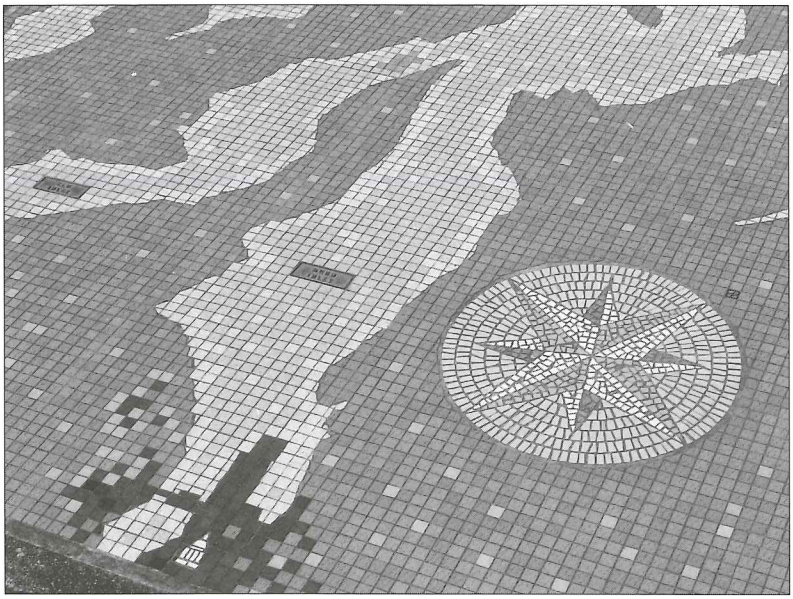
Museum Without Walls: Public Art on Percival Landing

by Stephanie Johnson

Percival Landing is a beloved City waterfront landmark, an important recreational facility for the citizens of Olympia and the historic gateway to the State Capitol from the water. Named after the old commercial steamship wharf operated by the Percival Family on Budd Inlet, Percival Landing encompasses 3.38 acres. It was built in phases from the 1970's with final completion in 1988.

Public art seen today along Percival Landing has a rich and varied history, starting as early as 1959, when an anonymous businessman donated South Sound Mosaic. This art piece was designed by Oliver Tiedeman with Klee Wyk Studios, and fabricated by Rod Dresser. The mosaic is a map of the water and land forms of the area, with a compass rose and a cluster of tiles representing the City. The City paid for installation of the mosaic, creating a concrete overlook very near where the mosaic is now. When that section of Percival Landing was built in the 70's, the mosaic was cut from its base and replaced in the boardwalk. The original donor of the artwork was a lifelong saltwater yachtsman who felt strongly that Olympia's placement at the southernmost point of Puget Sound should be emphasized. He made his gift very soon after Lakefair began, and when a viewer looks at the map with the water beyond, she or he is standing with their back to Capitol Lake. Rod Dresser's son (of the same name) learned the tile trade from his dad, and spends time each Father's Day maintaining the mosaic.



"South Sound Mosaic" was designed by Oliver Tiedeman with Klee Wyk Studios, and fabricated by Rod Dresser. *Courtesy Art in Public Programs, Olympia Parks, Arts & Recreation.*

South Sound Mosaic was an ambitious gift, placed during a time when the waterfront was not much more than a collection of warehouses, with the belief that over time, the area would come to be seen as a jewel. It remained alone on the Landing until Patrons of South Sound Cultural Activities (POSSCA), gifted Kujira I, by Joe Tougas in 1981, soon after the development of the first phase of Percival Landing. Kujira means "Orca" in Japanese, and a second cedar carving, Kujira II is located in Olympia's Japanese Sister City, currently Kato City, formerly known as Yashiro. The artist, Joe Tougas, was a sign maker in town for many years. He is the sculptor of the bears at Tacoma's Point Defiance Zoo and currently on the faculty of The Evergreen State College.

In 1990, POSSCA also donated one of the most recognizable images in the City, The Kiss, by Richard Beyer. Located at Percival Landing

on 4th Avenue, the cast aluminum sculpture of two figures kissing is often photographed, and sometimes decorated with flowers. Mr. Beyer is formerly of Pateros, WA, and has sculpture all over Washington. His pieces include Waiting for the Interurban in Seattle, and a second sculpture in Olympia near the Farmers Market, of dancing goats in front of the offices of coffee retailers Batdorf & Bronson.

Tide Pool of Time, by Brian Goldbloom and David Vala is located at the Landing along Columbia Street. It was purchased by the City through its Municipal Art Fund. The artist was selected through a jury process and was charged with reflecting the history of the site and to use moving water within the project. The location of the carved granite installation is near where the Customs House stood during Olympia's Federal designation as the Port of Entry for Puget Sound, from 1851-1854. That designation would contribute to Olympia becoming the Capitol of the Washington Territory in 1853. The sculpture evokes a shallow tide pool where past artifacts are revealed through sand by the action of waves and the tide including objects that symbolically allude to the history of the area, and some of the structure of the Custom House itself. The artist hails from Amboy, Washington, and has many projects across the State.

The most recent artwork placed along the Landing was a gift from Olympia artist Simon Kogan, whose bronze sculpture Motherhood, placed in 1999, was supported financially through a community effort, and installed by the City. The base is inscribed with the names of mothers, honored by the contributors. As the mother holds her child, she is facing away from the water, signifying the end of a journey. Artist Simon Kogan moved with his family from Russia to Olympia in 1992 and wanted to give a gift of his art to express his gratitude to the citizens and visitors of Olympia. He feels that Olympia and the State of Washington are his "Motherland." Mr. Kogan has created many other works in the community, including the WWII Memorial on the Capitol Campus, a sculpture at the offices of Community Youth Services and several works for Saint Martin's University.

Artist Richard Beyer sculptured "The Kiss." *Courtesy Art in Public Programs, Olympia Parks, Arts & Recreation.*

Public art in Olympia is both shaped by and defines our community. The gifts, the inspiration, the stories and continuing interaction of public art, our community and visitors to our spectacular waterfront contribute purpose and meaning to our experiences there.

Stephanie Johnson has had the great fortune to be actively working to support the arts in Olympia for almost two decades. Her credentials include an MA in the History of Art from The Ohio State University, a healthy curiosity and a great sense of adventure. She manages public art and special events for Olympia Parks, Arts & Recreation.