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Left and right: Tiles designed by students in SBMA's education programs to be part of sidewalk project at Haley & De La Vina.
Middle: Tile ready to be placed in sidewalk.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art Students Create “Bird’s Eye View” Tiles for City’s Haley and De La Vina Bridge Replacement Project

April 28, 2011 - Students involved in two of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art's education programs have created 120 decorative tiles to be installed in the sidewalks and pedestrian areas as part of the Haley & De La Vina Bridge Replacement Project. The City of Santa Barbara project involved replacing the deteriorating bridge, improving pedestrian areas near the bridge, and enhancing portions of Mission Creek for water flow and native habitat.

Architect David Black approached SBMA in the fall of 2010 to help facilitate the creation of the decorative tiles. The concept was not only to involve Santa Barbara youths in beautifying the intersection, but also to draw attention to the fact that the new bridge, which runs diagonally across the intersection, marks where Mission Creek flows through the neighborhood.

In February 2011, Tina Villadolid, one of SBMA's Teaching Artists, began the sidewalk tile project with a total of 65 students, including 20 from SBMA's Homework/Artwork After School Program (representing 10 City elementary schools and two junior high schools), and 45 from La Cuesta Continuation High School. Overall, the age of the contributing artists ranges from 6 to 18.



Swirl of Shrimp and Fish in Edges (detail), Japanese, 19th – early 20th century. Mulberry paper, persimmon tannin and silk thread. SBMA, Gift of Mrs. Lockwood de Forest.

Before actually decorating the tiles, the students studied images from the Museum’s collection of Japanese stencils. The flowing lines and patterns of the stencils provided inspiration for the designs, along with information about the creatures that would be found in a typical riparian habitat: steelhead trout, salamanders, insects, turtles, tadpoles, among others. The resulting designs are drawn from a bird’s eye view, as if the tiles are a window into the world of the creek below.



Example of SBMA Student Tile Project in Santa Barbara’s Bohnett Park, 2008

The idea of involving school-aged students in a public art project that celebrates Mission Creek is not new to the Museum and its educational programs. In 2008, a tile “rug,” created by neighborhood children and depicting the flora and fauna of Mission Creek, was installed in the Westside’s Bohnett Park, which consequently won a coveted Santa Barbara Beautiful Award in 2009.

For the current project, the City of Santa Barbara provided pre-manufactured 4” x 4” terracotta tiles. The challenge was how to create the most visually dynamic image and texture with glazes that would be durable enough for foot traffic. The solution was to use the ancient technique of sgraffito with a high fire, matte glaze that lent rich, mottled colors. City staffers declared that the tiles “surpassed all expectations.” Joshua Haggmark, City of Santa Barbara principal civil engineer notes, “In addition to the great infrastructure improvements, it is wonderful to have student artists decorate and educate the neighborhood about this biological habitat. Their tiles highlight the great wildlife enhancements for this area of Mission Creek.”

The installation of these decorative tiles is one of the final steps in completing the new bridge at the intersection of Haley and De La Vina Streets. The remainder of the infrastructure project will be completed this summer. Be sure to take a stroll through the intersection and enjoy the work of young Santa Barbara artists who are helping to raise awareness of our City’s efforts to restore and revitalize our creeks.

For more information about the program mentioned above, contact Patsy Hicks, SBMA Director of Education at 805.884.6432.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a privately funded, not-for-profit institution that provides internationally recognized collections and exhibitions and a broad array of cultural and educational activities as well as travel opportunities around the world.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA. Open Tuesday - Sunday 11 am to 5 pm. Closed Monday. 805.963.4364 www.sbma.net