

## ***The City of Oakland's Public Art Program has commissioned a new public art project for Willow Park!***

Oakland Artist Laurel True was invited to create nine ceramic tile mosaic bench insets to be installed into the tops of the new concrete seating at Willow Park in the Spring of 2007.

### **Project Description for Mosaic Panels at Willow Park**

The artist's concept is to include West Oakland youth who live near Willow Park in a collaborative design process that also includes design concepts and ideas from youth in West Africa- specifically Ghana- to create a cross-cultural design that would point to universal themes and positive concepts to "guide our daily lives as citizens of the world".



***(Left: A recently completed mosaic project by artist Laurel True)***

The artist's design proposal for this project includes colorful mosaic patterning in which specific words would be drawn out in the mosaic design. She wanted to solicit specific words and concepts from both groups of youth that they thought were important not only to park visitors, but to everyone. The patterning behind these words would be an abstracted and stylized interpretation of a type of woven cloth made in Ghana that has come to symbolize African American identity for some called Kente cloth- characterized by bright geometric and linear patterns. Kente cloth is a symbol of royalty, respect and identity in Ghana, and is often given to family and visitors as a gift and symbol of welcome, honor and hospitality.

The artist organized two "rap sessions" with youth to collect ideas from them about important messages to put in the mosaic benches in the park. One of the rap sessions took place on January 6, 2007 in West Oakland, at the house of community organizer and parks advocate Marilyn Reynolds, who lives less than two blocks from Willow Park. There were 12 youth present ranging from ages 4 –16. The second "rap session" took place at a cultural center in Nungua, Ghana on January 20, 2007 (this trip was already planned before the project's inception). There were 25 kids participating- also between the ages of 4 and 16.

From these "rap sessions" the artist selected 9 themes to be used in the mosaic bench insets, written in mosaic tile. These were crossover themes/ ideas that were offered by both groups of youth, which the artist believes is significant in that it illustrates the universality not only of these concepts but the importance invested in them by youth everywhere, from West Oakland to West Africa.

The common themes that will be drawn out in the mosaic designs are:

**COURAGE**

**HONESTY**  
**PEACE**

**LOVE**  
**FREEDOM TRUTH**

**CREATIVITY**  
**UNITY**

**RESPECT**



# Cultural Arts Programs

## *Cultural Arts & Marketing Division*



*Another recent work by Laurel True: Oakland Bertha Port Project*

### **Willow Park Artist Laurel True:**

As a mosaic artist, instructor and advocate of community enrichment through art, Laurel True has worked with many groups and communities, specifically in the Bay Area, in New Orleans and in a fishing town in Ghana, West Africa called Nungua. In the Bay Area she has created over 70 permanent mosaic installations in the form of murals, sculptural benches, park furniture and architectural mosaics, and had worked with youth in both the design and execution phase of mosaic making for community projects in Oakland and throughout the Bay Area.

### **The City of Oakland Public Art Program:**

For the Willow Park Project, in 2006 the City of Oakland's Public Art Program recruited artists to design art elements to be incorporated into the Willow Mini Park improvements in West Oakland. The goal of the artwork project is to beautify the park and celebrate local community. An interview panel of community members and City representatives interviewed local artists for this project. Oakland artist Laurel True was selected to develop her mosaics for the park seating areas in December 2006.

### **The project is scheduled for installation May 2007.**

Funding for this project comes from the Oakland Public Art Program. This project is authorized by the City of Oakland's Public Art Ordinance, commonly referred to as the "Percent for Art" Ordinance, which requires the allocation of 1.5 percent of municipal capital improvement project costs for public art.

**For more information on the project, please contact [Kristen Zaremba, Public Art Program, City of Oakland @ 238-2155 / kzaremba@oaklandnet.com](mailto:kzaremba@oaklandnet.com).**