

Andrea, Ghirardelli Square, 1966 - 1968

ADDIE LANIER: *“I wanted to make a sculpture that could be enjoyed by everyone. For the old, it would bring back the fantasy of their childhood and for the young, it would give them something to remember when they grow old” -*

SUSAN STAUTER: - those are Ruth’s words, read by her daughter Addie.

ADDIE LANIER: *She really understood that when you're making public art, you're trying to engage as many people as you can. So this mermaid and the frogs - children get it. And so it is a very beloved fountain.*

SUSAN STAUTER: Ruth’s friend Andrea modeled for the mermaids while nursing her new baby.

ANDREA JEPSON: *She used to come over and draw me. And she decided that she was going to do a body cast of me. She was a force - it was extremely hard to say no to her. I'm not sure anybody ever did!*

SUSAN STAUTER: The fountain is full of inventiveness – such as the scaly mermaid tails. Ruth’s daughter Aiko:

AIKO CUNEO: *The tail is made with looped wire covered in several coats of wax and then cast into bronze.*

NARRATOR: The fountain caused plenty of debate -

AIKO CUNEO: - *partly because it was a nursing mermaid. So that was controversial in 1968.*

SUSAN STAUTER: But also, the landscape architect who designed the square wanted something more modern. Abstract. It looked like a big battle was in the cards, but Ruth and the square’s developer stood their ground. The mermaids were installed in the middle of the night. Next morning, they’d appeared as if by magic!

Ruth got to explore new techniques during the two years she spent creating the fountain. The first model was made from a body cast in plaster. Then she cast that model into wax for further sculpting. And finally had it cast into bronze – her first experience of working with this material. She used a foundry formed by four Dutch artists, located in the industrial section of San Francisco, south of Market Street.

AIKO CUNEO: *What was great about her was that if you didn't know how to do something, you went and you found the right people to teach you how to do it. So that fountain allowed her to learn all about the casting process.*

ADDIE LANIER: *And the foundrymen became friends.*

AIKO CUNEO: I know, and she had so much respect for people who worked really hard and were good at what they did.

XAVIER LANIER: And I think because of her demeanor, people wanted to be involved with her projects or be around her.

SUSAN STAUTER: That was Ruth's son Xavier. Her creative process often involved others – artists and craftspeople, and friends and family. Her kids made a few of the frogs here. And even went to Chinatown to get their mom a live frog as a model.

AIKO CUNEO: I think it was a birthday present for her. No, it was a Mother's Day present for her, so that she could then draw and sculpt the frog. And it got out of the box it was in, and it went under the gas pedal and we couldn't go forward, we couldn't go back. But you know, we were laughing so hard.