

Recolecciones

The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library Public Art Collection

“Recolecciones” is Spanish for “recollections” — as in memories. It also means “harvest” or “gatherings.” The Latin root, “lect,” means both “to read” and “to gather.” The ancient Romans envisioned reading as a process of gathering up scattered bits of information and combining them into meaningful sequences. Readers are thus gatherers and harvesters. The library is a place where people come together to recall and reformulate their common heritage. a place for “re-collection.”

As part of the City’s ongoing commitment to the arts, the San José Public Art Program commissioned artist Mel Chin to create an artwork for the new Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library. Mel Chin’s approach was a non-traditional one, creating 34 artworks, sited throughout the library, designed to pay homage to the Library’s collections. These artworks are to provoke your interest and curiosity, encouraging exploration and circulation throughout the Library. All of the artworks are sited to surprise you and add to your sense of mystery and wonder. They are site-specific; their adjacencies to the collections add context and additional layers of meaning. The artworks vary from large and dramatic statements to intimate and subtle insertions that may require numerous visits to discover. *Recolecciones* includes functional installations such as chairs, tables and shelves, as well as wall paneling, sculptural ceilings, curious light projections, and more traditional sculpture. Some of the concepts are invested with a sense of humor and quick wit, while others are designed for contemplation.

It is the hope of all involved in the creation of these artworks that they provide additional meaning to your library visits.

Artist Team

Mel Chin is an internationally recognized artist, known for creating works in a broad range of media and scale, including objects, temporary installations and permanent public artworks. Since the 1970s, he has produced artworks that join cross-cultural aesthetics with complex ideas including political and ecological issues. Mel Chin’s artistic process is highly collaborative in nature; his collaborators have included biologists, psychologists, geologists, medical doctors and television producers.

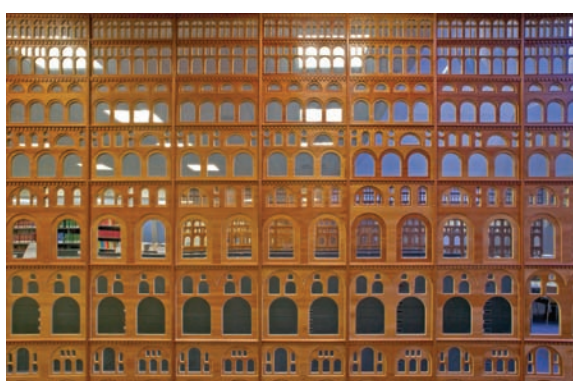
Mel Chin’s chief collaborators on *Recolecciones* were Haun Saussy, Bird White Houston, Professor of Comparative Literature at Yale University, Robert Babelton, Assistant Professor of History at Georgia Southern University, and artist James Millar. Mel Chin’s methodology also involved an extensive process of community consultation and participation. Through numerous community forums throughout San José, Mel Chin facilitated discussions on a wide spectrum of personal and civic issues that served to inspire the artwork concepts. These discussions involved participants from a diverse range of race, age and socio-economic backgrounds who voiced multiple points of view. In some cases, artworks are the implementation of creative concepts delivered by talented students of San José State University and the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art.

Recolecciones: A GUIDE

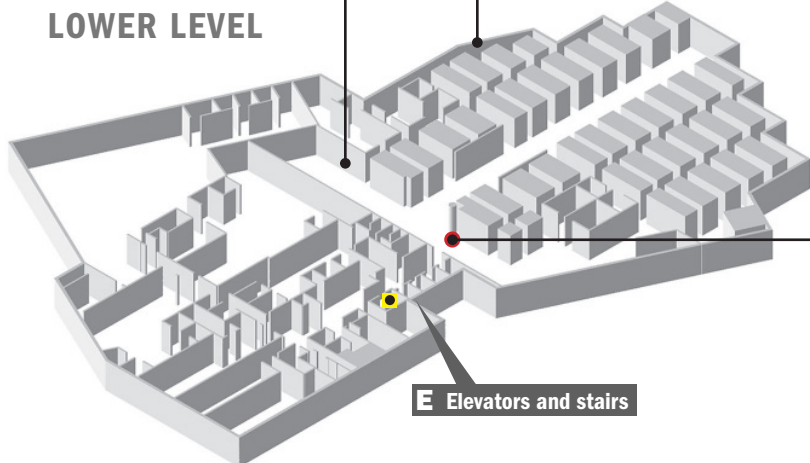
The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library Public Art Collection

Babel

Inspired by Pieter Brueghel’s *Tower of Babel*, two parallel walls in the Government Periodicals and Microfilm Section are covered by elaborate frames inset with mirrors, reinforcing the theme of infinite reproduction; a meditation on the monumental and reflective nature of language.



LOWER LEVEL



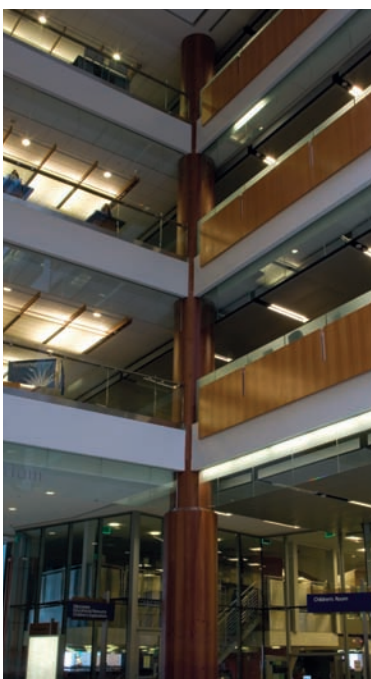
Canary Couch

A canary-yellow reading chair, an overstuffed vinyl-clad version of “Twenty Bird™,” situated amid the stacks on this subterranean level, references San José’s mining history where fragile caged mineshaft canaries were used to warn miners of unhealthy air. *Canary Couch* becomes a metaphor for the role of libraries as cultural institutions whose health and vigor testifies to the well-being of the societies that support them.



True and Through

A magnificent redwood tree was removed to accommodate construction of the new Library building. The tree was hauled cross-country, milled by the artists into veneer, and returned to clad a continuous column within the building. The reconstructed trunk begins on the Lower Level and reaches to the Eighth Floor.

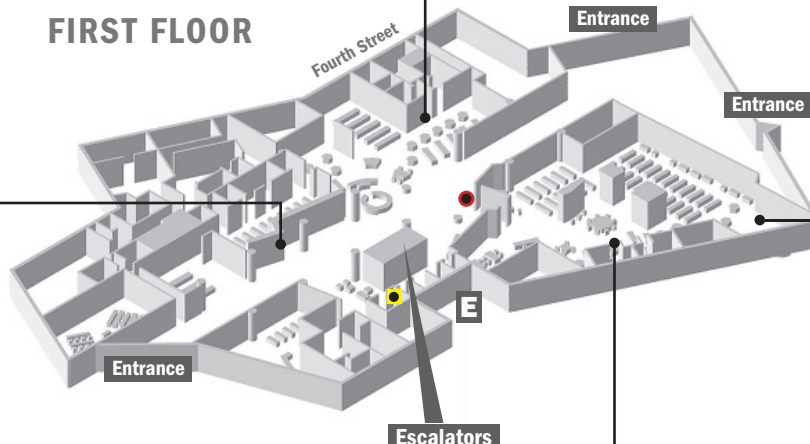


Fiction/Fiction

As in many great mystery novels, the Brandenburg Browsing Area contains a secret rotating bookcase. One side of the shelf is stocked with faux mystery books, the other with current popular-fiction titles.



FIRST FLOOR



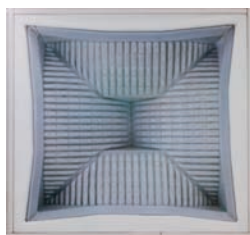
Counter

A digital reader mounted on a wall adjacent to the checkout counter displays a real-time record of the total number of books checked out system-wide since the opening of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library in August 2003.



Tree of Light

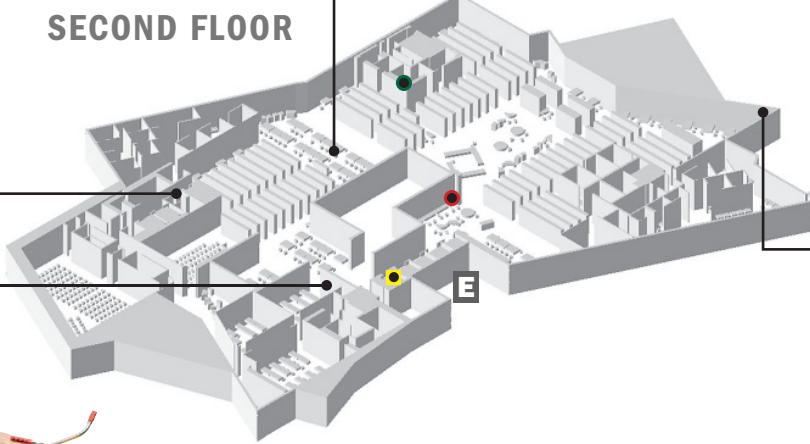
A light fixture above the Children’s Story Telling Area alludes to a 19th century diagram of the Sephirothic Tree, a symbolic Arabic and Jewish mapping of the connections of life, language and belief.



Oasis

Desert watering holes are sites where stories have been exchanged for millennia. The nomadic tribes who traversed these desert lands have inspired many of our fairy tales. In homage to nomadic storytellers, the carpet and furniture designs in the Children’s Area were developed jointly by the artists and architects on the basis of traditional geometric patterns and colors of tribal weavings.

SECOND FLOOR



Round-Up

Eighty-one leather chairs, each marked with one of the forty-three cattle brands of the original San José ranchos (as recorded in 1819), “range” freely on the 2nd floor.



Hearth

A fireless corner fireplace is fabricated from book-shaped cast bricks and marble specifically selected for its smoky tendrils. This artwork alludes to the history of book burning.

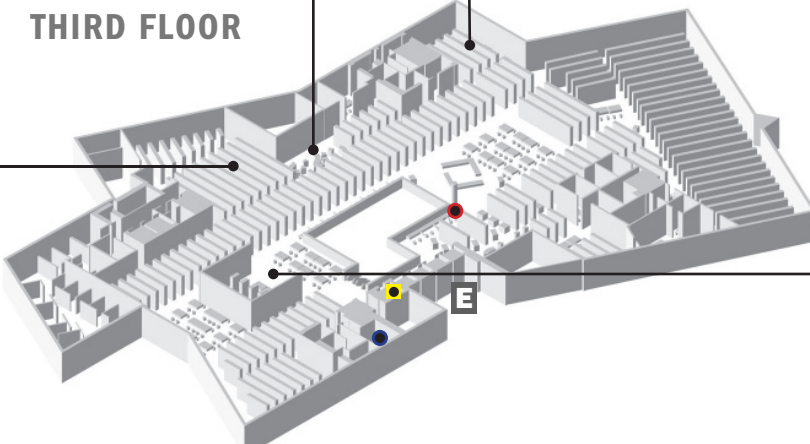


Raza Writers

The transformation and personalization of mass-produced cars parallels the process of reading, promoting transformation, personal movement and creativity. *East Side Story* is a chopped down bicycle supporting a table detailed with stories of San José’s east side. The ‘48 Chevy Fleetline is a table activated with electric lifts. *Table of Miagros* incorporates thousands of Latin American traditional charms. The designs, selected through an area-wide competition and fabricated locally, celebrate creative local enterprise.



THIRD FLOOR



Self-Help Mirrors

Mirrors mounted behind the books in the Self-Help Section give us another perspective with which to reflect on ourselves — if we care or dare to.



Vessel

A vessel formed in the shape of the redoubled profile of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., emanates the colors of skin tones representing the ethnic composition of the citizens of San José. This vessel, located adjacent to the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Collection, is filled with the symbolic “content of our [collective] character.”



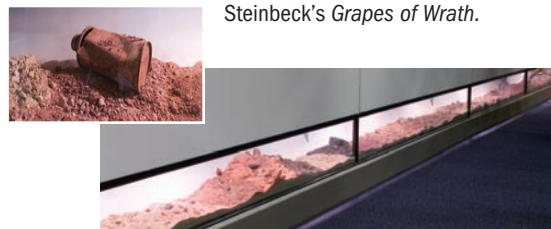
Page Passage

As library patrons walk between two rows of the book stacks, they trigger sounds of pages turning, followed at the end of the corridor by the sound of a book closing. Books contain “passages;” the reading of a book can also be a passage to a new way of seeing the world.

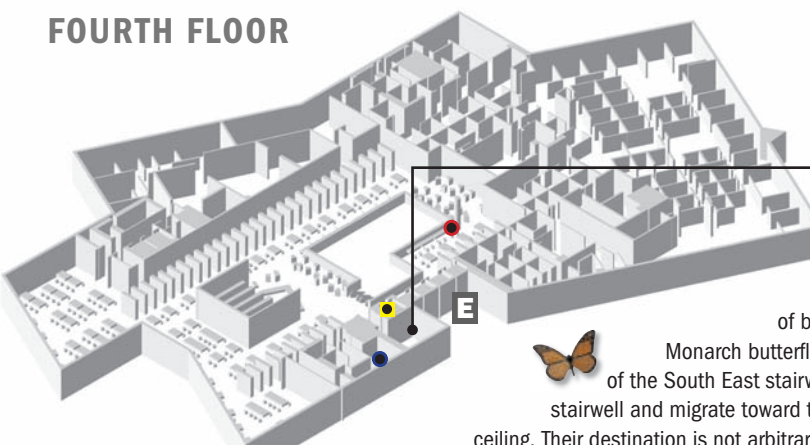


Steinbeck’s Fissure

A diorama at ankle height is located within a wall surrounding the Steinbeck Collection. Steinbeck described the process of rediscovery as follows: “A young, inquisitive and original man might one morning find a fissure in the traditional technique of thinking. Through this fissure he might look out and find a new external world about him.” The fissure contains soil and artifacts from the Oklahoma-to-California migration outlined in Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*.



FOURTH FLOOR

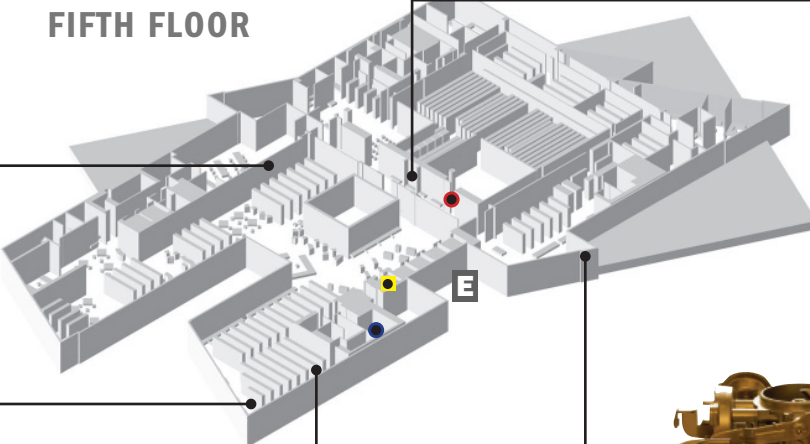


Migration

The path of *Migration* begins with the ascension of thousands of brilliantly colored cast metal monarch butterflies along the brilliant blue wall of the South East stairwell. The butterflies escape the stairwell and migrate toward the book stacks resting on the ceiling. Their destination is not arbitrary, but marks the location of significant books by Latin American authors of various disciplines. *Migration* acknowledges the contributions of these authors and further reinforces the concept of “circulation” — both of books and knowledge — as a major goal of the Library.



FIFTH FLOOR



Golden Gate

The gateway to the Special Collections displays 88 golden carburetors, the construction of which recalls the towers of the Golden Gate Bridge, an emblem of the utopian hopes and dreams of California, and a part of the state’s highway culture. The carburetors also recall the ranks of bodhisattva images in Buddhist shrines, suggesting the sacred and infinitely elusive quality of such utopian dreams. The embrace of the car as a cultural icon contributes to making California what it is today.



Skeptacle

If a skep is a beehive made of straw, and a spectacle is something to behold, and being skeptical is advisable in this complicated world, then *Skeptacle*, is a giant bookcase for the thesis volumes produced by generations of San José State University students. *Skeptacle* honors the boundless investigation of the thesis authors, and their industrious, creative and intellectual productivity.



Beethoven’s Inner Ear

A brass-plated, perforated, sculptural representation of an inner ear, approximately the size of a French horn, replaces the grill of a public-address speaker in the ceiling of the Music Section. “The most perfect music is soundless,” said the Taoist philosopher Lao-Tzu. Beethoven’s compositions produced after the onset of his deafness are the result of an inner, intellectual hearing, and are considered by many to be his most far-reaching and exploratory work.



Father Magin’s Pillow

One of the founders of the Santa Clara Franciscan Monastery, Father Magin Català is said to have foreseen the coming of the Anglo-Americans, the railroad, the discovery of gold and the 1906 earthquake and fire, in dreams that came while he slept on his adobe pillow. This chair-sized pillow, fabricated from adobe with flakes of gold, straw particles, and ash, alludes to those dreamlike prognostications of history.





DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. LIBRARY
A collaboration between the City of San Jose and San Jose State University

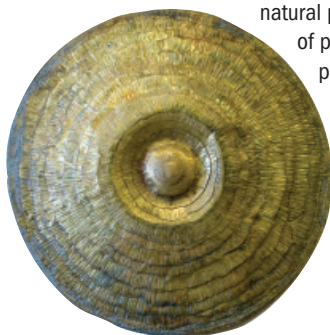
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CITY OF
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Redevelopment Agency

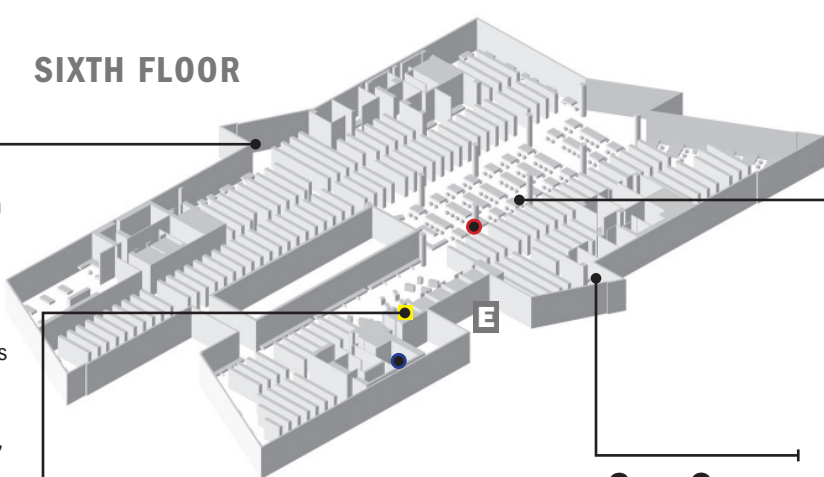
CITY OF
SAN JOSE
CAPITAL OF SILICON VALLEY

Gong & Scale

The design of this hand-hammered brass gong references the San José scale, a parasite that nearly destroyed the fruit orchards of the Santa Clara Valley in the 1880s. Chinese laborers, blamed for this pestilence, led one of America's first labor revolts. Below the gong, behind glass, is a mallet with a head of embroidered silk; the pattern and color based on the Asian ladybug, the scale's natural predator. This commemoration of past dangers, natural remedies, persecutions, and call to activism, is located adjacent to the Labor and Immigration Sections.



SIXTH FLOOR



Sour Grapes

Aesop's fox disparaged the grapes he was unable to reach saying that they were sour. Sprouting from the ceiling in the Business and Economics Section, this twisted and tortured wrought-iron vine is laden with sour green fruit. The sculpture can be interpreted as a sly comment on the early agricultural economy of San José, the data-harvesting economy that has replaced it, and deals gone awry.

Archeology Table

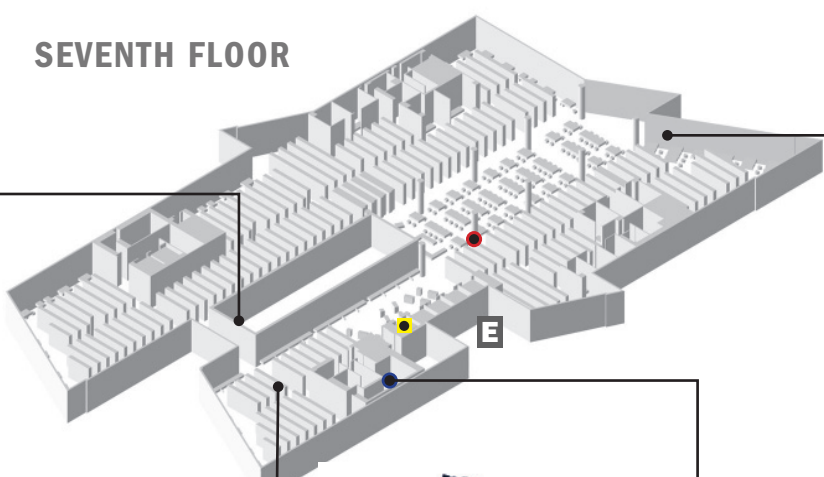
A carved volcanic stone table, alluding to Olmec sculpture, is placed among the standard library tables in the vicinity of the Archeology Collection.



Hatch

A little door surrounded by an ornate façade is located at the base of the wall of the southernmost elevator. Easily noticed by children, it evokes an *Alice in Wonderland* potential of going down (and up) the rabbit hole into another world. The artwork suggests a dialogue between the construction of imaginary spaces by author Lewis Carroll and of built spaces by famous architect Louis Sullivan. As Carroll animated the movement of childhood imagination, Sullivan necessitated the elevator with his skyscrapers.

SEVENTH FLOOR



Wise Cracks

The glass windows on the bridge located near the Art and Art History Section appear cracked. On closer scrutiny, the cracks match those in Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*. Closer inspection reveals the lines as jokes and puns, sand-blasted into the surface of the glass. Duchamp shattered art-making tradition, using puns, irony and complicated layering to emphasize the conceptual over the retinal.



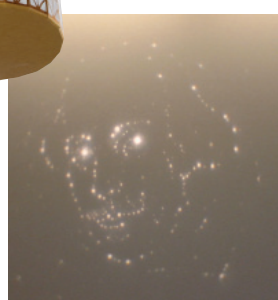
Owl of Minerva

The nineteenth-century idealist philosopher G.W.F. Hegel noted, "the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk," meaning that philosophy comes to understand a way of life just as it passes away. Hegel had in mind the transition from eighteenth-century feudalism to nineteenth-century commercialism and democracy. A carving of a great horned owl perched within a darkened niche waits to take flight over the Philosophy and Psychology Sections.



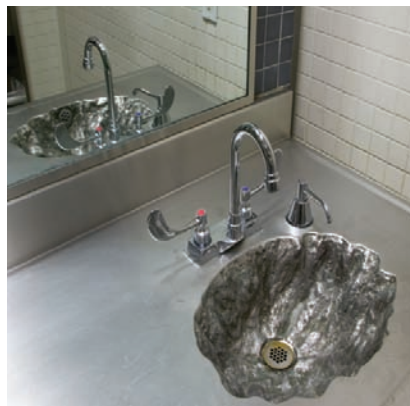
English Lit

Honoring a desire expressed by the San José State University English Department to immortalize the Bard, the artists designed a mechanized "constellation" based on Shakespeare's portrait that projects across a wall adjacent to a collection of his works. The image appears briefly and randomly once each day. Shakespeare's lit visage will not escape Brutus' comments in *Julius Caesar*, Act II, Scene 1: "The exhalations whizzing in the air give so much light that I may read by them."



Reflecting Pools

Creating a commentary on water usage and industrial erosion, one of the three sinks within each of the men's and women's bathrooms is sculpturally eroded, progressing from the Eighth to the Third Floor.



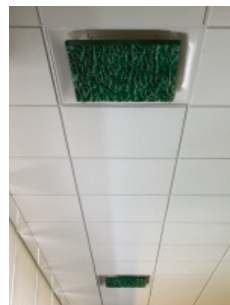
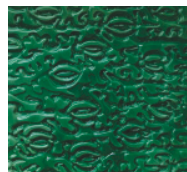
Vermin Miller Chairs

A mutation of the standard library chairs with two additional legs, this artwork references the insect world and is located near the Natural Science Section.

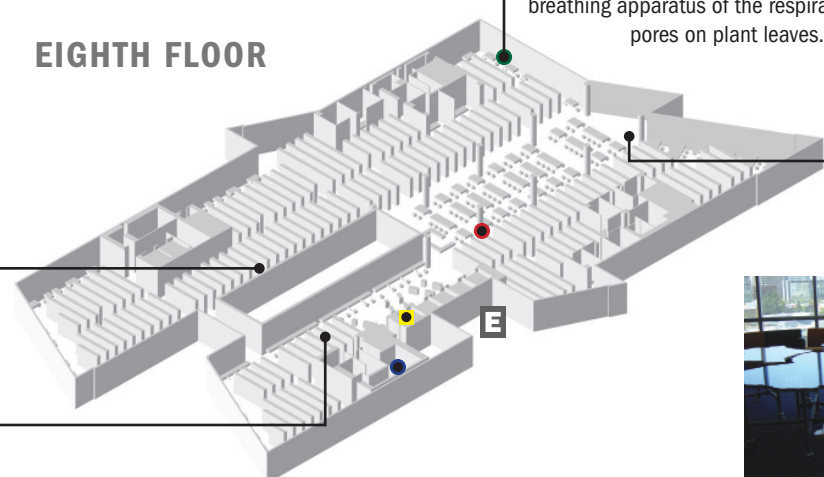


In and Out

The grill covers of the building's ventilation system have been clad with a sculptured surface pattern derived from stomata, the breathing apparatus of the respiration pores on plant leaves.



EIGHTH FLOOR



Zeno's Books

This artwork is composed of white leather-bound books inserted among the Mathematics collection. Zeno of Elea, in the 6th century B.C., argued that motion was impossible. He reasoned that since the space between any two points can be infinitely subdivided (halved, then halved again, and then halved again, and so on) no moving object could ever reach its goal. This series of books, shrinking progressively, visually manifests Zeno's mathematical construction.



Tectonic Tables

These five functional reading tables, located adjacent to the Geology Section, map the shape of the Gondwanaland. The granite of each table was quarried from the continent it recalls. The tables are on casters, referring to the tectonic activity of the Earth's surface, ever evident in California.



Underground Books

Beneath certain book stacks throughout the Library lie underground "vaults" holding books that historically have been banned, burned or intentionally set aside. *Huckleberry Finn* and *Harry Potter* lie buried beneath the Mystery and Science Fiction Sections. Galileo is represented beneath Science. *Candide* can be uncovered in Folio Art and *Ulysses* in British Literature. More vaults are to be found in amongst the book collections in: Art, Old World History, Mathematics, International Languages, Business, Law, Literature, Asian Literature, Technology and Control Systems, and Decorative Arts.



FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE ARTWORK, PLEASE VISIT WWW.SJLIBRARY.ORG/MLKART.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ARTIST Mel Chin

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT Mel Chin, Haun Saussy, Bob Batchelor, and James Miller
Other contributors to the conceptualizations of the artworks include over 100 San Jose community members: San Jose City and University librarians; students of San Jose State University and Cooper Union School of Art; San Jose State University team: Wendy Angel, Ed Clapp, Francesca Davis, Russell Fan, Carolyn Gersman, Janet Kang, David Kempkin, Rachel Lazo, Sheila Malone, Masako Miki, Inna Kazanova, Rob Spain, Scott Timball, John Zimmerman, Mingling Zhou
Cooper Union School of Art team: Amelia Bauer, Alejandro Cardenas, Robert de Saint Phalle, Jorge Ebrecht, Nina Gallant, Amee Genell, Frances Kerrigan, Sam Kusack, Alexander Monorchino, Sarah Morgan, Michael Vahrenwald, Alyson Vieira, Donald Tobias Wong
Heben Nagge – Office Management, Jamie Streichter – Bookkeeping
FABRICATION/INSTALLATION MANAGEMENT TEAM Barron Brown – Lead Fabricator and Project Manager, Helen Nagge
CORE FABRICATION TEAM Barron Brown, Curtis Allen, Jim Whitehurst, Jerry Murphy
SAN JOSE FABRICATION/INSTALLATION MANAGEMENT Mary Rubin – City of San Jose Public Art Program Project Manager, Doores Montenegro – San Jose Redevelopment Agency Project Manager, Keim Kunndick, Dawn Zimmer, Jeanne Rawlings and Bill Bocken – Carter Johnson Architects; Trish Heine, Jim King-Smith, Brendan Barrio – Gilbane Building Company, Construction Management
RAZA WRITERS ARTISTS Jeanne Labour – *Table of Mirages*; Abraham Ortega – *'48 Freeline*; Matthew Rodriguez, Sam Rodriguez, and Huong Nguyen – *East Side Story*

ADDITIONAL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ARCHAEOLOGY TABLE Keith Grisdale, Wayne Shoemaker
ARTIC Asterville Thermoform
ABEL Keith Grisdale
GLASS FOR LESS Keith Grisdale
SHOPSIDE, INC. Julie Murray
BRETHROVEN'S Charles Tucker
CANARY COUCH Charles Tucker
OWL OF MINERVA James Miller
PAGE PASSAGE Concept: SSU Student Team
BOB TAYLOR Bob Taylor
RAZA WRITERS Concept: Alejandro Cardenas
COULTER Concept: Alejandro Cardenas
VOIR INDUSTRIES Bill Winstart – Fabrication
ENGLISH LIT Concept: Amelia Bauer
SECTION/SECTION Concept: Amelia Bauer
DAVID MURRAY David Murray
GOLDEN GATE Concept: Mary Rubin
HAUT SCOUT ADVANCED Auto Tech Class Fall, 2006; Spencer Cook, Gene Davis, Josh De Rush, Humberto Felix, Ben Fontanilla, Binh Hoang, Jon Magullo, Leonardo Morales, Nick Peterson, Jorge Santana, David Wilson
CONCEPT Barron Brown
ALTON EDWARDS Alton Edwards
WYPER POWELL Frank Sowers, Megan Goveia, Korney Highfill, Ulla Larsen
STAL GRANITE Stal Granite
JOINT LIBRARY PUBLIC ART MASTER PLAN Freeman Whitehurst Group
JOINT LIBRARY ARTIST SELECTION Mary Livingston Beebe, Ann Chamberlain, Regina Cornwell, Gretchen Freeman, Robert Milnes, Jill Sebastian, Joel Stigson – Selection Panel; Brenda Brown – Selection Coordination
RAZA WRITER ARTIST SELECTION Ann Chamberlain, Mel Chin, Julie Curry-Rodriguez, Frank Espinoza, Corbin
SPECIAL THANKS Harriet Traug, Barbara Goldstein, Jane Light, Martha Alvarez, Robert Bass, Guineer Brinkers, Patricia Breivik, Cindy Chavez, Alan Becker, Bill Etem, Fawna Ferguson, Art Herrlich, Roni Klein, Sylvia Light, Bob McCormack, David Neill, Lorraine Olsack, Lung Phan, Bob Ritt, Sharon Russell, Mark Scheraga, Nick Smith, Jerry Stein, the San Jose City Council and Arts Commission for their ongoing support, and the library donors who sustain the project.
GRAPHIC DESIGN CDF Graphics
FLOOR PLANS Courtesy of the San Jose Mercury News
PHOTOGRAPHY Gregory Case Photography
WEB DESIGN Gorman Lai

RECOLECCIONES

THE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. LIBRARY
PUBLIC ART COLLECTION

M. CHIN, H. SAUSSY,
R. BATCHELOR, J. MILLAR
ET AL