

Underpass to get cultural makeover

Art installation mimics archaeological dig

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SANTA CRUZ

EACH BONE, each shell, each Ohlone artifact that Susana Arias is sculpting will become a piece in one of the area's biggest art projects.

Large in size at 110 feet by 15 feet, it is also long in reach, for it will become a part of the local landscape, visible every day of the year, around the clock.

Arias is turning the embankments of a freeway underpass into an art gallery.

"I feel like a public servant," she

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'It's going to be great driving by when it's done.'

— Susana Arias

said recently in her Santa Cruz studio. "I want to do the best I can."

The clay and porcelain pieces she shapes here will be cemented into place next spring at the underpass where Bay Avenue and Porter Street — gateways into Capitola

Please see UNDERPASS —A10



Susana Arias is sculpting replicas of fossils and cultural artifacts as part of an art installation at the Highway 1 underpass at Bay Avenue and Porter Street.

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and Soquel villages, cross Highway 1.

When Arias is done, the barren sides of the underpass will look like an archaeological dig.

The concept, she said, is a natural for a region rich in buried history. Others who have seen her plans agree.

"I think the special part is this is going to tie the history of the county together," said Barry Samuel, director of the county's Parks, Open Space and Cultural Services.

There will be depictions of whale bones, antique tools, fossils.

Arias studied and photographed the whale skeleton outside Long Marine Lab before forming her clay bones.

Old logging tools were borrowed from the McCrary family, owners of Big Creek Lumber Co.

Seashells were gathered along the beach.

Arias, a Panamanian native, is seeking authenticity, not cuteness. "Everything is taken from something," said Arias, who has sculpted for 20 years.

To make the whale bones look real, Arias brushed the smooth clay with a brush to give a rough texture. She even carefully crafted several so they would crack for additional realism.

The bulk of her other professional work has been abstract — "more an essence of form," said Arias.

Her art can be found in several museums in South America as well as the Museum of Modern Art of

Latin America in Washington, D.C. She has received a National Endowment for the Arts grant.

To get the community involved in her biggest venture, she has gone to local schools to let students help build some of the pieces.

Arias will spend about a year on the project, which is funded largely through a \$50,000 federal "transportation enhancement activities" grant. Santa Cruz County and the city of Capitola through its Arts Commission are contributing \$7,000.

Art projects have been successful in preventing graffiti and other vandalism, added Linda Wilshusen, executive director of the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission.

It is also an enhancement to the

cultural life of a community, she said.

There are a few other public art projects planned in the state, according to Pete Hathaway, chief deputy director of the state Transportation Commission.

A mural will be painted underneath a bridge in Martinez, and there have been discussions about placing large art panels on freeway sound walls in Orange County, he said.

Every two years, the state accepts applications for projects seeking the federal enhancement funds.

A Capitola resident, Arias lives close to the underpass.

"It's going to be great driving by when it's done," she said.