

A Silver Thread

Art traces Bellevue's past, future

City Hall visitors will experience something unique—major works by three Pacific Northwest artists helping to transform the new building into a cultural legacy for the community. Their artworks celebrate the history, culture, and people of Bellevue, creating a pathway from the city's past to its future.

The artists—Dan Corson from Seattle; Linda Beaumont from Langley; and Alan Storey from Vancouver, B.C.—were captivated by Bellevue's history and natural beauty. Taken together, their art—Silver Root, Reed-Rookery-Boat,

Current, and Compass—weaves a story about Bellevue. As you move from the plaza in front of City Hall through the building itself, you will follow a silver thread that metaphorically stretches from the land, to the water's edge, and then through the water itself to views beyond.

Dan Corson begins the story in his two sculptures, one at the plaza's edge and the other at the entry to the building. He sees his two projects as “poetically linking nature and our early relationship to it to some version of the future out in front of us.”



Silver Root

Corson's Silver Root sits in a black reflecting pool at the northeast corner of the plaza. It is as if the tree came up, leaving a footprint in the ground. The root sculpture suggests Bellevue's foundation, the place where we come from. It links us to the land that was once a forest of massive trees, which gave way to logging, then to farming, and then to a vital urban center. The root is tilted, half up, half leaning. It is a gesture of activity, of aliveness. It is balanced, as we constantly strive to balance our natural and built environments. The visible root structure reflects a central idea in the City Hall design: making the work of the city visible and accessible to its residents.

The root sculpture itself is taken from an ancient cedar tree harvested in the 1800s. The smooth heartwood at the center of the root shows beautiful swirls like the water it stands in. You can see the growth rings, the bark, and the trunk. Cast in bronze and plated in high-tech silver, it is the color of the future: bright, shimmering, and reflecting light. It glistens in the sun like a giant sunburst.

Located directly behind the root is a living **nurse log**, planted with a living tree as part of the landscape. It marks



the start of this new civic place. Over time the tree will grow. Years from now the nurse log will be gone; in its place, a magnificent old tree dwarfing the root in front of it. Life growing from the old nurse tree and life symbolized in the silver root—in full view of each other.

Reed-Rookery-Boat



Photo by Frank Huster

Moving to the front entrance, you encounter Corson's second sculpture, the Reed-Rookery-Boat. This artwork takes you to the water's edge. The stainless steel piece was inspired by the great blue herons' nests found in Bellevue. Reflective silver "reeds" emerge from the reflecting pond on the 1st floor by the new Service First center. Hammered and bent, they have an organic feeling as they bow and extend up into the air. At about 10 feet up, the reeds are collected and woven together with materials not normally seen on the outside of buildings: coaxial cable, conduit, wire rope, galvanized and copper piping, and fiber optic cables. The weaving forms a rough shape suggesting a nest from a rookery or even a Native American longboat that might have been used to travel the Mercer Slough.

Reed-Rookery-Boat cont.



Corson saw this piece as a “quirky juxtaposition between high-tech materials and low-tech, nature-inspired shapes and materials woven into this universal boat form way up in the air.” It’s like birds taking a bit of this and that to form, insulate, and soften their nests. And fiber optics woven through the piece reveal the lighted form of the boat floating up in the air at night.

Current



Linda Beaumont’s artwork takes you into the river. Current is the epoxy terrazzo floor that flows the length of the entire concourse of the new City Hall. Echoing the steady and smooth movement of a river current, it is a visual metaphor for the flowing of ideas and activities within. It recalls the underground river close to City Hall and also references the river of underlying materials and people essential to the building.

The terrazzo floor is composed, in the artist’s words, of “a subtle shifting of the colors of a river, with water greens that shimmer with colored and iridescent glass chips inset into an undulant rhythm of silver lines throughout the floor. Lengths of glass cane, semi-precious stones and beads, shells, and mother of pearl abalone chips native to our region swirl in the rhythms of this river, creating a luminous organic field of color and energy underfoot.” Beaumont took her inspiration from the way the Japanese detail water and the watercolor aspect of wood block prints. In her floor, she says, “there is a current revealed, one that rewinds, reweaves, and respects the flowing energy of life.”

As the only interior artwork of the four pieces, Current becomes a refined conduit that connects the massive root system of Silver Root and the growing and weaving energy of the Reed-Rookery-Boat with an articulated, navigational artwork by Alan Storey, Compass.

Compass

Storey's work points to the views beyond. As you move through the interior concourse, you arrive at the balcony and look out to a classic Northwest vista of sky and mountains, including Mt. Rainier. Storey's Compass stands at the end of the balcony, the elegant 63-foot-tall compass needle. He was inspired by compasses and nautical directional devices and by the history of boating and compass manufacturing in Bellevue.

From the exterior of the building, his sculpture has a significant and dynamic presence in scale with the architecture. Compass offers a unique up-close experience for viewers, too. Nestled into a gentle inward curve of the guardrail, it turns in place to continually frame new views of surrounding vistas.

Storey is fascinated with ingeniously interactive art, and Compass, which is viewer-activated, is more like a sextant or spectroscope than a static photograph. The main front doors of the building send a signal to the viewfinder device on the balcony. Every time the doors open and close, the compass point moves an increment so that you will always be looking at a different point and a different direction. Views of our community and views beyond, our metaphoric future, are created by those who come to City Hall.

Dan Corson, Linda Beaumont, and Alan Storey have collaborated to build a story, using a rich variety of materials, creating one interwoven and continuous art experience. From old growth roots, to reeds in the quiet waters, through silver threads in a shimmering river, to the viewing compass, the art creates a pathway from Bellevue's past to its future.

