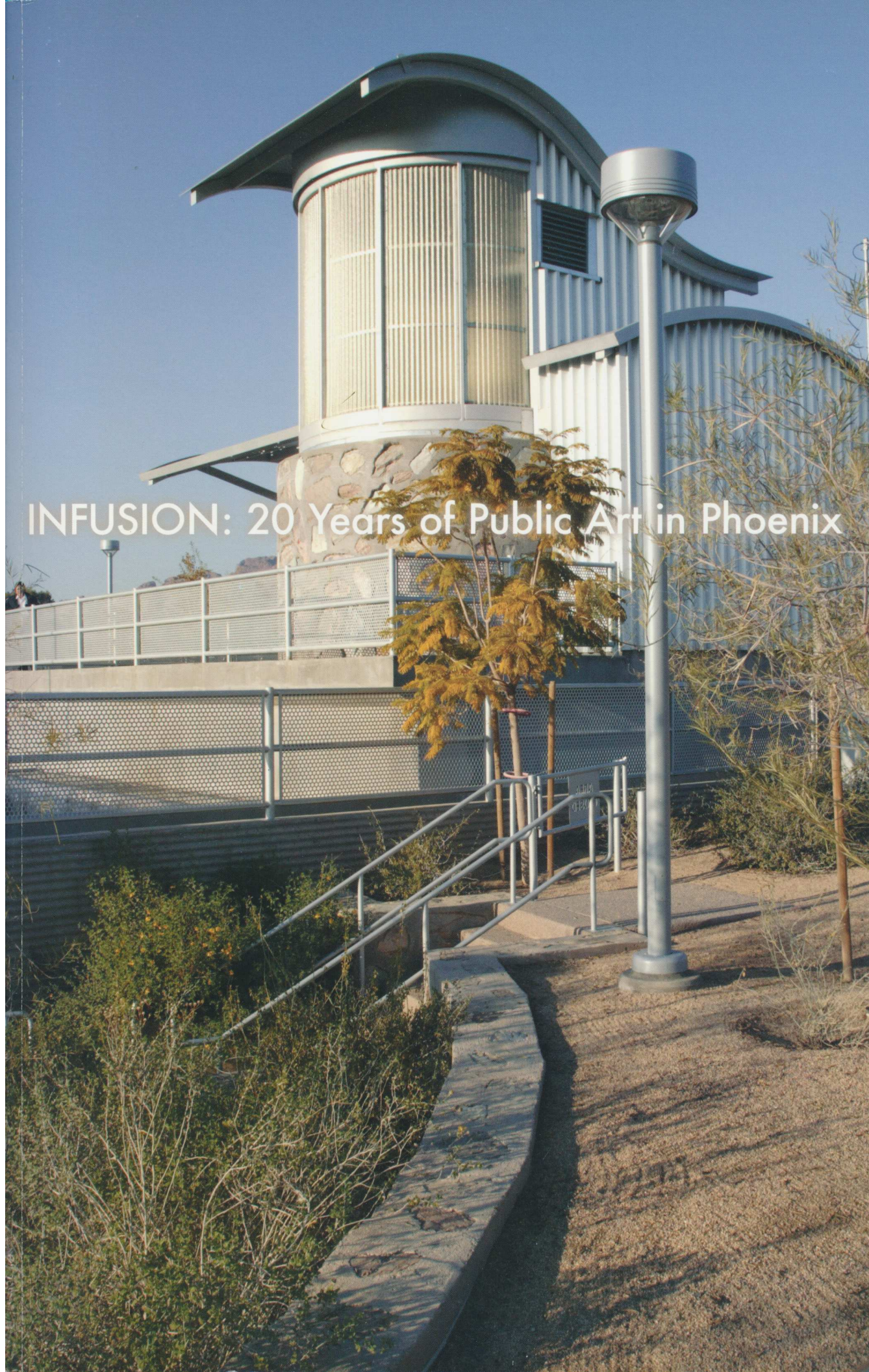




# INFUSION: 20 Years of Public Art in Phoenix

PHOENIX OFFICE OF ARTS AND CULTURE  
PHOENIX ARTS AND CULTURE COMMISSION  
PUBLIC ART PROGRAM





**BY ROBERT SCHULTZ**

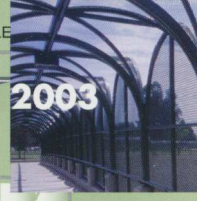
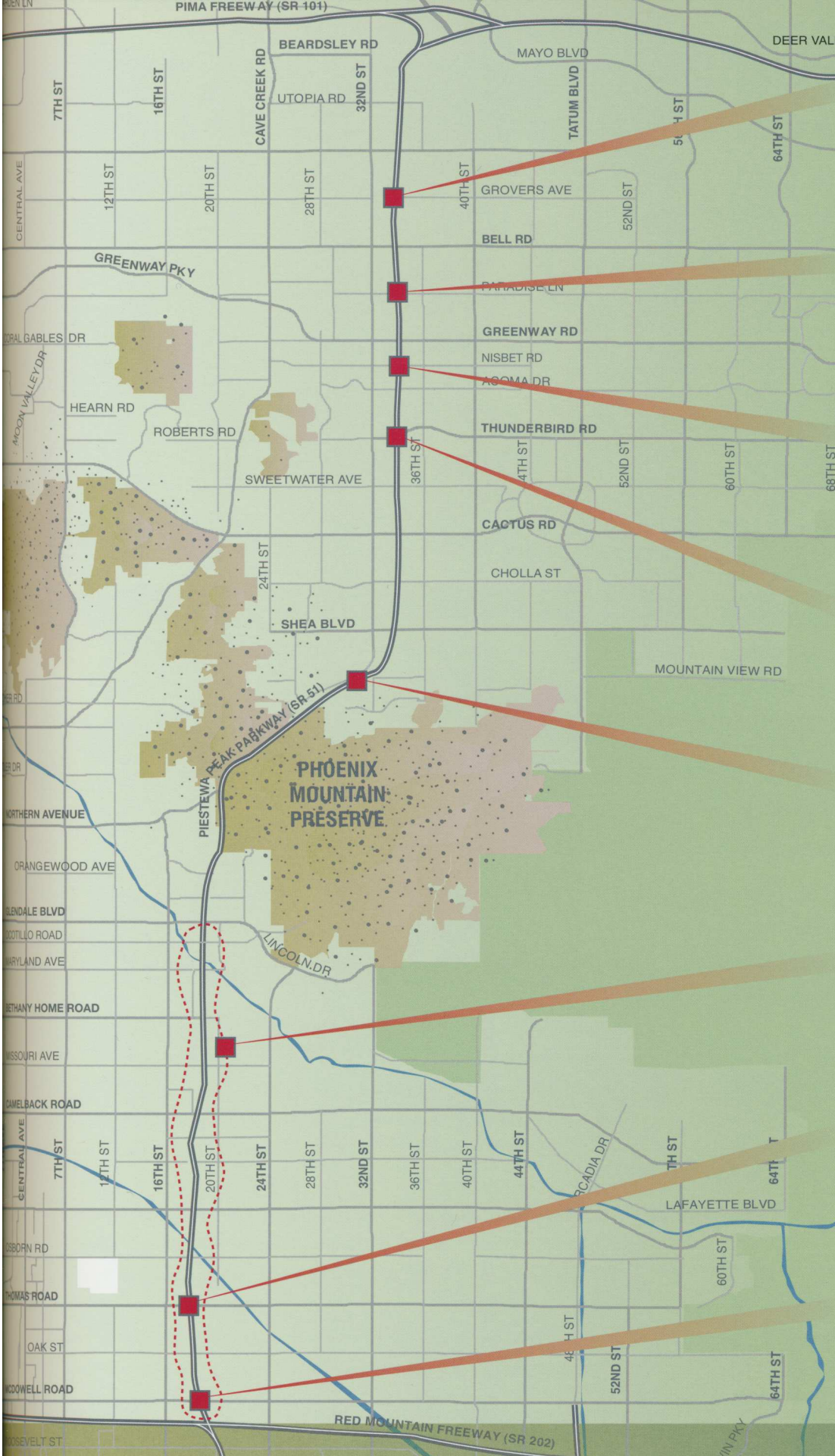
Piestewa Peak Parkway<sup>1</sup> is a six-lane freeway that runs north/south through the center of Phoenix. Its construction, because it took place during the 1980s and 1990s, afforded the newly formed Phoenix Arts Commission (now the Office of Arts and Culture) a chance to site many innovative art projects along a well-used public corridor. In the public's mind, the projects ranged from instantly successful to controversial, but they all made a distinctive stamp on this busy freeway that had transformed the heart of an established city.

The siting of art projects along the parkway was originally suggested by William Morrish and Catherine Brown in their 1988 public art master plan. They argued for "commissioning artists to generate ideas for how public art can not only enhance the spatial environment of overpasses and intersections, but working with road engineers to actually improve the visual orientation and cognitive process of driving, for example by creating landmarks and gateways to villages and their cores."

To address the concept of art-in-infrastructure, the underpass at McDowell Road was chosen by the Office of Arts and Culture as the location for their very first public art project, a double mural by Roberto Delgado completed in 1988. One mile north and two years later, *Our Shared Environment* was completed by Marilyn Zwak at the Thomas Road overpass. A striking and monumental work, the project proved to skeptical design team engineers that stabilized adobe could be used as a primary material for integration into a major highway bridge. In 1992, *Wall Cycle to Ocotillo* was created by Harries/Héder Collaborative. This project was bolder still, featuring thirty-five individual vessel-related artworks placed at locations along both sides of a five-mile stretch of the freeway. Only a fraction of the artworks was visible to traffic on the freeway, since many were located adjacent to freeway abutment walls facing the surrounding neighborhoods, and even along two canal banks. Several miles north, Vicki Scuri completed the *Dreamy Draw Pedestrian Bridge*, a bridge over the freeway that referenced the surrounding peaks of the Phoenix Mountain Preserve. When Scuri's bridge was fully completed in 1995, the freeway ended another mile north, pending additional construction funds to complete it to its eventual merger with the Loop 101 freeway, in north Phoenix.

When the freeway construction continued in the mid-1990s, the Office of Arts and Culture identified locations for four more freeway projects beyond Scuri's bridge. Heading north, the first of these is the *Thunderbird Road Vehicular Bridge*. Artist Beth Galston, in partnership with BRW, Inc., and Bolduc, Smiley and Associates, joined the design team after a basic overpass design had been developed. Because she did not participate in the original design, Galston's role was one of embellishment rather than integration. She says her goal was "to create a broad gesture that people would see whether they're in a car, on foot, or in a nearby house." She sought to soften the boxy shape of the bridge and "make it more sculptural." The site is characterized by large, landscaped mounds extending out from the freeway walls toward neighborhood homes 150 feet to the west, and eastward to Indian Bend Wash, which runs parallel to the freeway (the normally dry flood control wash also serves as a bicycle/pedestrian pathway). Nearer to the overpass, graceful terraces were added to soften the vertical height of the freeway roadbed. Brightly colored undulating railings enhance the terraces. The overall impression is reminiscent of balconies in a theater.





Grovers Avenue  
Pedestrian Bridge  
*Kim Cridler*



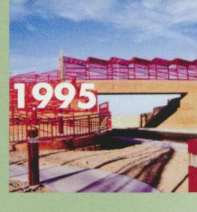
Paradise Lane  
Pedestrian Bridge  
*Linnea Glatt*



Mountain Pass  
Pedestrian Bridge  
*Laurie Lundquist*



Thunderbird Road  
Vehicular Bridge  
*Beth Galston*



Dreamy Draw  
Pedestrian Bridge  
*Vicki Scuri*



Wall Cycle to  
Ocotillo  
*Mags Harries and  
Lajos Héder;  
Harries/Héder  
Collaborative*



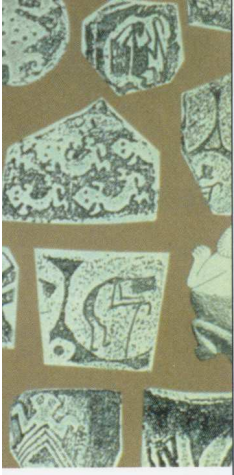
Our Shared  
Environment  
*Marilyn Zwak*



Untitled  
*Roberto Delgado*

THE FIFTEEN-YEAR CONSTRUCTION OF STATE ROUTE 51, KNOWN AS THE PIESTEWA PEAK PARKWAY (FORMERLY SQUAW PEAK PARKWAY) ALSO SERVES AS A LINEAR GEOGRAPHIC TIMELINE OF THE PHOENIX OFFICE OF ARTS AND CULTURE PUBLIC ART PROGRAM FROM THE FIRST MURALS BY ROBERTO DELGADO AT MCDOWELL ROAD, MOVING NORTH THROUGH THE "POTS CONTROVERSY" AND ON TO THE COLLABORATIVE LANDMARK ARTIST-DESIGNED PEDESTRIAN BRIDGES THAT SPAN THE FREEWAY.





The dedication ceremony for the project included a traditional American Indian dance to honor the history of the site. The adobe designs by Marilyn Zaak at Thomas Road were inspired by Hohokam pottery shards that were excavated at the site during construction. (opposite page) Views of Zaak's proposal model, working drawings, construction forms, and the artist on site with the finished artwork.

The underpass through which Thunderbird Road pierces the freeway roadbed is treated with a rough, undulating, granite-like horizontal surface pattern, in approximately 5-foot square blocks. At the end of each wall are smooth, unadorned columns, and here the wall pattern changes to vertical. The ceiling of the underpass is smooth concrete, and small rosettes at each end complete the design. Special lighting is a further enhancement. At night, the columns are highlighted by a wash of soft, blue light, with yellow backlighting that also illuminates the railings.

Galston's design did sidestep one potentially problematic turf issue. The City of Phoenix and the State of Arizona own different parts of the site, so the customary procedure would have been to simply install a chain-link fence right at the terrace walls to demarcate the respective ownership boundaries. Fortunately for the project's overall aesthetic appeal, the city eventually agreed to maintain all the landscaping, and the idea of a fence was dropped.

Traveling less than a mile north, local artist Laurie Lundquist's *Mountain Pass Pedestrian Bridge* at Nisbet Road, comes into view. The design team for the project included SVR, Inc., HDR Engineering, Inc., Bolduc, Smiley and Associates, and the Arizona Department of Transportation. The 260-foot span connects residential areas on either side of the freeway and serves to establish a link for the bicycle path on the west side. The rose-hued bridge is topped by tight-weave silver chain-link fencing that echoes the profile of the surrounding mountains, while also keeping pedestrians from throwing things onto the roadway below. The fabrication of the fencing was itself a substantial feat, as subcontractors devised an ingenious system for stretching the material over the arch shapes while keeping the profile clean and fluid. Lundquist felt pressure to use colored fencing, but she says that she "...fought to keep the standard finish on the fencing with the hope that the bridge would have a somewhat transparent appearance. I am pleased that it seems almost like a ghost mountain from a distance."

The illusion of a ghost mountain is strongest at a particular vantage point from the freeway when the ridged top seems to momentarily align with the distant, jagged range of the Phoenix Mountain Preserve. Lundquist also carefully considered the visual interest for pedestrians using the bridge. Strolling through the interior of the chain-link and steel pole structure, one notices the engaging shadow patterns that play across the deck. The artist meant to convey the feeling of walking through a mountain pass and to give users a sense of volume and space as they moved between shorter arches and taller ones along the spine of the bridge cover.





Thunderbird Road Vehicular Bridge by Beth Galston with views showing what would have been constructed without the artist's participation, an artist's rendering of the proposed project, and the finished project.  
 (opposite page) Larric Lundquist's Mountain Pass Pedestrian Bridge.

The bridge's location is itself scenic. In addition to the mountain preserve to the south, the McDowell Mountains east of Scottsdale are clearly visible, as is the hazy outline of the Mogollon Rim beyond the freeway corridor to the north. In an interesting contrast, another pedestrian bridge can be glimpsed just north of the site. The Greenway Road bridge, designed by the Arizona Department of Transportation, is a boxy, rectangular chute, built simply and existing purely for a utilitarian purpose.

Another mile north along the freeway sits *Paradise Lane Pedestrian Bridge*, designed by Texas artist Linnea Glatt, in partnership with HDR Engineering, Inc. This bridge also functions to unite the neighborhood that was divided by the freeway and it serves as a link for the north/south bicycle path. Glatt chose to use natural gray concrete for the switchback entry ramps and for the support structure for the bridge. For the upper bridge cover, she pondered how to illustrate a solution to the disruption caused by the construction of the freeway through the neighborhood. The result was a basket-like structure that would help weave the two sides back together.

Glatt created an engaging, carefully crafted bridge that has separate meanings and visual experiences for freeway travelers and pedestrians. For cars on the freeway, the bridge functions mainly as a physical reminder of location. However, the basic premise of the weave pattern and the gentle arching of the structure is plainly visible, even at sixty-five miles per hour. Pedestrians, in contrast, can take their time to examine the attractive woven strips of galvanized metal, perforated on their bottom halves and solid on top. Within the Romanesque vaulted shape of the bridge cover, the play of light and shadow is wonderful, changing constantly with passing clouds and the angle of the sun. Each end of the bridge cover is peeled away to define the pedestrian entrance, providing a break from the continuity of the smooth, rounded shape. The bridge location shares the same scenic vistas as those enjoyed by Lundquist's project.

Most recently, artist Kim Cridler designed the final pedestrian bridge at Grovers Avenue just before the Piastewa Peak Parkway connects with the recently completed Loop 101 freeway to the north. Her vaulted groin arch design is inspired by the Mission style of architecture prevalent in the Phoenix area. Plaques inscribed with memories of area residents line the sides of the bridge cage. For motorists, Cridler's bridge serves as a gateway into Phoenix; for pedestrians, the plaques serve as a reminder of the neighborhoods they are walking in.

These projects are the result of a fifteen-year effort by the Office of Arts and Culture to address a significant linear feature of Phoenix's built environment with a series of eight integrated projects that can be experienced, compared, and contrasted in