

Citlali

Citlali commemorates the Tricentennial of San Antonio's founding in 1718. It contains, within its grasp and gaze, a reflection on the moment of the city's foundation, whose effects extend both into the future and back to the historic context where it is located. This work has the honor of entering the company of artworks by other Mexican artists that inhabit public space in San Antonio, such as Juan O'Gorman's mural *Confluence of Civilizations*. However, rather than approaching this piece as a Mexican artist, I wanted to offer a work that transcends the relatively recent borders and boundaries we know today to offer an ageless perspective in celebration of the three hundred years of the city's distinctive history and culture.

Citlali is a towering figure of a woman who at once represents the land, the planet, Mother Nature and the first nations of the area, such as the Comanche, the Pecos, and the Papaya, among others who inhabited the land for over 11,000 years leading up to San Antonio's founding. She embodies San Antonio's age-old heritage in both natural and human terms. The figure she holds and examines is an abstract five-pronged form, which could be one of the flint tools or arrowheads still found on the ground in the area today, or a fossilized shell from the region's even deeper history under the ocean. Or it could also be a star like the ones that shine over San Antonio in the present — the same ones that have been contemplated by all peoples throughout the region's human history, the same ones that inspire awe and wonder as they help us glimpse our place in relation to the universe and to time. In fact, *citlali* means "star" in Nahuatl, the indigenous language of my hometown, and today it's a common name. This figure represents San Antonio's founding, formed as it is from an extraordinary and complex convergence of different human cultures and natural legacies.

Citlali's message takes us out of our immediate history and offers a timeless perspective, leaving us with two contrasting but concurrent perceptions: the humbling realization of how small we are and the stirring appreciation of the significance of what we have inherited.

As a sculptor, I am interested in a return to form as meaning, and to the vocation of permanence implied by working in stone, which for me reconnects the practice of art to moments in time from the very beginning of civilization. Here, both the stone materials and the monumental scale of this work have been chosen to reinforce its message of timelessness and connection to the past; it follows the tradition of ancient large-scale stone works such as colossal heads and pyramids. In recent years we have come to debate the meaning of many public monuments that memorialize a particular figure, event, or moment in time, but this work proposes a different model of monumentalism: one that reminds us of our place within a larger spatial, temporal and human context.

The San Antonio Riverwalk is an ideal location for this work, as the Riverwalk has exerted influence worldwide as an example of a vibrant and active public area integrating an enduring natural feature of the landscape with developed space. The different heights of the pedestrian paths, free from the presence of street traffic, will let the public view the sculpture from many positions and regard its silhouette from all angles, bringing out the different layers of meaning to be read in it. It is the privilege of art to inspire different interpretations and offer multiple meanings, which is the intent of *Citlali* as a sculpture honouring San Antonio's unique composite heritage.

Pedro Reyes, 2022