

San Francisco, California

# Mission District Police Station



On April 5, 1776, Juan Bautista de Anza's party rowed up Mission Creek from the bay to establish a mission. April 5 is the feast day of Our Lady of Sorrows (Nuestra Señora de los Dolores)—thus the name Mission Dolores.

The Mission District has been home to a motley crew for a long time. Spanish missionaries, Irish, rushing to the gold fields, Italians in the twenties, then Latinos and recently the dot-com brats, now departed. Artists looking for cheap rent, tarding up their lofts and then bullied out by yuppy attorneys. The cycle continues.

The first residents of San Francisco, however, were the Ohlone and they believed there was a monster who lived in a whirlpool in the center of the bay.

The reason this is important is that we all carry our own mythology around with us and it is as much a part of our community as it is a part of us.

The San Francisco Arts Commission commissioned me to design a sculptural work for the lobby of the new police station being built at the intersection of Seventeenth and Valencia.

Few remember New Century Beverage (later Pepsi) bottling plant preceded the police station. It drew its water supply from near-by mission creek. This is about site analysis. Trying to understand a place in order to know enough about it. So whatever you do there carries respect. Mere assertion is only arrogance veiled in exactitude. Listening to a place is harder.

I had meetings with the Police Captain who was going to be in charge of the new station in order to determine what he thought might be appropriate. Regarding the lobby, he said, *"Look, nobody is going to come here for fun. They will be here because they are hurt, or in trouble or have a friend or relative who is already in here locked up who is already hurt and in trouble. The best you could do is to distract them from their troubles for a few moments."*

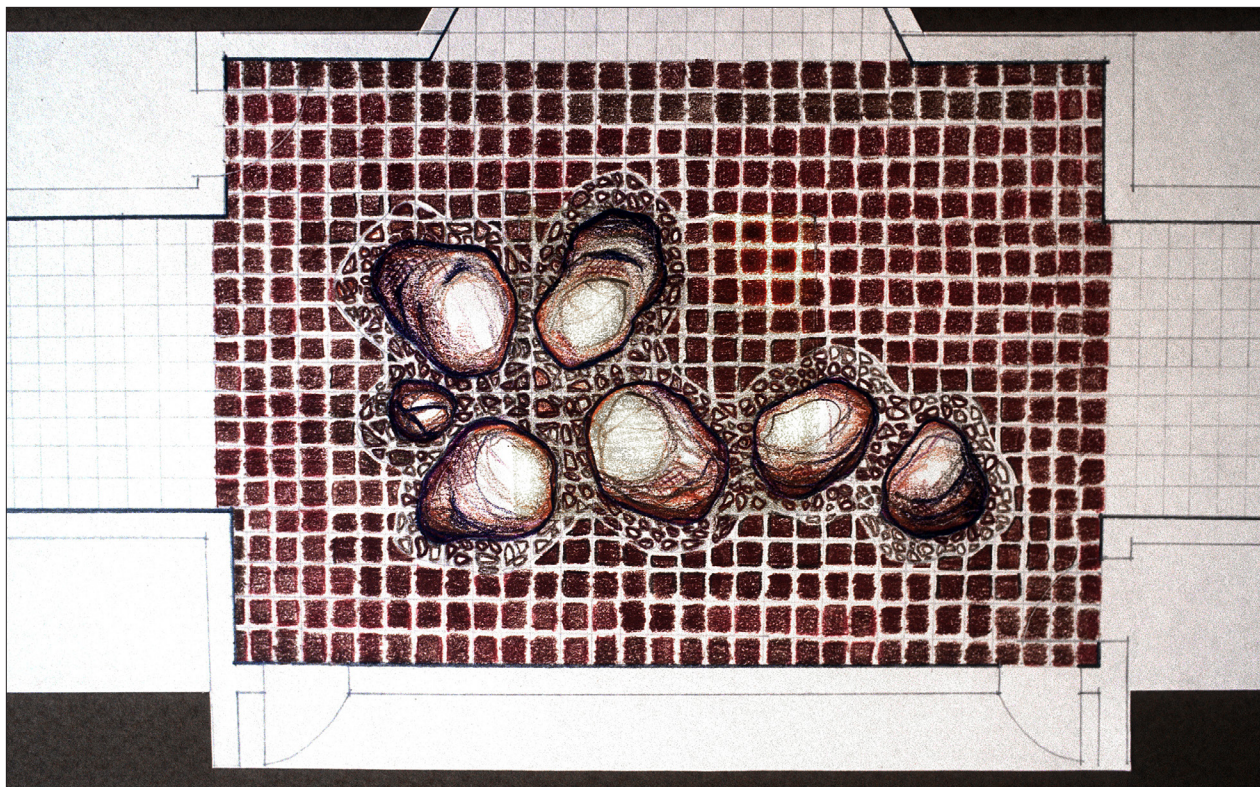
The first Idea I came up with involved some unusual soft furniture. The Police Captain rejected the idea immediately. He said, "It would be slashed to ribbons within a week." I responded by saying,

"There is an officer at a window in the lobby twenty four hours and he has a 45 automatic and the furniture would be slashed?" "In a week." He said.

If we could not have soft seating, we would have hard. Stones, stones of legends, both old and new. The stories of the stones are hanging on the wall to the rear. The stories are from the distant past and from out on the streets of the Mission District. A mild entertainment while you are waiting for your brother-in-law to get sprung. The architect said he would leave the steel framing off the lobby roof so we could use a crane to lower the stones into place. But he lied. So instead of real stones from San Francisco we had to make fake stones in Los Angeles out of cement and fiberglass and truck them to San Francisco and carry them through the front door.

The project started to go sour. I should have seen this coming because right at the outset I was handed a thirty-five page contract for a project costing thirty-five thousand dollars. The contract was excessive and even had a page requiring me to certify that I was not doing business with any one in the Irish Republican Army. I was outraged, but when I tried to negotiate, I was informed that they did not negotiate contracts. Sign it the way it is or lose the commission. Bend over.







## SEVEN DANCING STARS

by  
Gary Dwyer

Greek mythology tells us the small cluster of stars we call the Pleiades were the daughters of Atlas and Pleione. Their names are Alcyone, Merope, Celaeno, Asterope, Electra, Taygete and Maia. They were all being chased by the powerful god Orion. The god Zeus heard their cries of alarm and turned them into pigeons to get away from Orion and they flew up to the sky and became stars. After they were stars they all married gods, except Merope. She had to contend with the love of a mere mortal, a man named Sisyphus. Hence she shines less brightly in the sky than do her sisters.

While today we may care little about those Greek legends, we need to remember nearly every culture has told stories about the Pleiades. Australian aborigines think of the Pleiades as little girls, while the Hindus of India see the Pleiades as nurses caring for one of the sons of the god Shiva.

The Ohlone group of Native Americans were the first residents of what we now call the Mission District and they too, had very special legends about the Pleiades.

They first appeared in the sky in the middle of May and thus announced the return of good weather. When the Pleiades were at their height, when nearly overhead, they were the most important as Ohlone believed these were the favorite stars of a monster who lived in a giant whirlpool in the middle of San Francisco Bay. ***This monster controlled the earthquakes. The Ohlone believed if they moved big stones into the same positions as stars of the Pleiades, the monster would be appeased and the ground would not shake.*** The stone furniture in this room is arranged in the pattern of the Pleiades and shines in the lights overhead.

The other thirteen stories arranged on this wall were collected by interviewing people on the streets of the Mission District. Each person was asked to tell their version of the SEVEN DANCING STARS

Artist

San Luis Obispo: 20 years

Age: 49

*My version of the legend of the Seven Dancing Stars. The author of each version is identified in the same way.*







## SEVEN DANCING STARS

by  
The Lone Star Swan

I have an atomic view of the universe. My father was a doctored degree minister of the visionary ephemeral school of abstraction love, beauty and truth mystical Christianity and Buddhism all mixed together. He wrote and thought all day. He was a scholar and he had all sorts of ancient and sacred books. My father was mystically religious.

I accept the huge poem of atomic theory. I thought it out and it seemed to make sense to me. The atomic theory description of the universe is something like stars are sort of big atoms, the whole thing is one huge being, or it could be two married to each other and hopefully getting along or it could be fourteen, I don't know, or it could be one trillion beings and no one in charge. One of those possibilities. It certainly seems to be connected to itself. The scientists look at the universe which is as beautiful and poetic as anything you could come across. Quasars and distant plants huge all held together by magnetism. Call it the electrician's description of the universe.

Stars are the on fire blazing electrons of the mind of God or call him Buddha or call it the witch of the moon whatever you want to call it. The stars are the atoms of the great mysterious being or beings and it surely is conscious. Pure holy energy and consciousness. We don't think of fire as conscious. We think something has to have bones and flesh to be conscious. I think Fire can be conscious. All you need for consciousness is a whole neighborhood of conscious ghosts. It is like thought. Thought is a ghost, an invisible tv ray. We surely are ghosts when we don't have any bodies. When you are asleep and there is a deeper copy of you. We walk around invisible. Between stuff that we just can't see like air or clear glass, there are angels or ghosts, they just happen to be looser magnetically so we can't see them. It took me a long time and a lot of acid to figure this out. Air itself is invisible but it's there. It makes sense that dreams are connected to subatomic physics. Apparently the way to contact angels is to fall asleep and dream. Listen to very peaceful music with no words, take a vow of silence, breath deeper and deeper until you get to a meditative dream state and you run into an angel. So stars could also be stationary consciousness. Each star could be like a trillion angels divided up into 79 hundred dreamlands going also around each star. The second universe in the dream reality. I was trying to sell stars once. I would punch out any random pattern on a card and then circle the star and charge 'em a dollar or something. It was just a declarative act. Then I claimed to own everything and I'd give everybody free flats and houses.

Street Writer

Mission District: 5 years

Age: 52



## SEVEN DANCING STARS

by  
Gail Wittwer

It is not often that I star gaze in the City, let alone contemplate the seven sisters. There are so many streetlights, searchlights, stoplights, and headlights diffusing themselves into the humidity and pollution that the night sky is hard to see (save for the moon in its fuller phases.) Besides there is so much chaos at the street level that lifting ones head to the heavens may not even be such a grand idea. Night skies these days are for people who manage to escape the survival grind and end up laying on their backs in high mountain air. It is sad but I think that our myths are buried, harder to find , harder to tell.

This isn't to say that they don't effect us anymore, it's just that we are less aware of them. We still search for them in the littlest of everyday acts and superstitions. Our language is laced with the need for connection to the greater cosmos, "thank my lucky stars", "star light, star bright..." The idea that there are seven female stars hovering above this fragment of earth is comforting even if their appearance is rare and we cannot always remember their names.

I think that the seven stars are in fact eternal sisters that now have their arms linked together as one star and gaze upon the Mission as a communal child. A child which is constantly changing but never losing its joy at playing the game of survival. Life is not taken for granted here. It is earned with each hustle, each exchange of philosophy, each step. No matter the time of day or season of the year there is an air of perpetual spring that could only be explained by the blessing of our celestial sisters.

Artist

Mission District: 4 years

Age: 29







## SEVEN DANCING STARS

by  
Danilo Jaurez

Mio nombre es Danilo. Soy de El Salvador, Centro America, mi familia es de origin Lenca, La cual es una de las tribus de Centro America muy relacionas la con Mayas. Yo soy mezclado, mi padre era Gitano y mi madre es Lenca.

Mi madre nos contába de una tradición indigena de las mujeres nativas, sobre e planeta que es la estrella mas secrena a la tierra, y los nativos de mi territorio la Illamban, Los Laya que significa diosa del amor, tenura , suerte.

En los dias de verano esta estrella se macerca mas a la tierra y por la tarde muchas mujeres salen a obverarla. Hazta la medianoche, y predican por sus seres queridos y alguna hacen rituales espirituales y le par a los Laya favores. (si el esposo está enfermo, ó el ha abandondo a ella ó etc) Entonces si la mujer tiene el pelo largo tiene que cortaselo 2 ó 3 pulgadas y acriticarlo ó darselo a la estrella, y si tiene el pelo corto degaelo crecer hazta el prosimo verano. Y en se senitlo recupara el amor perido del esposo ó pretendiente, ó recuperar la salud de mismo.

Hay atro tradicion nativa ques es la da adoptar nombres del la estrellas y ponersecas a los ninos recien nacido y eso los protegerá y les dara muy buen suerte.

Rainbow worker

Mission District: 6 years

Age: 35



SEVEN DANCING STARS

by  
Lois Perillo

The seven sisters shine in the night sky as a galactic star cluster over 400 light years away, taking their name from the Pleiades of Greek mythology.

Often I've heard the tale of Pleiades, the seven daughters of Pleione and Atlas, who held the sky. The sisters divided their time between guarding the golden apple tree in the Garden of Hesperdides and hunting with the moon goddess Artemis, until Orion, the hunter, pursued them and they took refuge and watch in the sky.

Alcyone, Celaeno, Electra, Maia, Merope, Asterope and Taygete shared a love for adventure and a call to community service just as police officers do today. Those who watch from the stars are commemorated by all San Francisco police officers who wear seven pointed stars as an insignia and as a reminder of their duty to protect this earth.

Community Police Officer

Mission District: 4 years

Age: 35



If you look back at the original drawing, you will notice the stories are all in a single row. The Arts Commission decided to have them staggered in two rows, I reminded them that the placement of the stones allowed wheelchair user access to the stories and it would be easier for someone in a chair to read them if they were all at the lower height. They decided on the staggered look. Then they decided they wanted different frames for the stories and that little decision cost me a thousand dollars. Then they decided the stories had to be attached with theft-proof museum hardware, and tempered glass as well. Poof goes another five hundred dollars. They were engaging in design by committee and it was costing me.

The stones had been completed for months but it was somehow all right for the building construction to be eighteen months behind schedule. I had a job in Australia and I was not about to wait around for the contractor. When I was in Australia, I received an angry fax informing me that if I did not complete the installation on a certain day I would be sued for breach of contract. I responded by contacting the general contractor to discover what was the best date for me to do the installation so it fit into his schedule. We agreed upon a date. I informed the Arts commission of the date and announced that I would be back in the States to accomplish the installation on the date specified. When the project was completed I was informed that because the Arts Commission had recently taken some heat in the press for another project there would be no opening for my project and no publicity.

I had enough. This was the end. None of these projects ever lead to anything better. I was not getting better budgets, or more knowledgeable or compassionate clients. Galleries and museums had shown a distinct disinterest. I had expectations of the world of public art that it was not capable of producing. I was not getting rich and I was certainly not getting famous. It was time to find a more rewarding realm of creative endeavor, one not filled with petty clients with petty cash. I informed the Arts Commission that their outrageous behavior had substantially contributed to my decision to end my career in Public Art.

Since 1994, I have put all my energy into being a photographer. I really enjoy my work.