

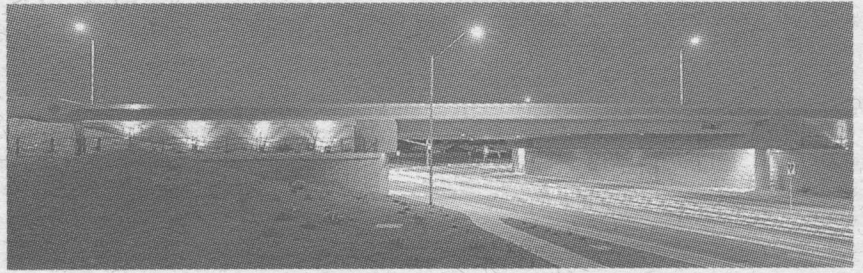
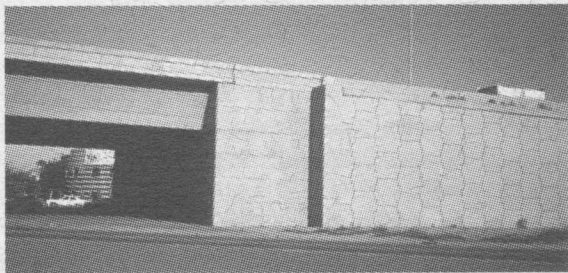
m i l e s t o n e s

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**Thunderbird Road Bridge at State Highway 51:  
from Boring Box to Natural Curves**



Left: Standard vehicular bridge. This plain box is a useful structure that is best driven past and forgotten.

Right: Beth Galston's redesigned bridge unfolds in sweeping curves, natural landscaping and colorful lighting. Photos by Craig Smith.

An environment altered by public art is not always as clearly visible as a fountain or sculpture, bus stop or mural. Beth Galston, in partnership with BRW, Inc. has shaped the world of our daily commute to and from work in a way that may go unnoticed by some but can be appreciated by all. The standard freeway vehicular bridge in Arizona is a square concrete box culvert offering no visual interest—only intimidating heights rising from the flat dusty surface of the desert floor. Compounded with traffic, fumes and hard edges, this type of bridge is a useful structure that is best driven past and forgotten. Artist Beth Galston was commissioned to design a vehicular bridge at Thunderbird Road and State Highway 51 that would continue to be useful, but also offer an aesthetically pleasing alternative to the bridge standard.

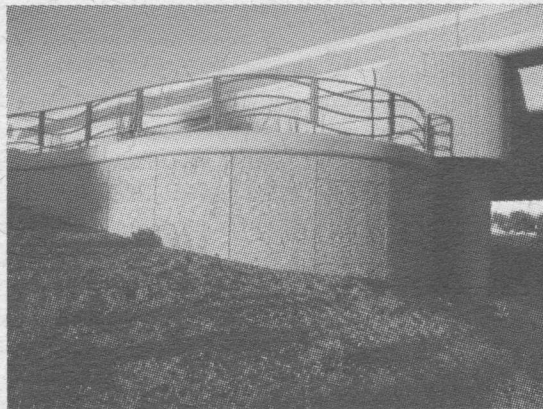
Without Galston's involvement residents in homes facing the bridge would be confronted by 24-foot high concrete walls. As stated in the artist's own words, her redesign has "rounded the lines of the overpass to soften its look and create a graceful, flowing shape. Rounded corner columns were exposed to 'lift' the structure and create the feeling of a gateway. Serpentine terraced walls were added, bringing the bridge's overall height down to a more human scale. These undulating terraced walls, which are topped by brightly-colored curvilinear metal railing, 'flow' from inside of the elevated structure and disappear into the landscape alongside the highway."

Wanting the bridge to feel like a natural rocky form, Galston chose a fractured granite surface pattern for the concrete. A sculpted landscape of earth mounds and

contours extends for several hundred feet on all four sides, surrounding the bridge and creating the appearance of natural hills, echoing the rising shape of Squaw Peak in the distance. The design also acts as a reference to ancient Native American mounds that may have once been near the site.

As Galston explains, "The bridges' curved form is dramatized by a special lighting system. Blue light washes the front of the corner columns, which are then back-lit in yellow, accentuating the gateway effect. Back lighting also silhouettes the serpentine railing. Beneath the bridge recessed ceiling lights further soften the architectural lines of the structures." This softening of structural edges successfully alters the bridge into a more approachable and naturalistic form.

Thereby making the view of our daily drive into a more enjoyable experience. This project was made possible through funding from the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT), City of Phoenix Street Transportation Capital Improvement Program Percent for Art funds to pay for costs in excess of standard ADOT specifications.



Detail of the Thunderbird Road vehicular overpass designed by Beth Galston. Photo by Craig Smith.