

Philip Martin Gallery

PUBLIC ART
ARCHIVE

Underwater Canopy

Santa Monica, California

Artist Name(s): Carl F. Cheng: [Visit website](#) +

Owner: City of Santa Monica, CA

Date: 2005

Location Name: Santa Monica Main Library



An integrated artwork sited at the Santa Monica Main Library at Santa Monica Boulevard and Sixth Street, “Underwater Canopy” by Carl Cheng is inspired by the marine life in the Santa Monica Bay.

The site-specific artwork is located over a portion of the café space in the outdoor garden courtyard of the library, which opened in 2006. The steel and glass structure is over 30 feet in diameter and swirls in a graceful canopy over eleven feet above the courtyard deck. It is adjacent to a water feature that also reflect the underwater theme. Five circular skylights mounted on the canopy display transparent images depicting underwater scenery as if the viewer is underwater.

Cheng was chosen as the Main Library project artist through the City of Santa Monica Arts Commission’s juried selection process from a field of 54 California artist applicants, many of them with international reputations. He has received several public art commissions throughout the United States and has an extensive roster of solo exhibitions and installations internationally. In 1988, he executed the “Santa Monica Art Tool: Walk on L.A.,” a cast concrete and steel sculpture that was installed on the beach north of the Santa Monica Pier. Cheng has also received numerous visual artist awards, grants,

Philip Martin Gallery

fellowships and residencies from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Getty, and the Flintridge Foundation.

“Underwater Canopy” is a project of the City of Santa Monica’s public percent for art program and was developed through a collaborative process with Moore Ruble Yudell Architects and Planners and the landscape architect for the projects, Pamela Burton & Company, both of Santa Monica. The interplay of materials, natural processes, and physical phenomena are hallmarks of Cheng’s public art. “Underwater Canopy” focuses on the effect of shadows thrown by the canopy as the sun moves across the patterned glass.

The artist states: The inspiration for the canopy in 2006 was the new photographic, topographic scan of the entire Santa Monica Bay that was made about that time. My interest as an artist was to place the viewer at the bottom of the kelp forest. By looking upwards through the skylights, one would see the fish swimming overhead. The smallest photo image in the canopy shows a topographical sonar map of the bay.

About the Artist:

Carl Cheng was born in San Francisco and raised in Los Angeles, CA. He received his Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts from UCLA and currently lives and works in Santa Monica, CA. His artworks, which attempt to demystify the human/nature relationship, have been exhibited throughout the U.S. and abroad. Cheng’s numerous other public commissions include Santa Monica Art Tool, which imprints the map of LA on the sand along Santa Monica Beach, a sheriff’s facility in San Francisco, and projects in New York City; Tempe, Arizona; and Seattle, Washington.