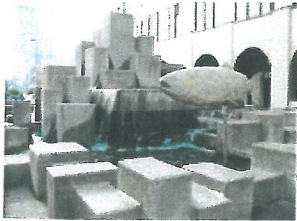


Free Arts Month: Walking around Tacoma's public art

Posted By [Rosemary Ponnekanti](#) on January 18, 2011 at 12:39 pm [Share this](#)



Maritime Fest Peace Salmon.

Tuesdays are often as tricky as Mondays for free arts events: Theaters are dark and galleries are (mostly) closed. But public art is always there whenever you care to look, and Tacoma has a wealth of it. One great way to see it, at least for the highly-concentrated downtown art, is to give yourself a walking tour. All the art is listed by map and photo on the city's arts website: www.tacomaculture.org/arts/publicart.asp, scroll to launch the public art tour. You can also ask at Tacoma Art Museum for their GPS treasure hunt brochure.

Why walk to see art?

1. It's fun. (Take your kids and turn it into a treasure hunt, as I did, e.g. "The next clue is a brain/buried anchor/face/whatever.")
2. It's good exercise (the tour I did takes about an hour over 10 city blocks.)
3. It makes you look at your city in a different way (and other cities, too.)
4. As a citizen, you get your public money's worth. (All the art is paid for by the City of Tacoma.)

So, here we go! Start at Tollefson Plaza and walk along the old railway line through the University of Washington. You'll come to Brian Goldbloom's "Terminus," a grid of upturned concrete suitcases in honor of the railway's old passengers. Walk down the 19th Street steps and look up: the university buildings have art way up near the roof, giant words that change as you walk by (try viewing from further away for best results.) On Pacific Avenue check out the sculptures of floats, fish tails and buried anchors in the median strip near the Link station before walking back to Union Station for Larry Anderson's lifesize bronze "Traveller" (the man with the carpet bag.)

Walk up along the Tollefson Plaza ramp past Shaun Peterson's towering tribal "Welcome Figure" and up to the Convention Center, where (if it's open) you can head up to the second-floor restrooms to see toilet cubicles with bubbly walls (Alex Schwerder's "Lovesick Walls.")

Stride along Broadway to the Hotel Murano, inside for world-renowned glass artists in the lobby and outside for the giant glass-filled ladle (my kids thought it looked like a toilet.) Turn right down 13th Street and stop on the corner of Pacific – if you look out toward the freeway you can spot Doug Granum's colorful "Locomotive" before heading north on Pacific. At 12th Street there's Jill Anholt's gorgeous water-tiled "Projecting Drop"; climb the steps to Commerce Street (don't miss the dodo out front of Mad Hat Tea) and on up the steps to Granum's giant brain on Broadway. Further up the steps are the red and blue murals by the first SOTA students, inspired by the LeMay Car Museum.

Between 11th and 9th Streets on Broadway there's a wealth of art: Granum's theater masks peek out of walls, his metal banners hang from light poles, the Peace Salmon (gone today, for some reason) swims in a Brutalist concrete fountain and another, made of recycled tin cans, swims near Theater on the Square. There are the Woolworth Windows and tiny Tollbooth, more stone sculpture outside the Pantages and all the historic murals in the parking lot opposite.

We then turned down 9th Street all the way to the Alaskan totem pole at Fireman's Park before heading south along A street to see Whylan's enormous orca mural and the frolicking seals at 10th. You could then catch the link back to the starting point, taking in the etched and sidewalk art at the station on Commerce Street.

Of course, this is just the beginning. There's great public art all over Tacoma, particularly in the Dome District, along Ruston Way, in Wright Park and in unexpected places like the county jail. It's all free, and almost always visible.

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