

# Where the Tree is Born

## Artist: Masayuki Nagase

June 2008

Joyce Ellington Branch Library / 491 E. Empire St., San Jose, CA 95112 / Council District 3

### ABOUT THE PROJECT

In the artist's words, "The history of the library's creation and its significant meaning to this neighborhood struck me. I was impressed with the work that Joyce Ellington and other members of the community did in the 1970s to bring the library to this neighborhood. The key issues I want to address in my concept are: 1) bring a meaningful metaphor in the artwork to the community; 2) acknowledge the significance of the history of the library; 3) work with natural imagery and natural materials; and 4) have the artwork recognize the strengths and the diversity of the neighborhood."



Above: View of *Where the Tree is Born*



Above: Detail of etching in granite tree

Mr. Nagase describes his concept of a tree as metaphor for the body and soul of the earliest inhabitants. Trees encompass an iconic role in community life. Throughout time trees have served as gathering places, and learning takes place beneath their branches. Such trees become part of a community's sense of self and even when they disappear, they remain in the community's collective sense of place. These ideas inspired his work.

Mr. Nagase created a 6' diameter granite seating element. Handprints on the side of the tree were collected from local community members and children at the Grant Elementary School, and in the center is an abbreviated history of the site – echoing the role rings play in marking the age of a tree. Incised in the ground are "shadows" of branches overhead.



Above: Detail of handprints on side of granite tree

#### **ABOUT THE ARTIST**

Masayuki Nagase was born in Kyoto, Japan. He began his career as an artist by studying painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Tokyo from 1968-1971. From 1971-1976 he trained in a traditional stone-carving apprenticeship in the granite quarries of Inada in Ibaragi-ken, Japan. Over the next 20 years, he participated in numerous international sculpture symposiums in Europe, Chile, Canada, Japan, and the United States. In 1979, Masayuki Nagase established a stone-carving studio in the region of Istria, on the Adriatic coast of Croatia. He has exhibited and completed a number of public art projects in Europe primarily in the country of Slovenia. In 1995, Nagase became a resident of the US. He established his studio with his wife, Michele Ku in Berkeley, California. More about Mr. Nagase may be found on his website [www.mnagase.com](http://www.mnagase.com).

#### **ABOUT THE PUBLIC ART PROGRAM**

The City of San José Public Art Program seeks to build community identity by initiating artworks and exhibitions that enhance the civic landscape. Through active community engagement, public art strives to reflect the City's diversity, historic richness, and envision its present and future.

The Public Art Program is part of the City's Office of Cultural Affairs, a division of the Office of Economic Development. The Public Art Program was established by a 1984 municipal ordinance that provides public art through funding from City capital improvement projects and eligible private development.

For further information and photos, please contact the San José Public Art Program.

