

SEAL DEDICATION SPEECH

SUSAN SHELTON

MAY 28, 2002

First, I would like to state how honored and privileged I feel to have been a part of this important project, and I am grateful to the committee for having selected Donna and me from the many talented and deserving artists who presented proposals. Many people worked on this project and deserve thanks—from the advisory committee to the welders and cement workers. But I would like especially to acknowledge Alan Osborn, our project manager, and Patricia de Cos, our researcher.

As a Californian who was born in Mexico and became a U.S. citizen well into my adult years, I have felt deeply passionate about this seal from the moment I first heard about it. The Request For Proposal stated that the seal was to commemorate the history of Spanish and Mexican Sovereignty in California, and Donna and I were committed to the historical integrity of the seal from beginning to end. But what really excited us as artists was the challenge of creating a seal that would speak to every person who looked at it, regardless of age, educational level, or ethnic background, and to do that we knew it was absolutely essential to include a contemporary cultural component in our seal. We knew we were taking a risk, as our design went beyond the stated scope of the project, but in choosing our seal, the committee agreed that this seal should be more than a chronicle of history.

Our seal portrays history in a series of concentric rings progressing outward from a central image, and ending with the outer ring, which is the cultural component of our seal. The outer ring is a series of images which are familiar to us as contemporary Californians, and which relate directly to the fusion of our Spanish, Mexican, and California relationship through history. The images in the outer ring emerged from the blending of Mexican and California influences in my own life, and from the love I feel for Mexico, California, and the United States. Although it is a very personal collection of images, I have thought of myself as a representative of an entire community of people with a common heritage, and I have been continuously mindful of the honor and responsibility of that role.

One of the images in the outer ring that is especially meaningful to me is the hand placing a ballot in a ballot box. Although I have lived most of my life now in California, I became a US

citizen only 10 years ago, because I was reluctant to give up my Mexican citizenship. And I was finally willing to give it up because I wanted to have the privilege to vote. And having made the decision, I found taking the oath of citizenship a profoundly moving experience. And I love everything about voting. I love the walk I take to my polling place at the Girl Scout Cabin in my neighborhood park. I love the little clicking sound the voting machine makes as I move the arrow up and down, and the satisfying crunch as I pull the lever and punch in my choice. And I always watch the volunteer put my ballot in the box, and I always wear my little sticker, because I am so proud to have a voice in the electoral process. But this image is meaningful not only to me. It represents the growing citizenship and civic participation of Latinos who are proud to vote, hold elected office, and shape public policy.

I had a chance to observe someone's response to our seal last Wednesday when the seals were being installed. Upon getting the seal safely in place, one of the workers--his name is Angel--finally stood and looked down at the seal. I approached him, and asked him in Spanish, "What do you think". The first thing he noticed was the Virgen de Guadalupe in the outer ring, and he said, "Quedó muy Linda la Virgen". Then he noticed the piñata, and the Chiles and Molcajete. Then I said, referring to another image in the outer ring, "Those are your hands, helping to build California", and he told me about all the buildings around Sacramento that he had helped build. Then he noticed the eagle and serpent in the Mexican ring, and asked about the image of Califia in the Spanish ring. Finally, he asked about the faces in the center of the seal. Although the history is told from the inside out, he was experiencing it from the outside in.

My hope is that any of the images in the outer ring might be a door to the story told in the inner rings, and different people might be moved to go through different doors to learn about this fascinating part of California's History.

Most of all though, in my heart is the hope that people of Mexican descent come see the seal, and feel pride in the contributions they have made and continue to make to our Great State, and that they feel that they have been recognized through this monument at our beautiful State Capitol.

De todo corazon, espero que vengan personas de decendencia Mexicanaa mirar el sello, y que sientan orgullo por todo lo que han aportado y siguen aportando al gran estado de California, y que sientan una gran satisfaccion por el reconocimiento tan merecido que se les ha brindado por medio de este monumento en nuestro lindo Capitolio Estatal.