

Aurora, The Embarcadero, 1984 - 1986

PETER COYOTE: Position yourself so you're looking eastward through this fountain's opening, to the San Francisco Bay and beyond. It's a stellar view, perfectly framed by a sculpture that Ruth Asawa named "Aurora", after the Roman goddess of the dawn. On a bright morning, the rising sun catches the facets of this fountain, turning its crisp, geometric forms into a circular dance of light and shadow.

The sculpture had its origins in an art form close to Ruth Asawa's heart. Here are her daughters Addie and Aiko, and son Paul:

ADDIE LANIER: *It's based on origami.*

AIKO CUNEO: *The model was a very small, maybe 10 by 10 ring of the folded origami paper - I remember it was silver colored. But when you attach the two ends of the ring, it rotates, you can turn it. And she liked when things could move once they were made.*

PETER COYOTE: Investigating the properties of paper was also a key part of the curriculum at the celebrated Black Mountain College. Ruth and her husband Albert Lanier studied there under Josef Albers in the late 1940s.

ADDIE LANIER: *You know, Josef Albers gave my father Albert the task when he left college, my parents told Albers they were going to get married and Albers told my father: "Never let her stop doing her work. You must make sure she does her work."*

PETER COYOTE: Albert became an architect, and often supported Ruth in creating complex pieces. This one has 120 welded stainless-steel triangles.

PAUL LANIER: *His geometry was unbelievable. He understood all the complexity and could put it onto paper.*

ADDIE LANIER: *Well, my mother folded the paper, the pattern, but then when it had to be fabricated into metal, you needed to have really accurate design. And he calculated all of the angles, the dimensions, how the sculpture would be supported structurally.*

PETER COYOTE: Ruth felt that one of the most important parts of her work was to expose kids to art, which often included origami. Susan Stauter, her friend and frequent collaborator on education projects, remembers:

SUSAN STAUTER: *I've seen her go into a math class and fold with students and explain the connections to geometry and all of this. And the connection is so real and immediate because the students are folding it themselves - they're experiencing it. And with Ruth things, art is not just an idea or something to be talked about. It's experiential.*

PETER COYOTE: And at home, even the Christmas tree was an opportunity to create something entirely new. Grandsons William and Henry -

WILLIAM LANIER: *I remember the Christmas tree in the living room was just one long, big metal spiral. And I remember origami ornaments.*

HENRY WEVERKA: *It actually was a very ingenious design too, cause you could stack your presents underneath it, because it was suspended from the ceiling.*