

sf **ART** CONSERVATION

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Condition Assessment

OBJECT:

This site specific artwork is the Diamond Heights Safety Wall, 1968, by Stefan Alexander Novak (b.1918-2006).

The Safety Wall is located on Diamond Heights Boulevard on Block 7504; Lots 11-15

DIMENSIONS: Approximately 32' high and 50' long



DESCRIPTION:

This site specific installation is a modernist work of art and forms a gateway into the Diamond Heights neighborhood of San Francisco. It was built as part of San Francisco's Redevelopment Agency Diamond Heights redevelopment project which was active from 1961-1978. A design competition in 1966 selected Stefan's Novak's design as the winner for the site, it was formally adopted in 1967, and completed in 1968.

The Safety Wall embodies Mid Century Modernist design consistent with the planning of the neighborhood, and is formed of geometric forms and conveys the relationship between the solid and the void. The artwork is built of untreated redwood, consistent with the building tradition in the Bay Area .

The designer intended that sunlight (coming from behind the artwork that faces south) would penetrate from behind and result in the pattern of solid and void, and make unique shadows. It was designed to be seen from a distance and experienced by walking through it. The piece is currently surrounded by trees that diminish the effect somewhat.

CONSTRUCTION AND DECORATIVE TECHNIQUES :

- The piece is an all timber construction using 10 x 10' solid redwood posts with the grain running vertically.
- The posts form a long rear wall and two smaller side walls. Projecting forwards from the rear wall is a tower, formed of two framed decorative elements. This is the tallest and main feature of the wall. In addition, there are three other smaller groupings placed to the front of the wall.
- The vertical posts that form the rear wall are set into a concrete slab that runs the length of the work. Most are bolted into position.
- Many of the posts, in particular those at the front, are also bolted to cast concrete blocks or abutments.
- The underside of the slab could not be accessed to assess for foundation stability.
- The framed sections are generally notched or bolted together. This includes the two sides, the raised framing elements of the tower, and the panel with the concentric squares and signature disc that is located beneath the tower.
- The ties appear to be galvanized steel threaded rods with with hex bolts and washers. The hex bolts and washers are painted.
- The posts have been carved and notched to shape with geometric forms to give a modernist interpretation of the totem.
- Round, recessed bolt holes are elements of the geometric ornament.
- Two round redwood ornaments are attached to the front of the wall, one a floral motif and a dragonfly, both seem Japanese in origin.

NUMBERING SYSTEM:

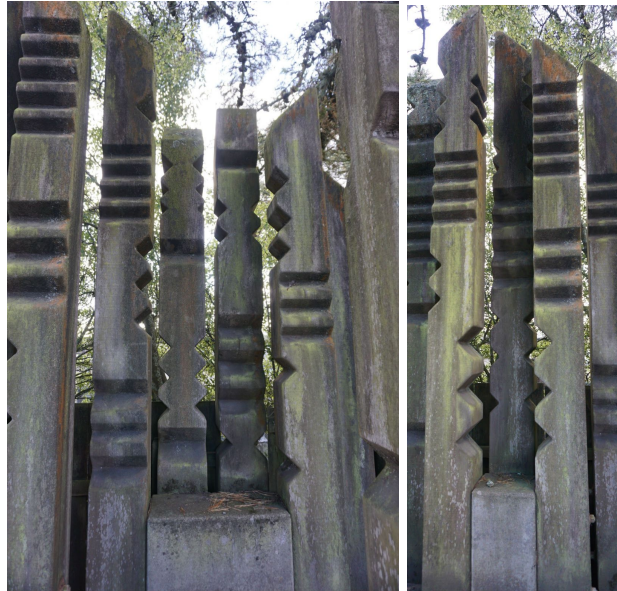
A numbering plan was devised for identifying the sections. Group 1 is the Proper Left side, and goes along the back wall to the Proper Right End of the Sculpture and then across the front elements. The groups were defined by natural groupings to the artwork itself.



Overall Front View



Group 1 (Left) and Group 2 (Right)



Group 3 (Left) and Group 4 (Right)



Group 5 (Left) and Group 6 (Right)



Group 7 (Left) and Group 8 (Right)



Group 9 (Left) and Group 10 (Right)



Main Group, 'Tower'

CONDITION REPORT:

- Structural: There appears to be some subsidence of the concrete slab footing the artwork. It appears to be sinking and below grade towards the rear wall from the road, (towards the South). An examination of the foundation beneath the artwork could not be accessed since it is located in a private yard, although assessing the condition is a priority. (See Figure 1)
- Structural: The rear wall could also be impacted by the attachment of garden fences to the rear Southern side of the artwork.
- Structural: The concrete slab may also be below grade on the Proper Right End, so sinking towards the West.
- Structural: Another concern is the proximity of trees to the artwork, in particular a large pine tree to the Eastern end. There were no trees when the artwork was installed, and the artist's intent was to enable the sunlight to penetrate uninterrupted through the structure. The branches of the tree have been trimmed, but branches are still leaning onto the eastern end of the artwork, and pushing the upright posts out of the vertical orientation. This, and the tree roots may also be undermining the foundation. (See Figure 2)
- Structural: The bolts and rods connecting the elements appeared to be generally in good condition, although some rusting of exposed surfaces was noted, especially where the paint had deteriorated. Approximately 50% of the paint on washers and bolt heads was deteriorated across the artwork. All fasteners should be checked for tightness and stability. (See Figure 3)
- Structural: Some of the bolts may have loosened, since six upright posts were found to be slightly moveable.
- Structural: In addition to the posts, seven other wood elements were found to be mobile. The upper tower framework was not assessed at this time.
- Structural: Corner brackets helping to keep Group 6 in square were rusted with deteriorated paint layers.
- Structural: The redwood posts are generally in remarkably good condition with no signs of wood rot or beetle infestation.
- The proximity of the trees is also an issue since it is forming a microclimate encouraging biogrowth. The area where the artwork is located is a particularly foggy part of San Francisco, however the extent of biogrowth on the piece is excessive. Green biogrowth was noted overall in addition to orange and brown algae and lichens and moss. There was also a covering of pine needles and other organic material on most surfaces. (See Figure 4)
- The outermost post of group 8 that faces the road, has a large loss to the timber at the bottom of the post. This is possibly from a collision or vandalism, and does not appear to appear to be from wood rot or infestation. (See Figure 5)
- There are a number of areas where graffiti has been scratched in and tags painted over. Painted over tags were noted on both redwood posts and most of the concrete blocks. It also appears that people may have climbed the 'tower' and graffitied in white paint on upper areas. (See Figure 6)
- There were many rusted nails and staples on some of the front posts, possibly from posting of flyers.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A full review by a structural engineer is recommended to assess the subsidence of the structure, foundations, impact of the pine tree and garden fences, and integrity of the bolting system to ensure the long term preservation of the artwork.

Future work should include:

Structural repairs as recommended by the structural engineer

Removal of the trees

Repainting of the bolt heads and washers

Fill of the large loss to the post in group 8

Overall cleaning to remove biogrowth and organic material

Removal of tags and overpaint

Application of a sacrificial coating to concrete blocks

Periodic monitoring



Stefan Novak



Figure 1: A View of the Interior of the Artwork Looking Towards the East. The slab appears to be subsiding towards the rear wall.



Figure 2: Group 1
Verticals Leaning Under Pressure of the Tree Branch



Figure 3: Green Biogrowth Present on Group 1 (Left)



Figure 4: Bolt Head and Washer with Deteriorated Paint Layer (Right)



Figure 5: Group 8-Loss of Timber to Outermost Post (Left)

Figure 6: Scratched in Graffiti and Painted Out Tags