Project Description

Project Identity and Location
Benito Juarez Park, Maywood, California

Purpose of the Project
Our client, The Trust for Public Land (TPL), has focused on bringing parks to neighborhoods where there is a deficit of public open space. Maywood, at 1.18 square miles has a population of over 27,000 and is one of the most densely populated incorporated cities in Los Angeles County.

Role of Landscape Architect
By the time we were engaged to design this park, TPL had secured grants to purchase the .25 acre site. They had also begun to engage the community, and through those meetings identified a program that included a small play area, skate park, and lawn for play. We also met with the community and learned a great deal about the largely Oaxacan region which is their ancestral home. Listening and research led us to an understanding of the cultural icon Benito Juarez the community hoped to pay allegiance to. We also gained a clearer understanding of the gardens and architecture of Oaxaca. And, our conversations led to a discovery of the fantastical folk art creatures “Alebrije”. We wove all of this into a design response that honored and engaged the community and featured a large scale Alebrije dragon as the heart of the park. Working from our drawings, a forty foot long dragon play structure was cast by Cemrock in Arizona and transported to the Los Angeles studio of tile artist Jolino Beserra. We met Jolino on a previous project and were thrilled to find out that he had already had a large collection of Alebrije figures. He embraced the work with massive enthusiasm and passion. It’s an understatement to say that we were thrilled with his response to this commission!

Significance
The park has become a playful garden for children of all ages. A mini skate park is modeled after the Monte Alba ruins. The Jardin Etnobotanico Oaxaca serves as inspiration for the succulent garden surrounding the play field. But it is the scale and exuberance of the tile dragon (with frogs that were added by the artist) that has grabbed the attention of the community. The life of this neighborhood is deeply elevated simply by having park space. We are most proud of our role in elevating the program to be an artful reflection of the cultural context of this deserving community.

Special Factors
The space was quite tight for the program and sits in the midst of a modest and very dense residential neighborhood. We had never before worked on a tile program as involved as this one but the artist took our concept and elevated it to a level that is inspiring to experience first hand.