

San Francisco Yesterday and Today, Parc 55 Hotel, 1983 - 1984

PAUL LANIER: *I never really noticed how beautiful the Golden Gate Bridge is until I had to make it out of playdough.*

SUSAN STAUTER: That's Ruth Asawa's son Paul, an artist who often collaborated with his mom. These seven sculpted panels are called "San Francisco Yesterday and Today". They present a cavalcade of San Francisco sights and scenes – both historical and modern. Ruth, Paul, assistant Nancy Thompson, and others molded the scenes from flour and salt dough, over Styrofoam to give more depth. The panels were then cast in glass-fiber-reinforced concrete. This industrial material was a new medium for Ruth. And the craftsmen who made the molds and poured the concrete were old-world craftsmen from Europe.

Let's dive in. The panel with the Golden Gate Bridge also goes right back in time. Beneath it, you'll see traditional Chinese and western sailing ships. And local Native American people, with their woven shelters and boats.

PAUL LANIER: *Ruth thought it was very important to preserve the history of a particular place, like the Miwok and the Ohlone native Americans that lived around the Bay.*

SUSAN STAUTER: Another panel shows San Francisco's domed City Hall. It's triumphantly rebuilt after the 1906 earthquake, like a phoenix rising from the flames beneath. Cable cars on a super-steep hill appear in another scene. On one side, the buildings of Chinatown and the financial district soar upward, and on the other is Japantown's Peace Pagoda. They highlight a city rich in diversity as well as history. One of the cable car operators is a portrait of a friend, who drove cable cars in real life!

Ruth's passion for arts education often led her to invite school students to assist on projects. For this one, she had students from the public arts high school,

PAUL LANIER: *to give them the experience of working on a public commission, working on a serious artwork. She was very committed to bringing artists to work in public schools.*

PAUL LANIER: *I think she felt that art changed her life, and her art teachers changed her life.*

SUSAN STAUTER: Here's Ruth's granddaughter Emma:

EMMA LANIER: *I think she just really wanted everyone to be involved – yeah, anyone can be part of the project - they don't have to have some special training or skill, but you'll learn a lot on the way, from her.*