley Rep's acquisition of land adjacent to its existing site. The Berkeley Rep's decision to stay ensured that Downtown would retain a critical performing arts anchor and stimulated discussions about how to build-up Addison Street as the core of an Arts District. It was clear that improvements to the physical environment of the Addison streetscape would be crucial in attracting other arts

organizations here, as well as help us position ourselves economically as a regional center for the arts.

To support this effort, City staff garnered some capital funds to do initial streetscape improvements along that block of Addison Street. This project became the focus of regular intense discussions between the City, the DBA, members of the Arts Commission, and the broader arts community. While ideas concerning public art such as the poetry squares hadn't yet crystallized, enhanced notions of place and public architecture certainly did.

Donn Logan, a local architect whose firm was located on Addison Street, was a member of the DBA Design Committee and he contributed a preliminary design for improvements to the street and sidewalk. This plan envisioned widening the sidewalks to create a more pedestrian-friendly environment, new sidewalk lighting and specialty street paving to create a plaza-like feel for public festivals and events – a great "outdoor room" where the street itself would be wired to accommodate music and on-street performances. This plan became the conceptual basis for all future physical improvements to the block. The Design Committee was thrilled with the idea and the DBA Board adopted the plan on a conceptual basis.

Shortly after the Logan design was circulated, John Northmore Roberts, a local Landscape Architect, joined in the discussions and took the lead in moving the Addison Street design development process forward, helping refine the design and integrating elements of public art, working closely with City staff and the arts community. As the discussions proceeded lots of ideas were on the table: public art in the sidewalk, bands of color, sculptural forms, or the possibility of small art squares that could eventually accommodate sculpture or other art pieces. What was particularly interesting about these ideas as they crystallized was that we didn't know in the end exactly what types of art would be included in the project. Everyone understood this was going to be a long-term project and what was needed was a unifying vision for the district – and sidewalk "placeholders" that could someday accommodate art and/or poetry.

The power of the Arts District idea caught fire in Berkeley and in 1994 the City Council adopted a Downtown Public Improvements Plan that specified the conceptual improvements to the Addison Street as the Downtown Arts District. It was also in 1994 that Mayor Dean based her successful Mayoral campaign on building the Arts District as the guiding force of Downtown revitalization. This period was a time of great enthusiasm and excitement about the potential of the arts to revitalize the area. I remember having endless conversations with anyone who might be able to assist our nascent Arts District development efforts -- Addison Street property owners, developers, local merchants and real estate brokers, and potential cultural users of the area. Increased interest in the arts raised the profile of the City's Civic Arts program and substantial new funding for public art was garnered from both General Fund and City bond proceeds targeted for Downtown Improvements.

As the physical design of the Arts District was developing, City Staff, the Arts Commission and others investigated public art programs in other cities seeking out ideas and inspiration. Important influences included the cities of Seattle and Chicago who had both used art in their commercial districts as defining and emotionally engaging elements of the pedestrian landscape. The famous celebrity stars of Hollywood Boulevard were certainly part of the inspiration for our original "art squares", now our poetry squares. Another less well-known street that sparked our interest was Brady Street, located in Milwaukee Wisconsin, where a partnership of the city and the local area association installed a special sidewalk treatment that successfully defined the area as an artistic district. They used a band of colored concrete along the edge of the sidewalk and sandblasted it with artistic designs and allusions to the history and cultural diversity of the neighborhood.

In the end the City, the DBA and the Arts Commission chose a concept quite different –and a bit more ambitious – than those used on either Hollywood Boulevard or Brady Street. With John Northmore Roberts' guidance we settled on an approach that integrates a diversity of art pieces of varying sizes, media and styles embedded directly into the street – all of which would be selected at some unknown point in the future. Placeholders for 12 large art pieces and 120 regularly spaced "art squares" were planned and designed. After lots of tweaking, a final design was approved by the Arts Commission and the City Council in 1995.

In 1996, the sidewalk was widened and the placeholder "art squares" were constructed in a band along the curbface. In the period after installation it was decided that placement of poetry was the preferred artistic design solution for the squares. People were excited by the fact that Berkeley has such a rich history of significant poets who called the City home for a time and wrote important work here. And as good fortune would have it Robert Hass, who at the time was the U.S. Poet Laureate, agreed to consult with the City, eventually stepping up to edit the project.

Thanks to Measure S Bond funds a second major phase of physical improvements was completed on Addison Street in 2001 and the first of the sidewalk public art was set in the ground over the course of 2002. And now in the fall of 2003 the installation of 120 poetry squares has finally been carried forward and implemented – the crowning glory of the Downtown Arts District. Just as initially imagined, the poetry squares very successfully serve as a unifying element for the entire street – and magnificently complement the District's numerous other art pieces now set into the sidewalk, on display in the Addison Street window galleries, or integrated into the sides of buildings. The many new arts and cultural venues that have located along Addison Street are all pleased and excited by this loving gift that now graces their street.

The success of the poetry squares project is a testament to the vision and active participation of its extraordinarily dedicated designers along with the many individuals who provided critical technical and support services to the effort. The Addison Street Arts District as a whole owes its success to a rare combination of early vision, creative city planning, artistic talent, patience and a strong partnership between the arts community, business leadership and the City of Berkeley. I am truly proud to have been a part of it.

7. VINCENT CHEN, Public Works Engineer

I became involved in this project midway through the process. Pink placeholder concrete squares had been in the sidewalk for some time. John Roberts had designed the street layout, Bob Hass already selected the poems, and the panel's fabrication process was underway. My involvement in this project can be broken down to the following three categories:

- Preparing project specifications
- Getting approval from the Mayor and City Council for this project
- Preparing the panels for installation

Generating specifications for this project was challenging, as this project is the first of its kind. Fortunately, a test panel was previously installed and we could address any issues from that installation in this specifications. One major concern was the large concrete cracks around the test panel. We discovered the test installation used expansive grout, and the pressures from the grout caused the cracking. We considered installing filler material between the panel and the concrete to allow room for expansion, but we realized that major cracking would be avoided simply by

using standard sidewalk concrete instead of expansive grout. The decision not to use filler material was later confirmed in the pre-construction meeting, as participants viewed the filler as detracting from the panel's aesthetics, and were willing to accept any minor cracking that may accompany concrete sidewalk work.

After the specifications were prepared, the project was open for bidding, and a contractor was selected for this project. I prepared a Council Report and Resolution to obtain Mayor and Council approvals for allowing this contractor to do the work at their bid price. After the Resolution was approved, I assembled the contract and Public Works Administration approved it. Preparing the panels for installation was the most physically challenging part of this project. The panels were shipped with a numbering sequence that had to be revised, so we lifted each 55-pound panel out of the crate, re-labeled it, and placed it back in the crate. The numbering sequence was changed once again, so that meant another round of lifting and re-labeling the panels. The panels arrived in the crate in no particular order, so we grouped the 123 panels in 10 piles on the floor of the warehouse in the City's Corporation Yard, organized according to panel numbers. The contractor installed the panels in sequence starting from panel # 1; therefore it was important to organize the panels so the contractor could easily take a pile (panel numbers 1-13, for example) for that day's work. We were also concerned with the effectiveness of the panel to concrete bond, since the smooth cast iron panels embedded 1/2" into the surrounding concrete did not seem very secure to us. Even though the panels are a hefty 55 pounds each, we wanted to make sure that someone with a crowbar could not pry one loose. The solution was to use sealant to attach perforated angles to the back of the panels. The contractor applied the angles and sealant to the panel 24 hours prior to installation to allow the sealant enough time to cure. Though this solution has not been tested, and we hope it never will be, it does provide stronger anchorage of the panels.

Lastly, Adrian Merry, the engineering inspector was at the jobsite daily watching over the installation. On the first day, the contractor set up pedestrian barricades and demolished all the panels on the north side of Addison Street. The next day, the contractor poured enough concrete for 30-40 panel locations, and hand installed each panel in place. After these panels were installed, the next concrete pour was scheduled, sometimes later that same day, sometimes the next day. The freshly poured concrete was sufficiently hard and dry to prevent the 55-pound panel from sinking into the concrete. By limiting the amount of concrete poured each day, the contractor had enough time to install the panels before the concrete set. After panels were installed, the contractor cleaned each panel to remove any concrete stuck on top of the panels.

8. <u>CONTEE SEELY</u>, Longtime Berkeley Resident

After I read about the installation of the plaques on the Poetry Walk in the October 30, 2003, San Francisco Chronicle, I went to have a look. I'm not a habitual poetry reader, and yet I found myself reading with fascination lots of poems. In half an hour I read more poetry than I had read the rest of the year--a great diversity ranging from Chinese Li Po (699-762 A.D.), whose translators were U.C. professors, to Shakespeare, many of whose works have been presented on stage in Berkeley, to 60s and beyond singer-songwriter Country Joe McDonald, to current-day street poet Julia Vinograd and Berkeley professor Ishmael Reed.

In the Chronicle article I had read that Robert Hass said that, in the process of selecting the poems, he had come across a number of interesting stories relating to the selections. He said that he wanted to publish a book of the poems and about their authors, a book that would serve as a guide for students and others. Funds were needed to publish it. The Internet helped me find Professor Hass, and we spoke and met. And then I met with members of the group of mostly

volunteers that had worked on the project for several years and had managed to convert this ethereal dream into over two solid tons of poetry. I was happy to contribute to the anthology book project. I would encourage others who are able to to contribute to Berkeley arts. The Poetry Walk and the rest of the Downtown Addison Street Arts District make this unique city even more unique.

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