



WOODS DAVY

MacArthur Park
Public Arts Program

Otis Art Institute of
Parsons School of Design
Los Angeles, California

This is a very exciting time for Los Angeles, the Westlake community, and Otis/Parsons. We are looking forward to the benefits of world exposure through the Olympic Arts Festival and Games, and have great expectations for a highly charged, post-Olympic Los Angeles that will carry this momentum into the future. We are proud to symbolize and celebrate this dynamic period with a new sculpture by Woods Davy.

With "Alameda," the first of several semi-permanent commissions, we embark on a new cultural program for the MacArthur Park area that will offer a wide selection of public art, design, and the performing arts for the benefit of the Mid-Wilshire district and greater Los Angeles area.

The Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design is positioned, historically and geographically, to act as a catalyst for the cultural revitalization of this area. Founded in 1918, the institute has had a long-standing relationship to the Westlake community. Over the years we have become a major cultural resource for the city of Los Angeles with challenging academic programs and one of this city's most important exhibition spaces for contemporary art. Recently, we have been privileged with the arrival of our new Dean, Mr. Michael J. Pittas, a nationally renowned expert in art, architecture, design and urban planning. Michael's sensitivity to the many issues facing the future of the college and his tremendous energy and vitality will project us into a new era of accomplishments unmatched in the history of this school.

As we developed over the years, we resisted the temptation toward urban decentralization with a continued commitment to our neighborhood. Today this neighborhood stands as a vital link between the downtown urban core and the Mid-Wilshire commercial and residential districts.

Our institution, with expert leadership and expanded academic programs, is making high-quality art of many disciplines more accessible to our immediate neighbors. To this end we are developing the MacArthur Park Public Art Program. This program will provide a much needed cultural focus for this area while creating many exciting challenges for the dozens of artists, designers and performers who will work with us.

One of the key elements in this program is the actual physical presence of the artist. Because the artist is producing the work on location, the public is provided with a better understanding of the art-making process and develops a more genuine relationship to the artwork. "Alameda" by Woods Davy is a fine example of the fruitful combination of a challenging site and an extremely talented artist.

The goal of this public art program is not to place aesthetic objects in the environment to simply decorate or visually upgrade the area, but to offer the creative resources of many artists of various disciplines to solve some of the very sensitive social, cultural and functional issues facing our community. We hope that MacArthur Park will become a true urban laboratory that demonstrates the potency of creative approaches and fresh thinking toward complicated urban issues. Of course, many of the solutions will be finely designed spaces, breathtaking performances and highly rendered beautiful objects, such as the one by Woods Davy, that will evolve from a sensitivity for the physical proportions of their sites. However the overall goal is to inspire and offer encouragement to this neighborhood, and the city in general, through accessible, high-quality, cultural activities.

We are very grateful to Woods Davy for his enthusiasm, time, and hard work on this project. The first commission of any public art program has its uncertainties and proceeds with caution. It is comforting to work with an artist as knowledgeable, professional, and creative as Woods. Throughout the process of planning and execution of "Alameda" I was continually inspired by working with Woods. I am personally thankful to him for his involvement with this program.

We are deeply grateful to the many contributors to the project for their early recognition of our efforts and their great confidence in us.

The individuals and organization listed in this brochure helped provide the foundation for the MacArthur Park Public Art Program. It is especially heartening to receive their support.

I would also like to gratefully acknowledge Councilman John Ferraro, representative of the 4th District; Tom LaBonge and Bill Garcia, deputies to Mr. Ferraro, for their early endorsement of the project and significant commitment of staff time and advice; Fred Croton, General Manager of the City of Los Angeles' Department of Cultural Affairs, for his support and personal encouragement; Shel Jensen and the Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation for their active participation; Bert Szathmary, President of the Wilshire Chamber of Commerce; and especially Barbara Thornburg, our consultant on the early stages of this program.

Finally, I would like to thank Michael Pittas, our dean, for championing the concept of this program; John Stein, our controller, for his confidence, support and active participation in the planning of "Alameda"; Tim Anderson, our preparator, for supervising the installation; and Clif Merck and Deborah Ward for their administrative support.

Al Nodal
Director of Exhibitions

"My sculpture is an attempt to distill the urban landscape," Woods Davy asserts in a written statement for "Alameda," the inaugural sculpture for the new Public Arts Program at Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design. Indeed, its site, a strip of grass on the grounds of the school which fronts Wilshire Boulevard, positions the piece within the very terrain which inspired it.

To describe Davy's style—in "Alameda" and many works of the past two years—is a simple task: each sculpture consists of a series of steel beams, chemically treated to produce a muted brown patina, which stretch vertically and horizontally; and to this structure, granite stones are anchored to form an unexpected and sometimes precarious relationship. But the formal contrast Davy creates, between technologically precise, straight-edge geometry and organic, rounded forms, raises a thematic question which offers no simple answer. Can the artist combine natural and technological form in such a way that one is fully reconciled to the other? I think not, but Davy presents the inherent contradiction between synthetic and organic form adeptly.

In all of his recent work, manmade structures are challenged by organic form. This became clear in sculpture which suspended sections of tree trunks from steel beams; and it is stressed even more emphatically by his more recent use of granite. The stones, unlike the logs, are unaltered; they are givens of nature.

There is something ironic about Davy's use of stones. One confronts a network of beams that evokes various elements of the urban world; an urban skyline; the support structure for a skyscraper; even the horizontal sweep of metropolitan streets. Yet this muscular technology serves, in pragmatic terms, to focus our attention on the beauty of his chosen stones. If technology is ordinarily used to make nature subservient to human needs, in Davy's sculpture this hierarchy is turned upside down. Natural formations in granite rise above his symbolic architecture in steel.

In our era, when an increasing number of sculptures are being installed in public venues, it becomes imperative that the presence of a work and the concerns it raises possess a clear relationship to its site. Davy's "Alameda" is one example of a harmonious union of site and sculpture.

Robert L. Pincus
Art Critic/Los Angeles Times



I live in downtown Los Angeles, among the freeways and high rise structures. My sculpture is a reflection of that environment, an attempt to distill the urban landscape. This process takes place through the mutual dependency of intelligence and emotion, technology and nature. I feel that the mixture of opposites is a constant reality, therefore their peaceful combination is a necessity. It is my aim to combine natural and technological form to forge an object of strength and power, that transcends the sum of its parts.

Woods Davy, 1984

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