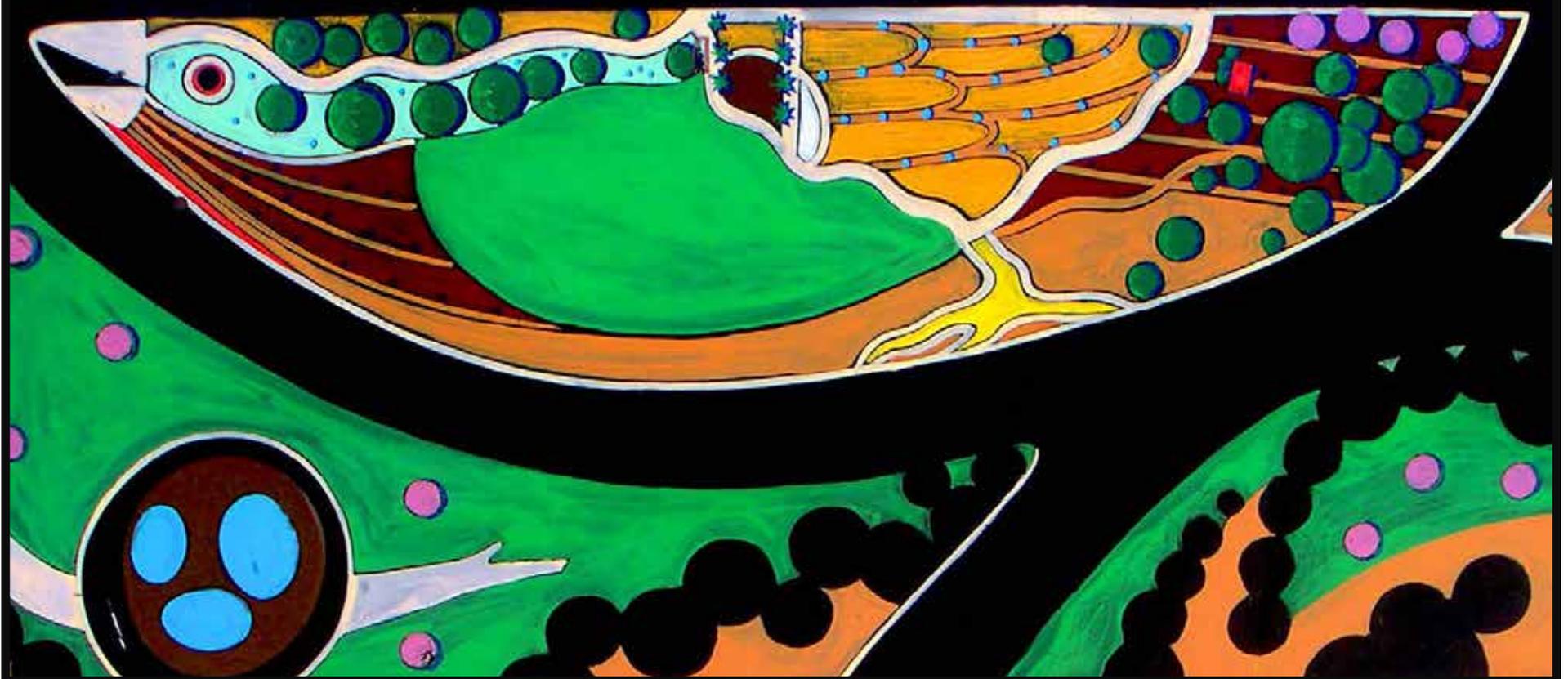


**CHILDREN'S ENTRANCE TO BALBOA PARK**

# **BIRD PARK**

**SITE REVITALIZATION**

**PUBLIC ART PROPOSAL - SUMMER 2020**



# INTRODUCTION

As Steve Hon wrote in his 2012 article about BIRD PARK (San Diego Uptown News):

## Once upon a time in North Park.....

*In 1902, Samuel Parsons, president of the American Society of Landscape Architects and the superintendent of Central Park in New York City, accepted a commission to design San Diego's city park. When taken for a tour of the vast, undeveloped area that had been set aside, Parsons became lyrical about the view from the northeast corner of the park that became the corner of 28th and Upas streets. Standing there, he compared the view of the Coronado Islands to the "stately pleasure dome of Xana Du decreed by Kubla Khan." The corner was, for years thereafter, called "Parsons' Gate."*

*Despite Samuel Parsons's identification of the northeast corner of what would be Balboa Park as having one of the best views in the entire park, that corner would be one of the last areas to be developed. It would be 95 years before Parsons's vision would become Bird Park.*

The creation of BIRD PARK began over thirty years ago with an idea for a children's park in one of the last developed areas of Balboa Park. Wallace Roberts and Todd team artist Robin Brailsford realized the site's half-moon shape suggested a perchiform bird.

With an approximately \$4 million dollar investment, the City completed the park in 1997. Funding restrictions dictated that not all iconic public art elements were incorporated in the initial build.



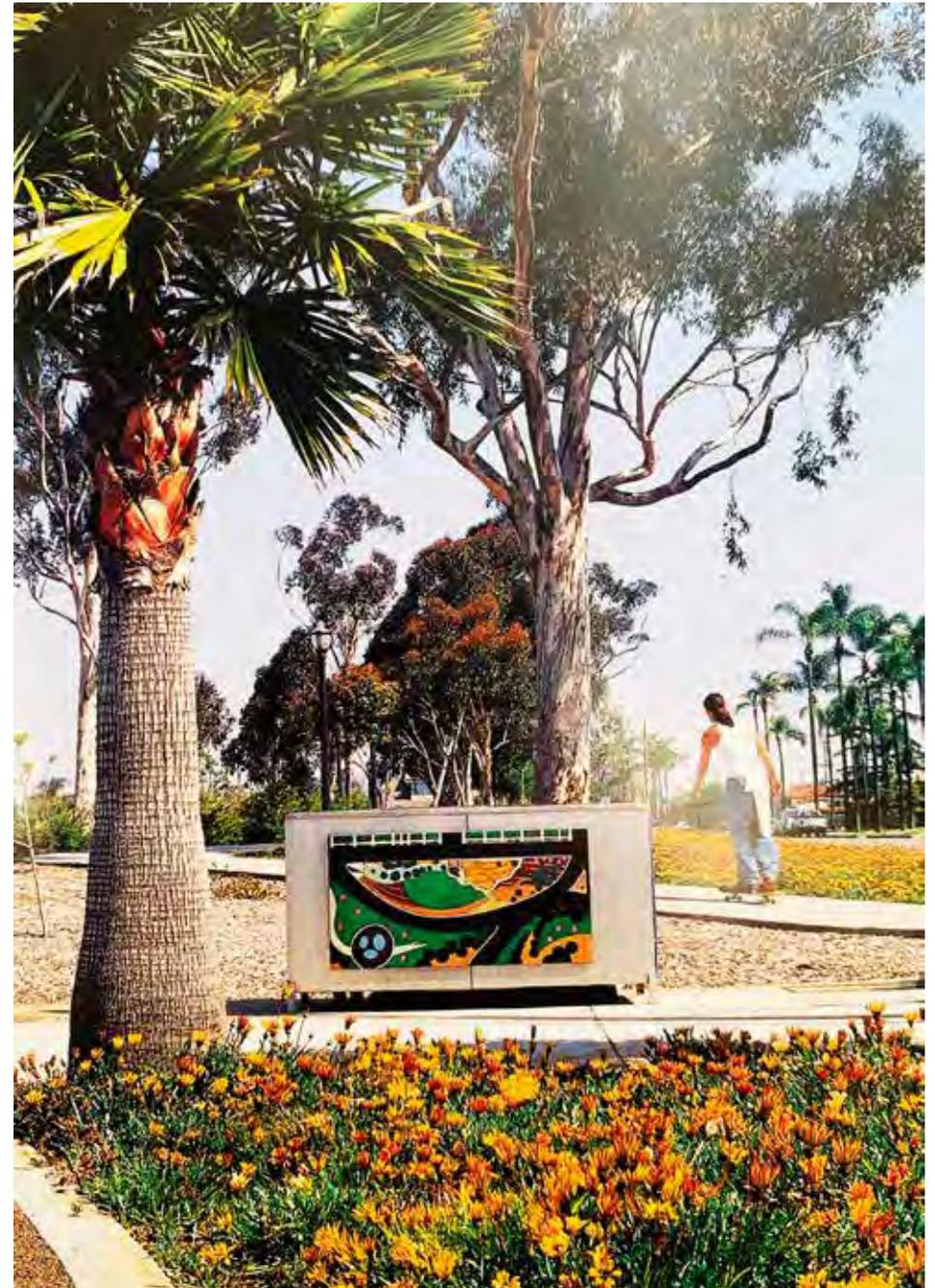
The Official Children's Entrance to Balboa Park, BIRD PARK was designed to incorporate all five senses in an integrated play and nature-based environment. For the past 25 years, the park has provided imaginative play and enjoyment for preschool-aged children and their family.

Time has taken its toll on BIRD PARK. Revitalization is needed to maintain the integrity and excellence that Balboa Park deserves. BIRD PARK hardscape, existing public art and mature trees remain in good condition. The wear and tear on play equipment and the degradation of the landscaping needs addressing. The public art program needs to be completed. The upgrades are all included in a new set of plans by Dennis Otsuji and found at the end of this document.

The world has been permanently changed by COVID-19 and by the loss of human connection that it brings. Our youth have been impacted significantly with the drastic shift from a world with smiles and human touch to masks and social distancing.

Now more than ever, the public; especially our children, need nature and the outdoors for a place to play, for comfort, serenity, and a connection to each other and to nature.

Let's give our residents the park they deserve by revitalizing Balboa's BIRD PARK.





## PUBLIC ART ELEMENTS INSTALLED - All are in excellent shape:

**Bird Brain:** Porcelain enamel interpretive pictograph panels (with no words - for little kids to understand) are installed on the park's brain, aka its electrical and irrigation control boxes. These panels include a large map of BIRD PARK, as well as a map of the green areas in San Diego that birds frequent, and a panel of egg formation. There is a diagram of a bird's internal organs, and an image of a bird's powerful heart. The set includes a dedication plaque, an image of the evolution of dinosaurs to birds (on a trash barrel), and instructions for the Game of the Golden Goose.

**Perching Birds of San Diego and Local Birds of North Park:** The names of over 120 birds are sandblasted into BIRD PARK sidewalks, assembled in collaboration with the ornithologists at the San Diego Natural History Museum.

**Game of the Golden Goose:** The proper number (80) and size of panels have been cast as a concrete sidewalk, for this adventure board game. It was brought to the West from the Orient by Marco Polo, as a gift to the King of Italy, and is destined to function here for neighborhood kids.

**Lark's Egg:** A lovely poem by children's author Frances Wosmek is sandblasted into the seatwalls at the NEST, EYE, and WING. It suggests the hopes the mother has for the child.

**Tot Lots:** Two play areas, sculpted into the forms of a NEST and GIZZARD are installed, and some minimal play equipment exists.

**Bird Eye:** The bird eye foundation is there awaiting the construction of the gazebo.

**BIRD PARK Concerts:** The park is beloved for this series of summer, family-friendly concerts.



## PHASE II - YET TO BE ACCOMPLISHED

Dennis Otsuji's new plans detail all the changes needed - including supplemental irrigation and landscape materials for every area of the park, and ADA corrections to sidewalks and slopes. They address 30 year's worth of wear to the park and deliver beauty, function, fun, and up-to-date code adherence. These are CIP costs.

To realize the remaining, iconic, STEAM public art elements, grants, or private philanthropy of approximately \$250,000 will need to be raised. This may be accomplished in stages.

All the elements here are as designed, approved, and stamped in the City of San Diego's current CIP plans.

**Entrance Arbor:** Fabricate and install a sculpture at Thorn Street that will be a neighborhood landmark signifying BIRD PARK. The bird-on-a-perch silhouette will be constructed of chain link over a steel armature and planted with colorful flowering vines. It is intended as a call-and-response to the also iconic Nicki De Saint Phalle "Sun God," in the Stuart Collection at the University of California, San Diego.

**BIRD PARK sign:** At the base of the Arbor, we will create a "color-blind" cobble wall to signify and safely set the park away from the energy of the street.

**Mosaic Tables:** Refurbishing the current off-the-shelf concrete picnic table and seats, is called for, reimagined as the things birds like to eat, as designed and conceived by local school children and created by the Artist.

**Playground Equipment:** Evaluate and supplement the status, beauty, and safety of the current playground equipment. Replace as needed.

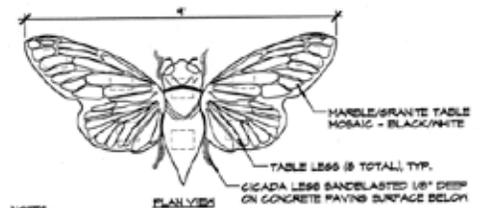
**Landscape:** See plans.



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C2

SPECIAL SPECIFICATION NO.	
CITY CONTRACT CIP NO. 21-861.0	
CONSTRUCTION DETAILS & SPECIFICATIONS FOR: <b>BIRD PARK BALBOA PARK IMPROVEMENTS</b> NORTH EAST CORNER OF EAST MESA	
CITY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA PARK AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT SHEET 3 OF 13 SHEETS	T.M. NO. W.O. NO. 218610
CITY ENGINEER	DATE
CITY ENGINEER	APPROVED DATE FILED
ORIGINAL	
CONTRACTOR	DATE STARTED
INSPECTOR	DATE COMPLETED
	33143-04-D



- NOTES:
1. CHILD HEIGHT TABLE MATCHES OTHERS IN FUNCTION & MATERIALS.
  2. PLACEMENT PER PLAN.
  3. MOSAIC SURFACE TO BE SEALED WITH AQUA MIX HARDENER.
  4. FOR DETAILS AND MOSAIC PATTERN CONTACT NOBEN BRALLSPOND STUDIO, (619) 466-1641.
  5. ALL CONCRETE SURFACES TO HAVE GRAFFITI COATINGS.
  6. ALL TILES AND MOSAICS PROVIDED AND INSTALLED BY ARTIST.

1 PERIODICAL CICADA TABLE  
 NO SCALE



**Foot:** Form a bender-board perimeter to the FOOT area, and infill with cobbles and boulders, planted with agaves. (The City has indicated they have many such stones after big rainstorms and will place them.)

**Beak:** Adjust the function, form, and science of the entry feature at the Upas and Perching streets (Parson's Gate) to be more useful, more inviting, and fun. Add a seat/dedication wall and flagstone to the plaza surface (to imitate the texture of a bird's beak). Fill the garden in the bird's mouth with wildly colorful plants that attract butterflies and hummingbirds.

**Game of the Golden Goose:** On the sidewalk between the BRAIN and FOOT, along the path that has been created for it, install the panels of the Game. All 80 panels have been designed by local school children, and the game is designed so that it may be played by persons of all abilities. Though it was planned for sandblasting, it could also be done in LithoMosaic or Skidproof.

**Eye Gazebo:** We have designed and engineered a belvedere (called for in the East Mesa Precise Plan) that functions as a gazebo. As a child on the design team imagined, "It will be good for weddins."

This important lexicon at the NE end of the park will function as a focus, and like all elements, has been designed to be intriguing onsite, and almost invisible offsite. It will have a domed metal roof, pierced with circles, some allowing sunlight through, and some set with colored glass cabochons, mimicking a bird's eye in structure and function.



# PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

## Entrance Arbor:

*"Outdoor art is for the birds."*

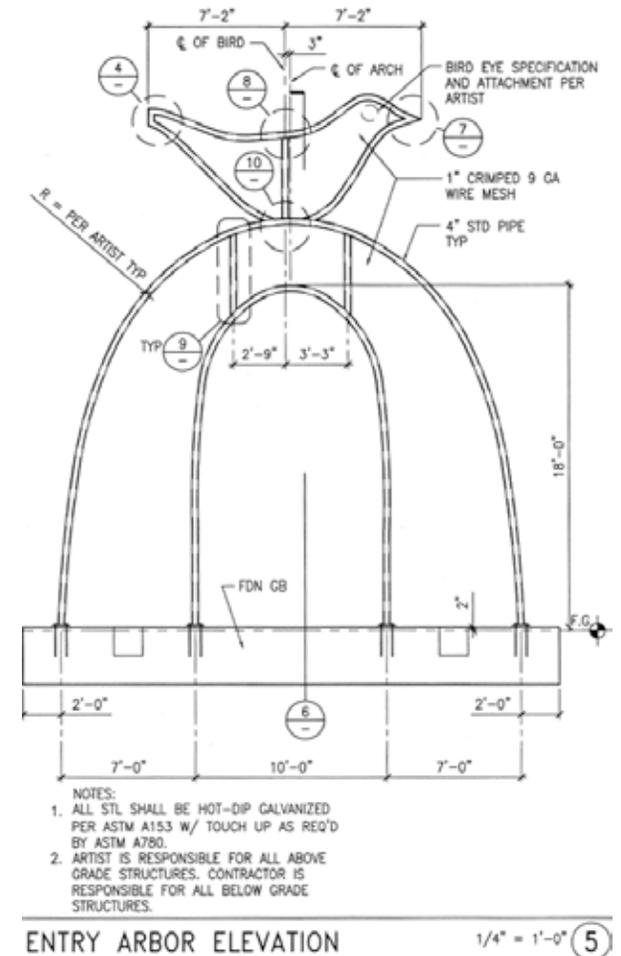
- Terry Allen (Sculptor of the Talking Trees at UCSD's Stuart Collection)

The bird-on-a-perch trellised ARBOR at the foot of Thorn Street will have dual purposes - communication and preventive medicine. Currently, the street sort of glides off into the park, as there is no visual or physical conclusion to the street - nor to the start of the park. I have always felt this is an accident waiting to happen.

The ARBOR will be a purely visual sign for the park - a call for great fun at the end of this very neighborhood street. It will be 25' high, and strong in format and concept. It will consist of a screen trellis painted green. A topiary form: flowering vines will grow over it. The ARBOR will be a living sign of BIRD PARK.

The second purpose of the ARBOR and the SEAT WALL in front of it - is to create a safe street end - to create a barrier through which a vehicle running the stop sign at this T-intersection, does not run helter-skelter into the PARK and GIZZARD Tot Lot.

SCHEDULE: The ARBOR will be created of 4" steel pipes bent into the form of a bird on an arching perch. Across this two dimensional framework, a plane of 1" wire cloth will be attached. Two identical, two-dimensional bird-on-a-perch forms will be set one in front of the other - east/west. They will be joined at the top, where their planes lean into each other, and the bases will share a distance of 6' between them. When viewed from the south or north, they will look like a tree or an "A." Only when viewed straight on from the street or the park, will one see the silhouette of a bird-on-a-perch.

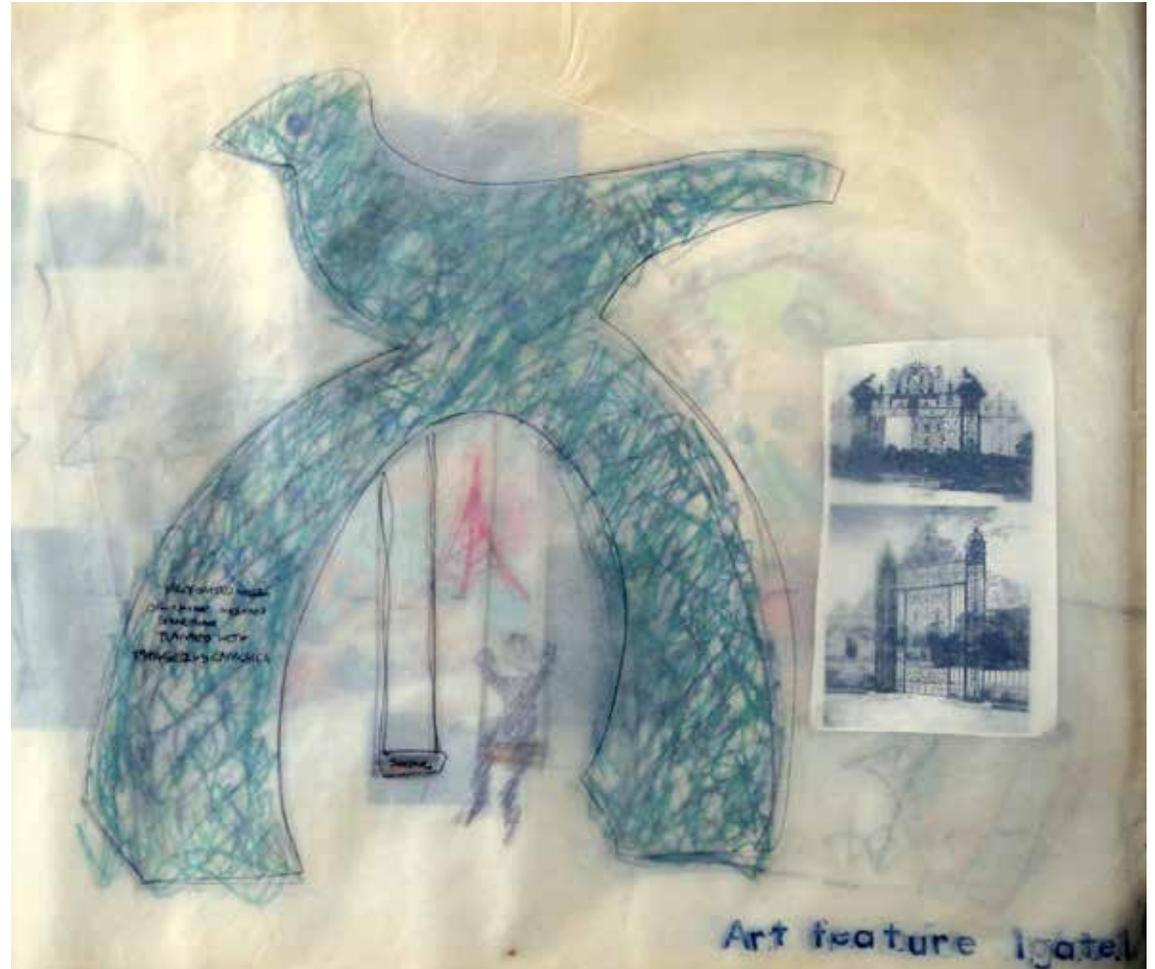


Engineered, fabricated, and painted offsite, the ARBOR will be brought to the site on a semi, and installed on the same day with the same crane, as for the EYE GAZEBO. Fine-tuning and planting may occur the next day.

The bases of the ARBOR will consist of four, poured-in-place, below-grade concrete foundations, and base plates. Once the ARBOR has been installed, these will be covered with soil and planting.

The seat/signage wall set a few feet east of the ARBOR will have been built at the same time as the foundations. Like the other seat walls in the park and around the neighborhood, native stone cobbles will face the street - though in this case, they will be of a red or green hue, set to spell out BIRD PARK - visible to all but those who are color blind. The ground on the streetside will be infilled with decomposed granite, and on the park side, will be replanted.

To build the wall and arbor, the existing "antique" street lamp will have to be moved - which is fine, as there is one missing a few hundred feet to the north. In its place here, ground-level up-lights should be installed. For safety, the telephone pole should also be removed, as well as the miscellaneous signs.



## BIRD'S EYE

Certainly no other living thing has the visual acuity of birds, hawks see better than men, not because they have telescopic vision but because their eyes are so densely packed with visual cells - as many as 1.5 million cells at the most sensitive points, the lovaea. The corresponding spot in man has 200,000 cells. Unlike other animals, they can see in color.

The Birds Eye is an opportunity for viewing, contemplation, philosophy and shade. In the spirit of the Victorian parks designed by Frederick Law Olmstead, and to provide an icon recognized from afar, The Eye will be a free-standing gazebo, one of only two free-standing elements in BIRD PARK, the other being the Arbor. The Eye is located within the eucalyptus grove at the north end of the park. The domed roof (cornea), painted azure blue and set with occasional hand-cast lenses (visual cells) will cast dappled and colored shadows on the patio (retina) and circular concrete bench (scieriatric ring) below. It will be supported by concrete piers...it will have no walls. Here is the second of three lines of poetry by Frances Wosmek.

Schedule: The dome will be made from prefabricates. spun steel "tank ends," and pierced and set with glass lenses as shown in the plans. All will be set on concrete pillars, with a crane and bolted into place in one day. The foundations, patio and poem and are in place and are set to accommodate the gazebo roof.



## NEST

When the park was first built, the playground equipment was apt in that it related to a bird's nest and was tastefully done. Since that time, odd elements in the NEST have been deposited as if by crows or magpies. These include a cartoonish frog that dwarfs a "fish out of water" sea lion, both negating an accurate depiction of what one might find in a bird's nest.

The swings show every decade of use, as does the slide (that was never intended to be bright yellow.) All should be updated for a new generation of kids. The swings can be painted grass green.

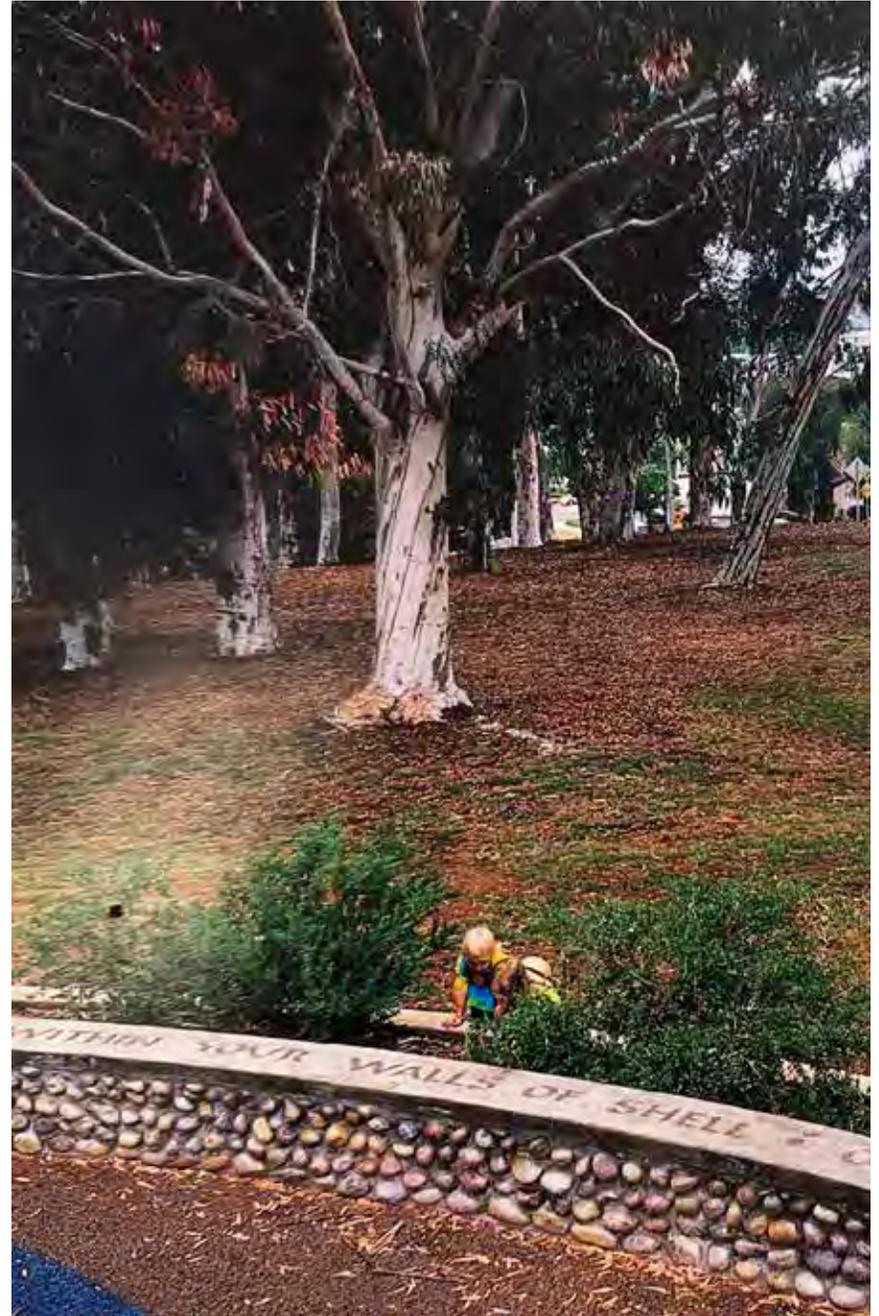
The slide should be replaced with a new one in unobtrusive shades of sky-blue.

A public art see-saw is planned, as are Talking Tubes - that enhance the message of the poem here.

The EGG and BIRD EVOLUTION panels by Wick Alexander at the BIRD BRAIN should be moved here as always intended.

In both tot lots, the rubberized surfacing was replaced without consulting the Artist. In the NEST it was brown with three wonderful big blue eggs, and in the GIZZARD it was brown, with nice natural BOULDERS symbolizing aggregate and fun for play. The stones are still there and work well, but the new blue (!) rubberized surface at both should be replaced the sometime in the future.

SCHEDULE: All these tasks should be able to be accomplished in a week or so, two persons per contract, working in sync. None of them are difficult.



## MOSAIC TABLES

The existing picnic table and stools in the Gizzard picnic lot/area of BIRD PARK were to be in the shape of the things birds eat - bread, fruit, bugs, insects. For economic reasons, bland square concrete ones were installed instead. The current scope of work calls for removing the tops and replacing them with unique mosaic art elements that fulfill the functional and creative, STEAM aspects of this area in this park.

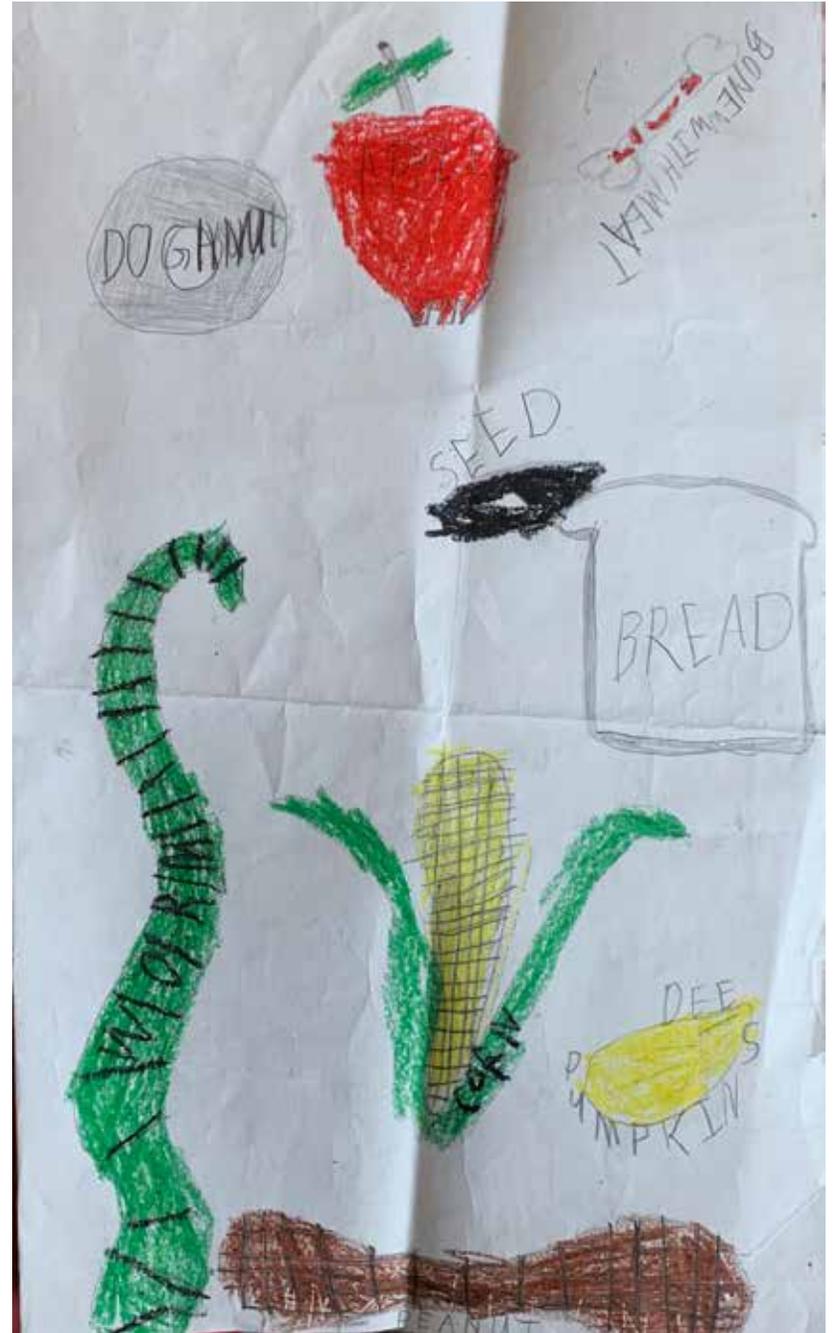
New plans call for a total of three tables, a bench, and twelve stools.

An ear of yellow corn with individual kernels of tumbled travertine will replace the current six spot tabletop. A husk, stone bench will replace three stools - but as with the table, we will use the existing bases and foundations. By casting these new forms as LithoMosaics, where the tile is embedded in the concrete, we will have beautifully detailed forms and eating surfaces impervious to weather or vandalism. Based on students' (now vintage) drawings from McKinley Elementary school, the tables will also include a piece of Wonder Bread. Enhanced stools will be grapes, carrot slices, and sunflower seeds. All easy and fun to do - and use!

A new table will be cast in the form of a cicada - the Chinese symbol of eternal youth - and it will be set at kid height - 24" tall. The cicada body will be of LithoMosaics with dichroic tile and the wings will be veined with black and white stone.

The mosaic work will be done offsite, and the elements will come in by truck, and installed by a subcontractor with a forklift in one day.

At one point, there was to be a caterpillar garden - still an easy thing to do, by saw cutting into the plaza and letting some native grasses do their thing in conjunction with the water bubbler.





## LANDSCAPE

The current tired landscape has been supplemented in the new plans. This is necessary as previous plantings were either sparse or never took. The new plans make very little change to the existing irrigation or hardscape. They take into consideration comments by Parks and Recreation staff (Mike Rasmussen, Div Brasted, Robin Shifflet) community members and the Artist.

The goal is to create a unique, low maintenance landscape that serves the park's purpose, concept, and individuality.

At the NEST, the current dearth of plant materials will be supplemented to enhance to be a larger tot-lot area, which is quieter, safer, shady, and playful. The design of the NEST and BRANCH is enhanced. The Texas Ranger hedge along both sides of Perching Drive is replaced to prohibit jaywalking at this dangerous, five corner intersection.

As discussed elsewhere, the BEAK garden is changed to accommodate ADA issues, and new plants are introduced that are imaginative, edible, and colorful.

The BREAST will enjoy the most new plantings. Community volunteer plantings and labor have not stood the test of time that six acres in Balboa Park require. Lines of Bronze Flax and Texas Ranger will re-emphasize the line of the BREAST, while Ruby Glow Leptospermum shrubs will discourage jaywalkers. Hydro-seeded native grasses, wafting in the marine layer breezes, will maintain the native feel and eliminate the current large areas of raw dirt.

Under the Eucalyptus trees, vines that never worked will be replaced with Lemonade Berry and other species that thrive under these magnificent tall trees.

At the GIZZARD, a major goal is to shade those enjoying the picnic tables and seat wall in the noonday sun. A row of yellow flowering Tipuana Tipu (currently looking magnificent along University Avenue in Hillcrest) will accomplish this goal. Papyrus planted in the existing palm tree wells, will accommodate frequent flooding and add color and texture.

The WING GARDEN will be completely reworked. Decomposed granite paths will once again delineate the feather gardens. Native flowering plants and shrubs will bloom continuously, and will be a fun space for child-sized adventure. Their guardians perched on the adjacent GIZZARD seat walls will have full visual access.

The LAWN is in great shape, so it is clear that all the maintenance has gone just to the lawn.





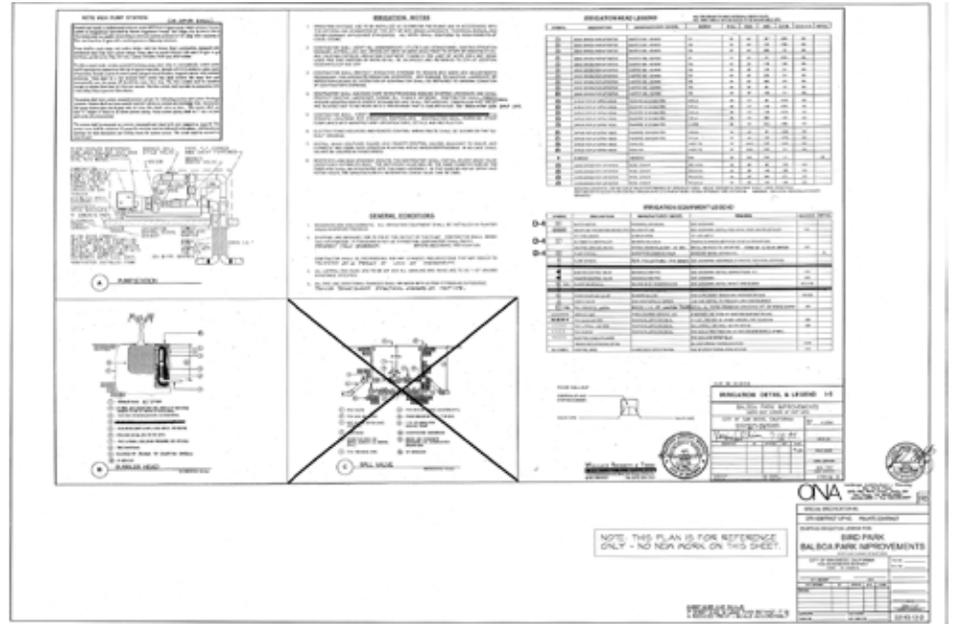
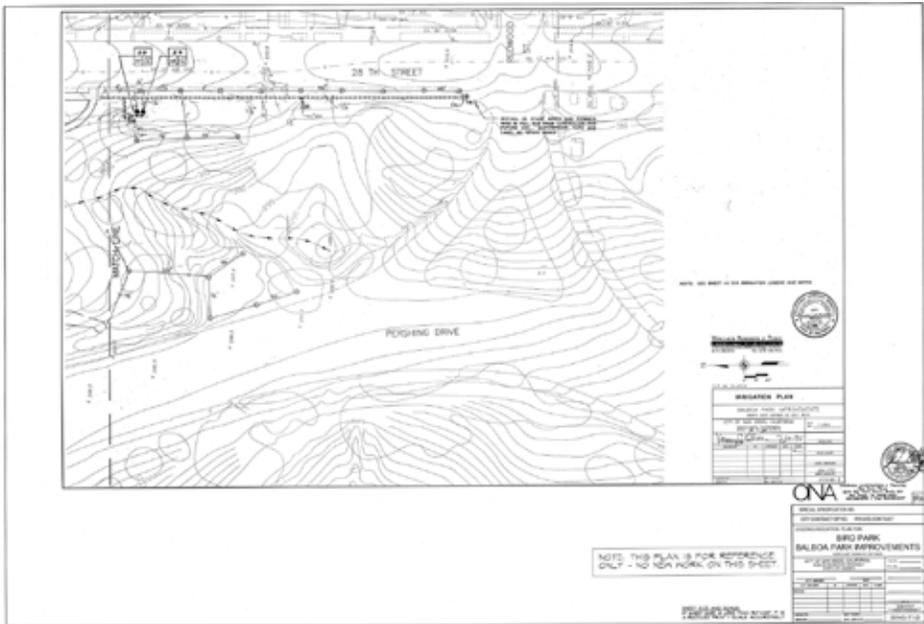
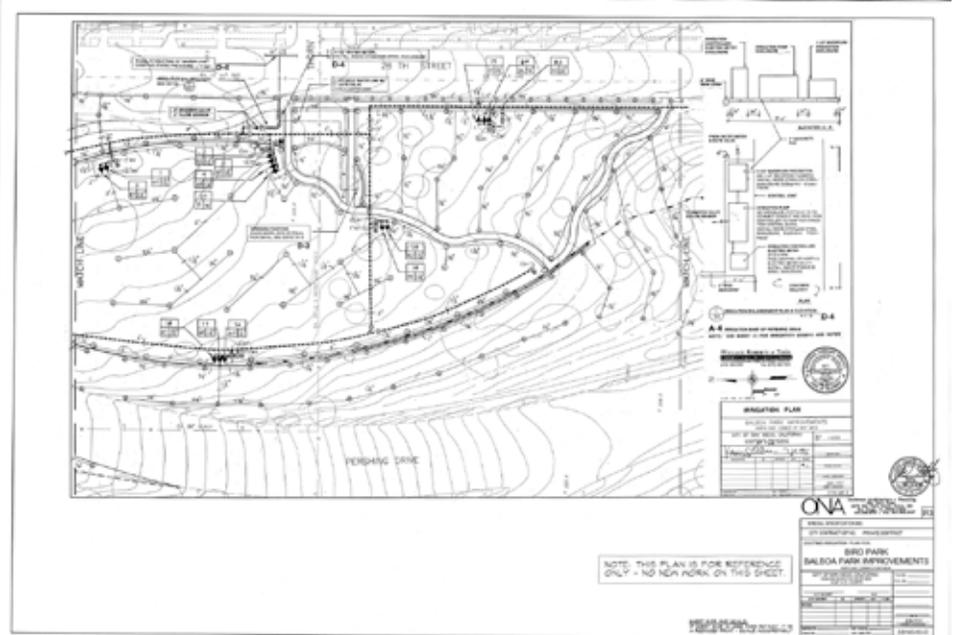
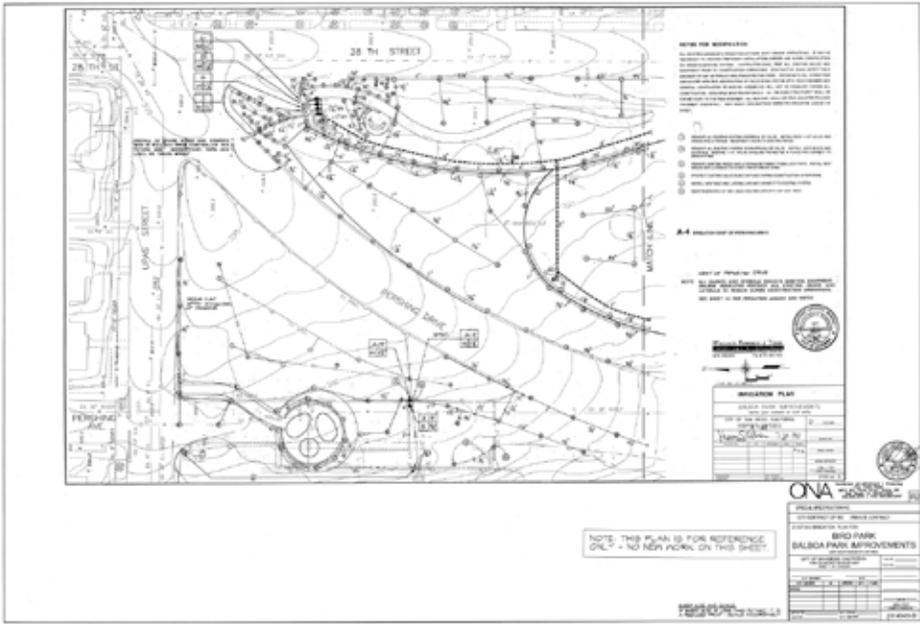
The bird's TAIL is a ramble.....left wild, and working well as a native habitat.

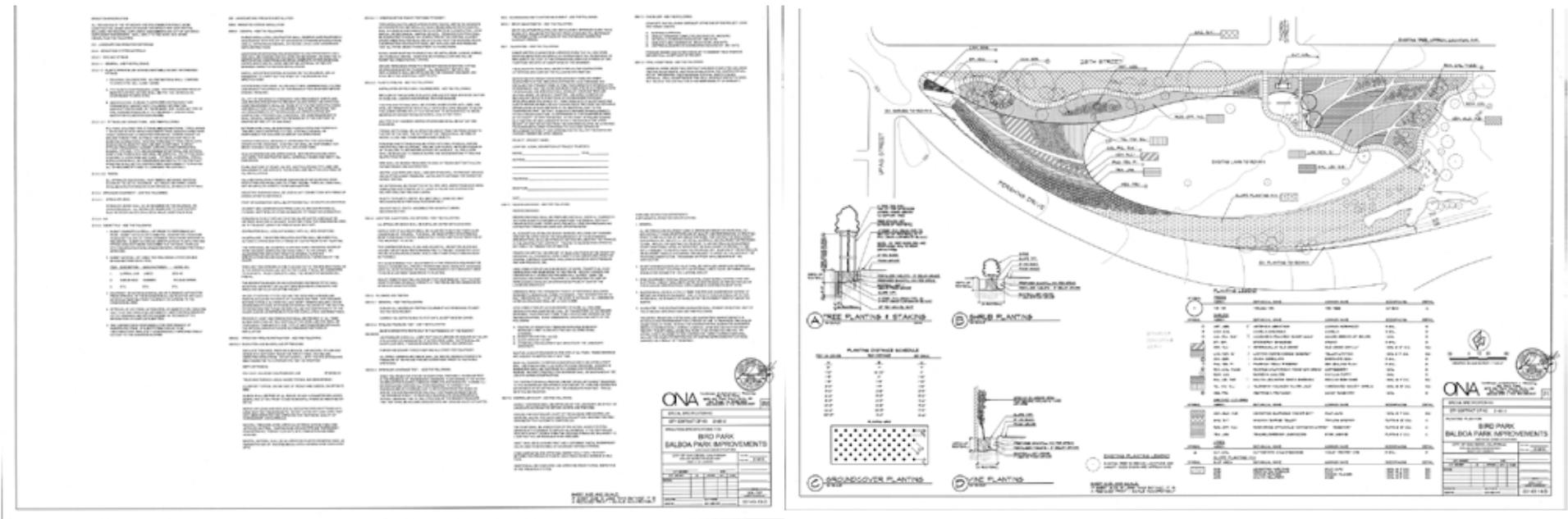
SCHEDULE: The landscape will be the major part of the reconstruction. The installation will take several weeks, with several people working on the job. The results, though, will be immediate and spectacular!











**Robin Brailsford  
Lead Artist, Inventor, Aesthetic Engineer, Silversmith**

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LithoMosaic Facebook Page - updated daily

*"AS A PUBLIC ARTIST, I SEE MY ROLE AS RECOGNIZING THE POTENTIAL IN PEOPLE, PLACES AND THINGS, AND THEN REALIZING THAT POTENTIAL. Recently I have been examining the public art process itself, to make it more meaningful for me as the artist and inspired and interconnected for the citizens who are its owners. The new wave of plop art is not for us. I examine the life and place of an overlooked site within our contemporary culture, to create works that are revolutionary - linking ideas, materials, scale, cities, funders, politicians and museums."*  
Robin Brailsford (Summer 2020)

**SELECTED COMPLETED PUBLIC ART COMMISSIONS**

**WALTER MUNK OCEAN INSTITUTE, La Jolla, California** It is a great honor to have worked with world-renowned Oceanographer Walter Munk, on The Grand Canyons of La Jolla, the 2450' plaza is the largest single LithoMosaic installation to date. Based on Walter's ground-breaking 1944 paper, the Grand Canyons of La Jolla, this work follows the footsteps of our undersea work for the Long Beach Transit to bring the deep sea experience to life. One hundred life-sized sea creatures, including an 11' Mola Mola and 13' Great White; and a 16 level bathyscaphe and every department at Scripps Institute of Oceanography are depicted. Installed at La Jolla Shores Beach, \$1,000,000, 2017 - 2020 Just installed.

**CALIFORNIA CENTER FOR THE ARTS, ESCONDIDO.** I am well into, a multi-year project of designing, proposing and building important exterior public art for six museums in northern climates. The six are the Corning, Tacoma and Toledo glass museums, as well as the Everson, Peabody Essex and CCAE art museums. I am reexamining and reinventing the relationship between museums, public artists, community, 501C3s, mayors and public art staff - applying the lessons learned from one city and museum and sharing it with the others. The first of six has been installed, Threshold Tessellation, at the CCAE, Art Museum. It was a collaboration with Doris Bitar and Wick Alexander and is a beauty - based on our proposal with Morphosis Architects for the US Embassy in Beirut. All the COLD CALL projects will be in LithoMosaic - the first time mosaic at this scale has been cast in in severe freeze/thaw environments. Overall budget - all to be fundraised - is about \$2M. CCAE was all donated for a budget of \$60,000. 2016 - 2020.

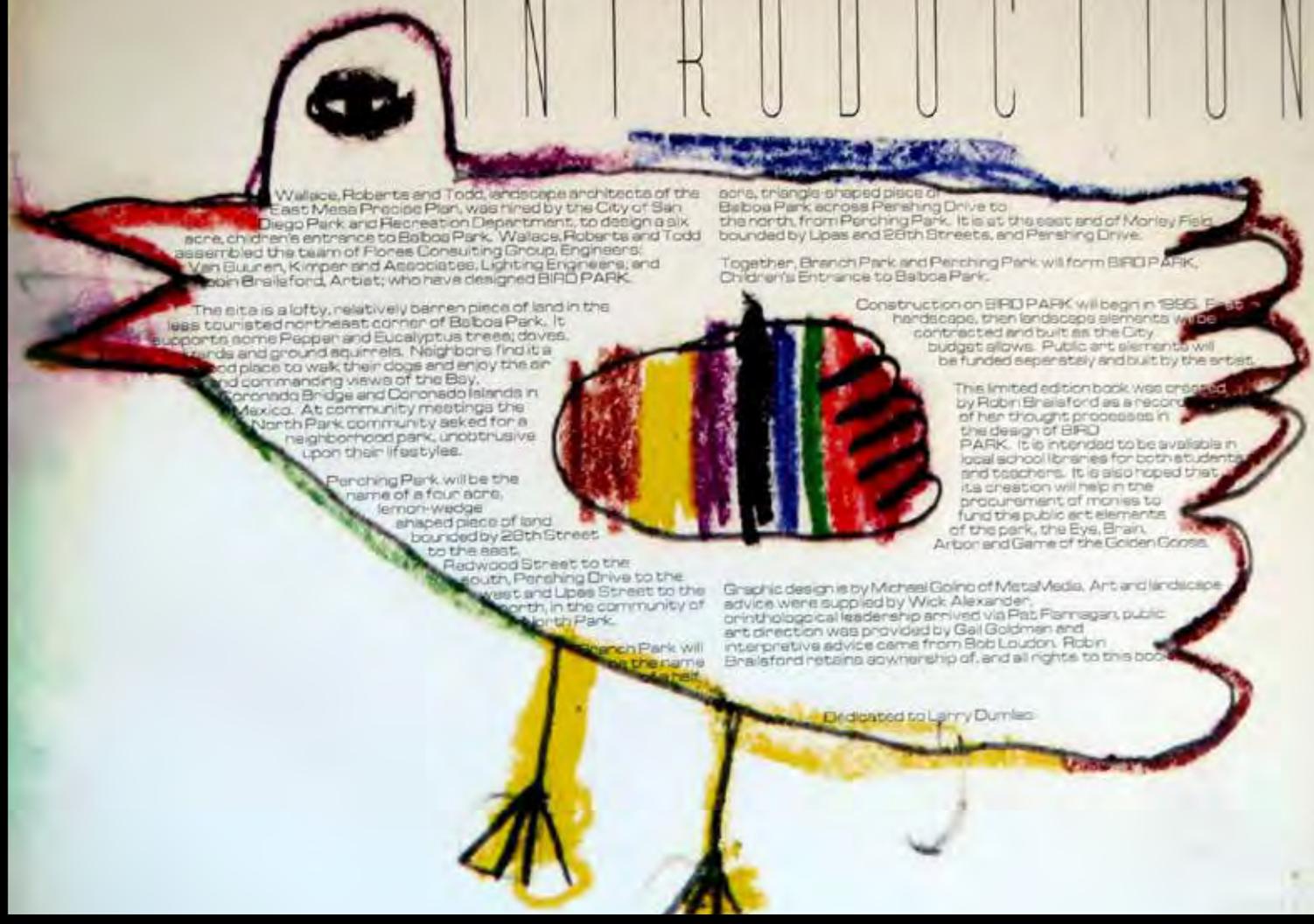
**LONG BEACH TRANSIT, Long Beach, California.** Commission to design and build landmark Battery Energized Bus station and charging facility the Long Beach Convention Center. The Long Beach Transit Mall design team of Brailsford Public Art, STV/VBN Architects and MIG Landscape Architects was the winning result. The art explores the CO2 benefits of a kelp forest through steel sculptural modules to be found at each BEB stop, and bioluminescence of life in California's 5 deep ocean trenches in LithoMosaic 8' rondels. \$24,060 design fee, 2014 - 2017. \$150,000 to fabricate and oversee installation. 2018. Deep Sea Tondos.

**METRO GOLDLINE, Los Angeles, CA.** For the Irwindale light rail public art commission, my Los Pioneros de la Riviera de San Gabriel, tells the ballad of this unique Chicano community through the corrido, "Axis Mundi, A Song for Irwindale." The names of all the city's residents from a 1950's census are cut into shadow-casting steel railings. The 10,000 square feet of on the station platforms - are dotted with LithoMosaic pavers relating to family trees and alluvial fans. \$350,000. Dedication August, 2015 2010- 2015

And: La Luna Del Sol - LithoMosaic threshold for the parking garage - arabesques in gold and silver, \$12,500. 2004 - 2015



# INTRODUCTION



Wallace, Roberts and Todd, landscape architects of the East Mesa Precipice Plan, was hired by the City of San Diego Park and Recreation Department, to design a six-acre, children's entrance to Balboa Park. Wallace, Roberts and Todd assembled the team of Flores Consulting Group, Engineers; Van Buuren, Kimper and Associates, Lighting Engineers; and Robin Brailsford, Artist, who have designed BIRD PARK.

The site is a lofty, relatively barren piece of land in the less-touristed northeast corner of Balboa Park. It supports some Pepper and Eucalyptus trees; doves, quails and ground squirrels. Neighbors find it a good place to walk their dogs and enjoy the air and commanding views of the Bay, Coronado Bridge and Coronado Islands in Mexico. At community meetings the North Park community asked for a neighborhood park, unobtrusive upon their lifestyles.

Perching Park will be the name of a four-acre, lemon-wedge shaped piece of land bounded by 26th Street to the east, Radwood Street to the south, Pershing Drive to the west and Lipas Street to the north, in the community of North Park.



acres, triangle-shaped piece of Balboa Park, across Pershing Drive to the north, from Perching Park. It is at the east end of Morley Field, bounded by Lipas and 26th Streets, and Pershing Drive.

Together, Branch Park and Perching Park will form BIRD PARK, Children's Entrance to Balboa Park.

Construction on BIRD PARK will begin in 1995. First hardscapes, then landscape elements will be contracted and built as the City budget allows. Public art elements will be funded separately and built by the artist.

This limited edition book was created by Robin Brailsford as a record of her thought processes in the design of BIRD PARK. It is intended to be available in local school libraries for both students and teachers. It is also hoped that its creation will help in the procurement of monies to fund the public art elements of the park, the Eye, Brain, Arbor and Game of the Golden Goose.

Graphic design is by Michael Galino of MetalMedia. Art and landscape advice were supplied by Wick Alexander, ornithological leadership arrived via Pat Flannagan, public art direction was provided by Gail Goldman and interpretive advice came from Bob Loudon. Robin Brailsford retains ownership of, and all rights to this book.

Dedicated to Larry Dumler



*"Built to honor and invite children"*  
Lacy Warren (Community member & Master Gardener)