

Growth, Bethany Center, 1968 - 1969

PETER COYOTE: A glowing sun in a brilliant blue sky. And a floating form that's both simple and complex, delicate and strong. You might see it as four trees, their branches extending out into the air. Or maybe as roots, multiplying as they reach for nourishment. The mosaic is called "Growth". It's an inspiring message at this senior center entryway, symbolizing the new directions and beginnings that aging can bring.

The mosaic's branches also resemble Ruth's tied wire sculptures and the related drawings she made at this time. Her daughter Addie explains what her process looked like:

ADDIE LANIER: She starts with a cross, and she branches out and there are these very intense, focused, meditative drawings. I know that she's working through ideas. It's very much the idea of the mandala, which is, your hands can be doing the work, and your mind is free.

PETER COYOTE: Ruth was deeply committed to making art that everyone could enjoy – and share in. Later, she donated a huge table from her own home to the Bethany Center. It's used for seniors' art activities.

Growth gave another of Ruth's cherished projects a kickstart. When her collaborator, Mexican artist Alfonso Pardeñas, couldn't pay her design fee, Ruth asked for payment in mosaic tiles instead. Ruth used them at Alvarado Elementary School. She invited students to make self-portraits and create the neighborhood on the school yard walls, as part of the Arts Workshop program she'd recently established with another parent. Eventually, the program spread to over fifty San Francisco public schools. Here's her friend and fellow education activist, Susan Stauter:

SUSAN STAUTER: She wanted students to experience the arts. And she was a pistol too, she would fight so hard for what she thought was important. She never gave up.