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## Places

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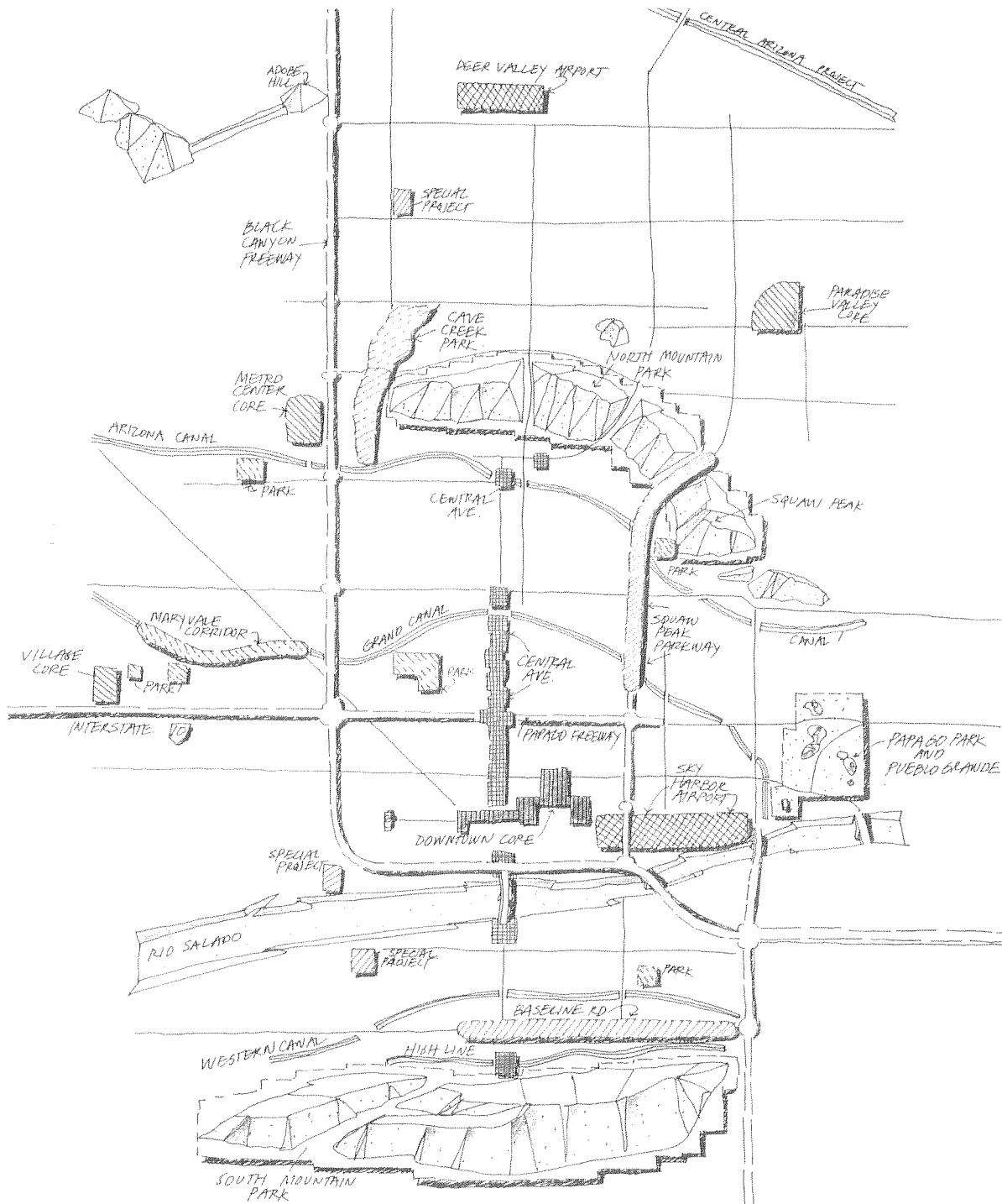
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# Western Civic Art: Works in Progress

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From the air, the form of Phoenix almost makes sense. Set on a desert floor punctuated by mountain-sized rock outcroppings, a tracery of drainage washes, and a most subtle plant palette, the lines and points of the built city give an obvious counterpoint. About a million people live within the city's 375 square miles, on land parceled out literally along the most standard north-south survey grid used in the American west.

Within this gridded pattern, private introverted oases growing from the winter resort tradition provide a vivid celebration of the desert, its climate and lifestyle. Outside these enclaves, however, one too often confronts another reality formed by the explosive growth of look-alike streets and awkward developments across the flat city floor. Facing this, the observer of the city is soon overwhelmed and disoriented by vast distances and long lines of formularized development that obliterate any sense of the original beauty of the desert.

Growth is not about to stop. As much as 100 square miles will be annexed at the northern and western frontiers of the city. Despite this, public revenues are at a minimum and are focused primarily on catching up with private developments to provide adequate public infrastructure. To build the necessary roads, sewers,

utilities, and public facilities to support this expansion, the voters approved in May 1988 a \$1 billion capital improvement bond issue.

Budgets of \$1 billion plus are standard in American cities today. However, as designers and civic design advocates in these cities have discovered, comprehensive urban design proposals are seen as luxury items in the face of utilitarian engineering demands. Ironically, infrastructure projects are not usually seen by designers or public officials as opportunities for building cities that are both functional and beautiful.

In Phoenix neither the citizenry nor the public officials have been willing to dictate aesthetics or visions for most of the new growth—a position not unique to that city. Like most progressive American cities, Phoenix does have a “General Plan,” which specifies such things as land use, transportation corridors, and village core planning concepts. Apart from the traditional planning documents and policies, however, there is no unified aesthetic or physical urban design plan for the entire city, no articulated vision, no philosophical statement about building a city in the desert.

Interestingly enough, it is the Phoenix Arts Commission, through its Percent for Art program, which has inherited a leading role as aesthetic urban designers for

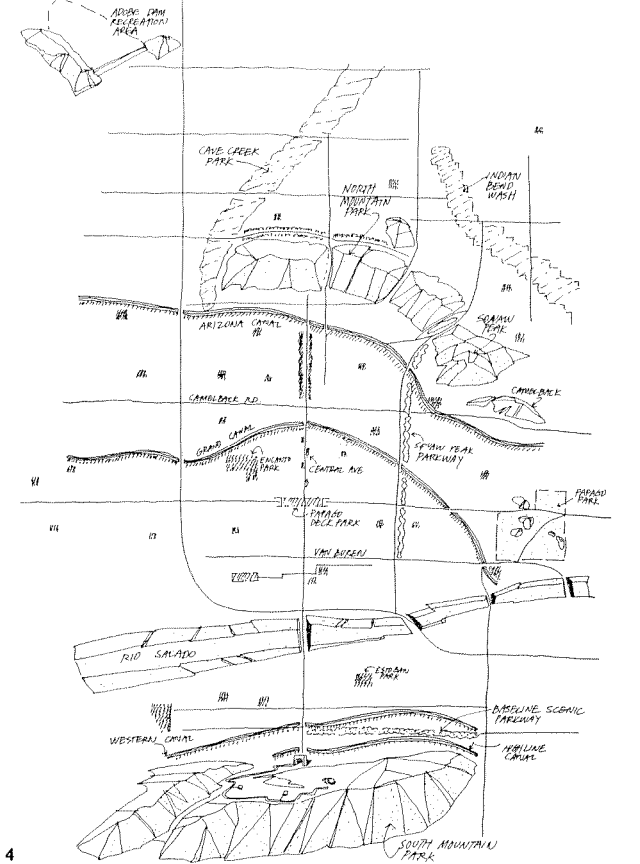
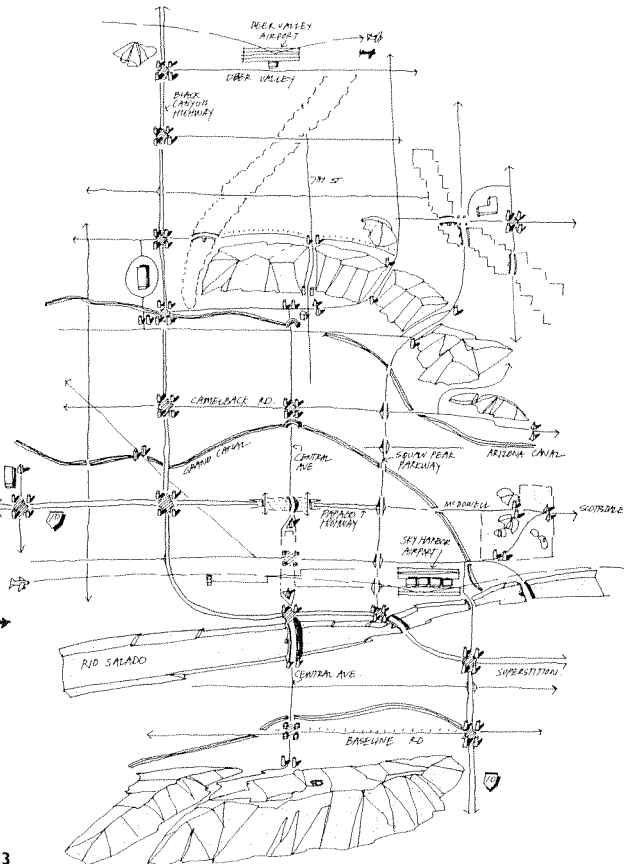
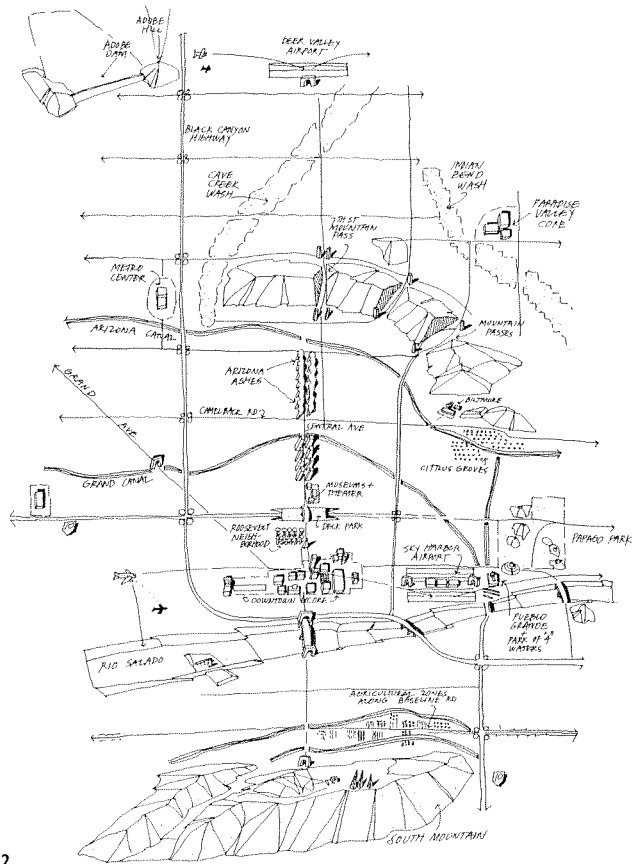
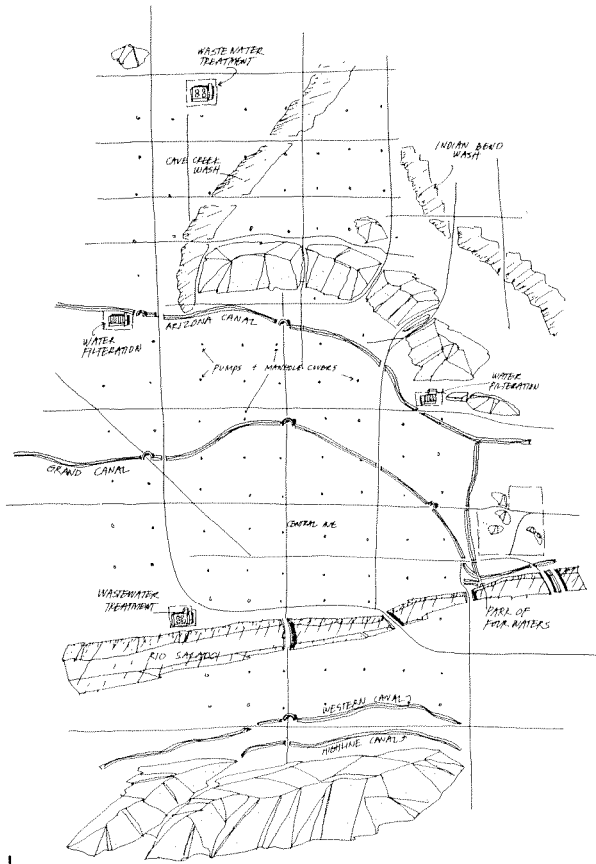
the city. Originally Percent for Art ordinances were enacted by public agencies to require that private developers spend a percentage of their construction budgets in redevelopment projects for fine arts. Later, with varying percentage formulas being applied, the idea was expanded in many cities to require that a portion of all public dollars spent for capital improvements be set aside for art projects.

In Phoenix, the Arts Commission is articulating and implementing a vision for the city, through public art projects that pull together a diverse group of public agencies, citizens, artists, and designers. Funding is provided by an unusually broad Percent for Art ordinance approved by the City Council in 1986, which sets aside for public art one percent of the budget on virtually all future public buildings and infrastructure projects paid for with public dollars. This makes the Phoenix Public Art Program unique in that it extends, along with roads, utilities, and new buildings, to the entire city and its suburban frontiers, not just to traditional downtown redevelopment areas. The emphasis on public infrastructure projects provides an unparalleled opportunity for city-building on functional and artistic levels simultaneously.

In 1987, the Phoenix Arts Commission appointed our firm, CITYWEST, to prepare

the master vision for the Public Art Plan that would establish the framework for current and future projects. In the simplest terms, the charge was to survey the city and recommend good sites for public art from an urban design viewpoint. To ensure that the sites selected were also “good” from an artist's viewpoint, Grover Mouton, an artist, was invited to join the study team.

Relying on our previous knowledge of Phoenix, an unlimited-mileage rental car, and the new-to-Phoenix eyes of artist Grover Mouton, we began. The team's twofold goal was to identify and select the project art sites and to ensure that collectively all selected sites (with their artworks) would form a comprehensive system which would create a clearer sense of orientation and place within Phoenix. Our notion was that the form and structure of such a comprehensive arts plan system might contain formal characteristics similar to the pattern of public infrastructure systems. Both systems were seen as containing single elements and extensive supporting networks serving various functions all woven together into a complex urban fabric. This was further reinforced by the fact that as infrastructure is funded and built, money is then available to build the public art projects network parallel to the first system.



An earlier art plan prepared by the Seattle Arts Commission for its city core had used the work and vocabulary of Kevin Lynch's book *Image of the City* to map and identify key public art sites. For workshops in Phoenix, the study team built upon this work and prepared a series of cognitive-type maps which pulled the city layers apart in a series of abstract diagrams and drawings for presentation and discussion.

Continued work on these diagrams isolated a basic spatial system of the city. Five primary systems were identified and mapped for Phoenix as being those with the greatest potential for integration of public art within the urban design context: Water, Oasis Park and Open Space, Vehicular, Landmark, Pedestrian. The highlighted areas were found to be the primary "peopled" areas of the city and were thought to be the places at which public art would hold both meaning and position in the viewers' mental map of the city.

In a city gridded for real estate speculation, there exist many available development "parcels." The team quickly realized that the plan must transform these remnant parcels, which are by nature isolated, disconnected, unprepared, and lacking in valued meaning. The transformation to be accomplished by the plan is from designation as a parcel to

a "site." Sites, by our definition, are linked to a larger network or system, connected, prepared, and endowed with meaning and values. Artists and designers who are later commissioned to develop these "sites" will transform them once again into collectively held public "places" through their works.

To understand the more specific characteristics of sites, a number of site drawings were prepared. Each site was scrutinized for those hints and fragments that, if properly defined, can lead future artists into a "whole area of magic." The team was looking for situations or moments in these sites where a special artistic intervention present only in Phoenix could be found.

Identification of the critical places, themes, ingredients, images, situations, moments, etc., became known as the search for "signature opportunities." The team consciously sought to identify and articulate those elements that make Phoenix visually unique and contribute to that amorphous and fleeting sense of place. Once identified, these would be the start of developing a truly unique-to-Phoenix public art program that would celebrate and give reference to the desert city's inherent character.

The "signature" opportunities identified are illus-

trated in the accompanying sketches. Those we felt most strongly about were the lines of water—the canals that diagonally cross and relieve the grid; the stone desert mountains; palm and citrus trees; native vegetation and climatic responses. Of a less tangible nature but of equal importance were two other strongly held themes: rein-statement of ties to history through reinforcement of existing remnants of past cultures and demarcation of the delicate edge between desert and city.

For implementation of the Public Art Plan the recommended sites were organized into 15 "working zones," which are the priority work areas for public art projects. There are two major types of working zones. The first group of zones designates a specific geographical area of Phoenix, such as Papago Park, and there are eight of this type. The second group of working zones is made up of networks and systems spread throughout the city, such as canals, roadways, mountain parks, and neighborhood parks. Within each of the 15 zones there are multiple art sites covering a full range of project types.

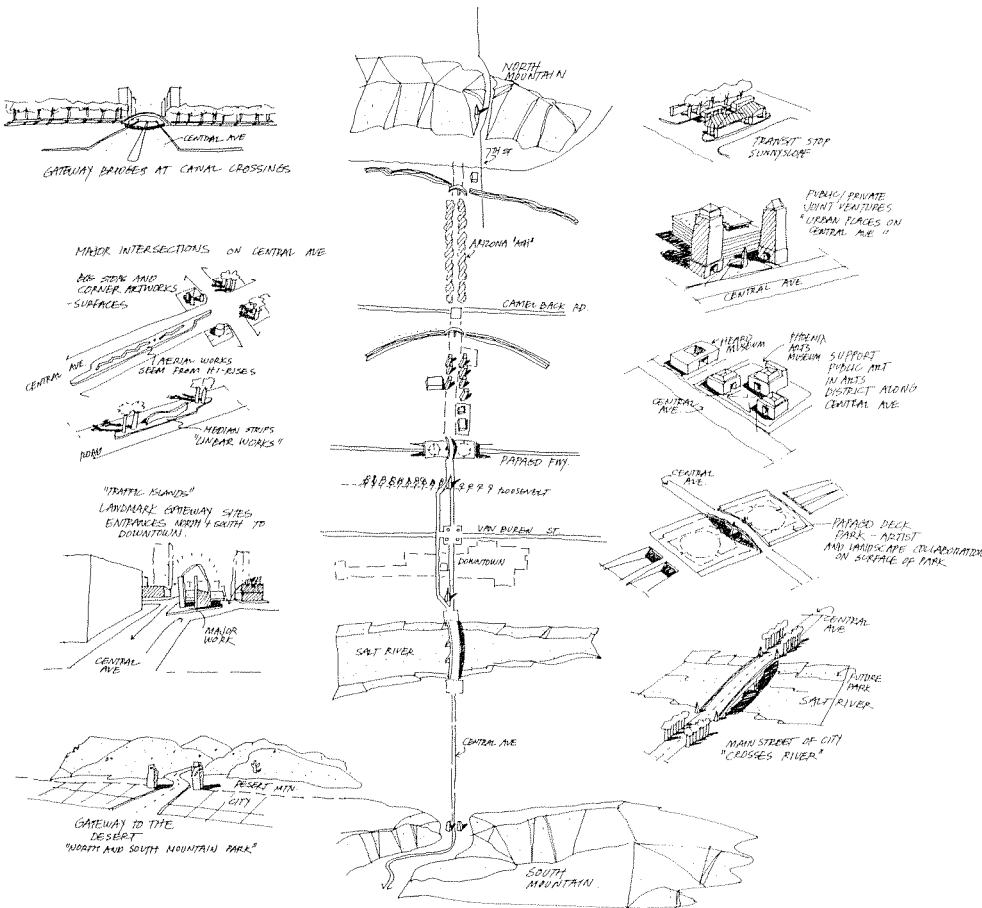
Working zones order a complex and at times overwhelming range of project types spread all over the city into "bite-sized" implementable packages. The working zones establish the framework of priority work areas for the next three

to five years. Boundaries for each are loosely defined and can expand or contract depending on circumstance. Each year, based on the city's annual Capital Improvement Plan, the zones are updated. Over time, as projects are completed within a given geographical zone, that zone will be phased out and new zones will replace old. The network-type working zones are likely to remain as permanent zones.

Propelled by a strong economic base and an emerging civic consciousness, Phoenix is at a threshold of maturity. Leaving the boomtown state and emerging as a more cosmopolitan city, Phoenix seeks to become a culturally rich and aesthetically beautiful city—a city with distinctive colors, rhythms, textures, and a memory of both urban and desert landscapes. Together these landscapes provide a rich palette for the artist and urban designer. The Public Art Program is one mechanism to transform this palette into a set of individualistic artistic expressions and a collective system of works that speak for both the uniqueness of the place and the new accomplishments of building a city in the desert.

- 1 Water System**
- 2 Landmark System**
- 3 Vehicular System**
- 4 Park and Open Space System**

## Central Avenue (Working Zone 2.0)



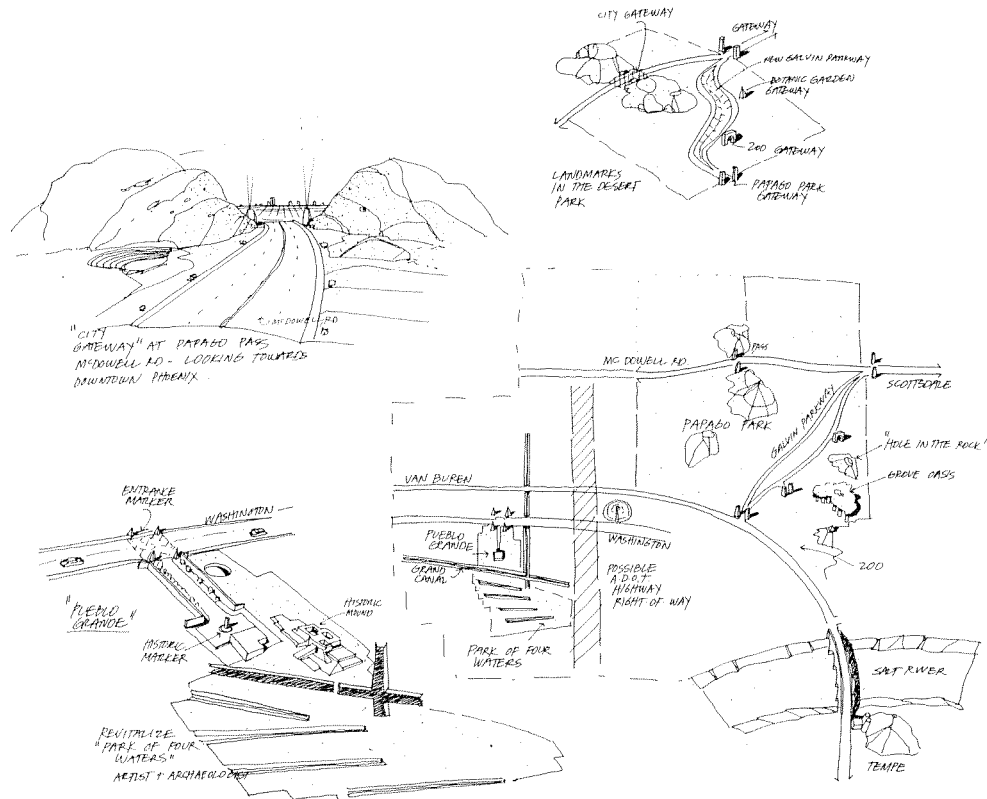
Zone Description: One to two block wide zone running parallel to Central Avenue from South Mountain Park north to the Arizona Canal.

Observations: Central Avenue is a street for the whole city. Historically the north/south axis of Phoenix, Central Avenue serves as a super scaled main street, the linear heart of the city, the parade route for civic festivities. The Central Avenue Corridor Image Study describes it as a linear assemblage of rooms clustered along an axis running from North Mountain to South Mountain. Serving as the location of the Heard Museum, Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix Little Theater, the Main Library, and other cultural facilities, Central Avenue is a cultural experience formalizing itself into a truly unique urban street. Public art can help to demarcate this space as well as embellish and enhance the positive elements which presently exist.

## Papago Park/Pueblo Grande (Working Zone 4.0)

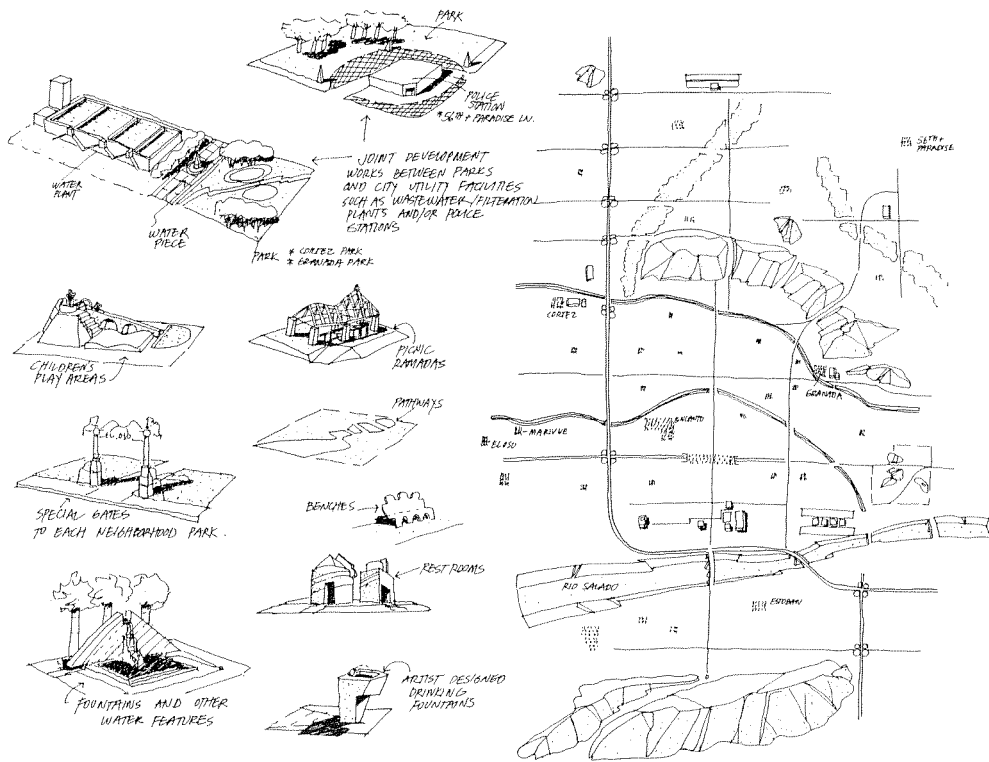
Zone Description: Zone includes all of Papago Park and Pueblo Grande Park.

Observations: Pueblo Grande is one of the first urban settlements in the valley and is the historic urban center of the city. Presently, its identity and location within the city is lost amongst the industrial and commercial uses of the area. In the near future construction of a new highway will pass close by to the eastern edge of Pueblo Grande. This urban historic site must be reinstated into the public consciousness. To the south of Pueblo Grande is an old abandoned area which was once called the Park of Four Waters, a place where the historic irrigation canals intercepted the water of the Salt River that was then carried into the city. This site also needs to be revived in the public consciousness.



Papago Park and the forms of its natural topography create a unique landmark in the city. Public art should be integrated into this landscape for a dual purpose. The first is to heighten the sense of arrival and experience of this place through the placement of markers in the landscape, defining edges and points of reference in the open land. Secondly, art can help to create an entrance into Phoenix from Scottsdale and Tempe.

## Neighborhood Parks (Working Zone 10.0)



**Zone Description:**  
Neighborhood Parks are designated, developed public parks included on the Parks, Recreation and Library Department's facility map and are scattered throughout Phoenix.

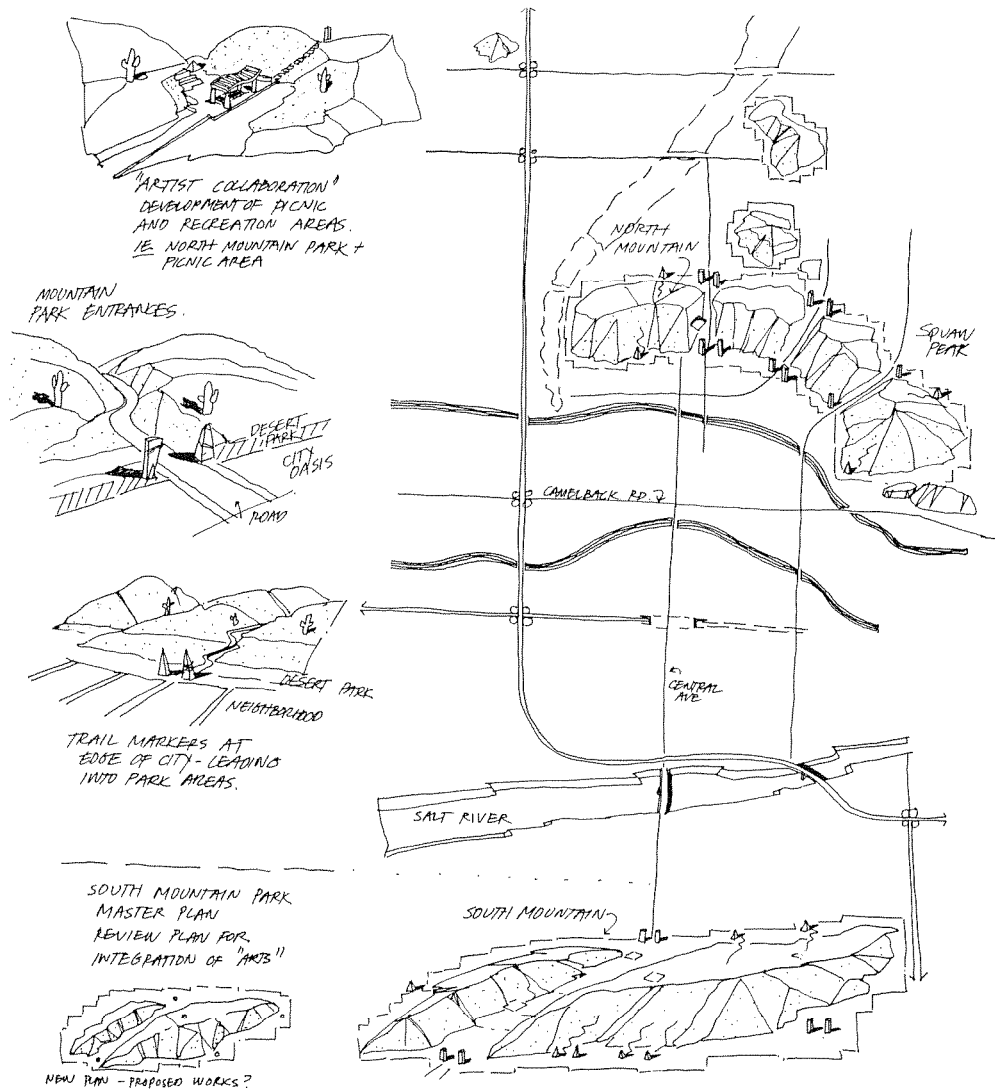
**Observations:** Neighborhood parks are points of concentrated pedestrian activity throughout the city. They are publicly owned and are a logical place for public art projects. Envisioned projects include water elements, landscaping, playgrounds, picnic areas, paths, benches, gateways, restrooms, drinking fountains.



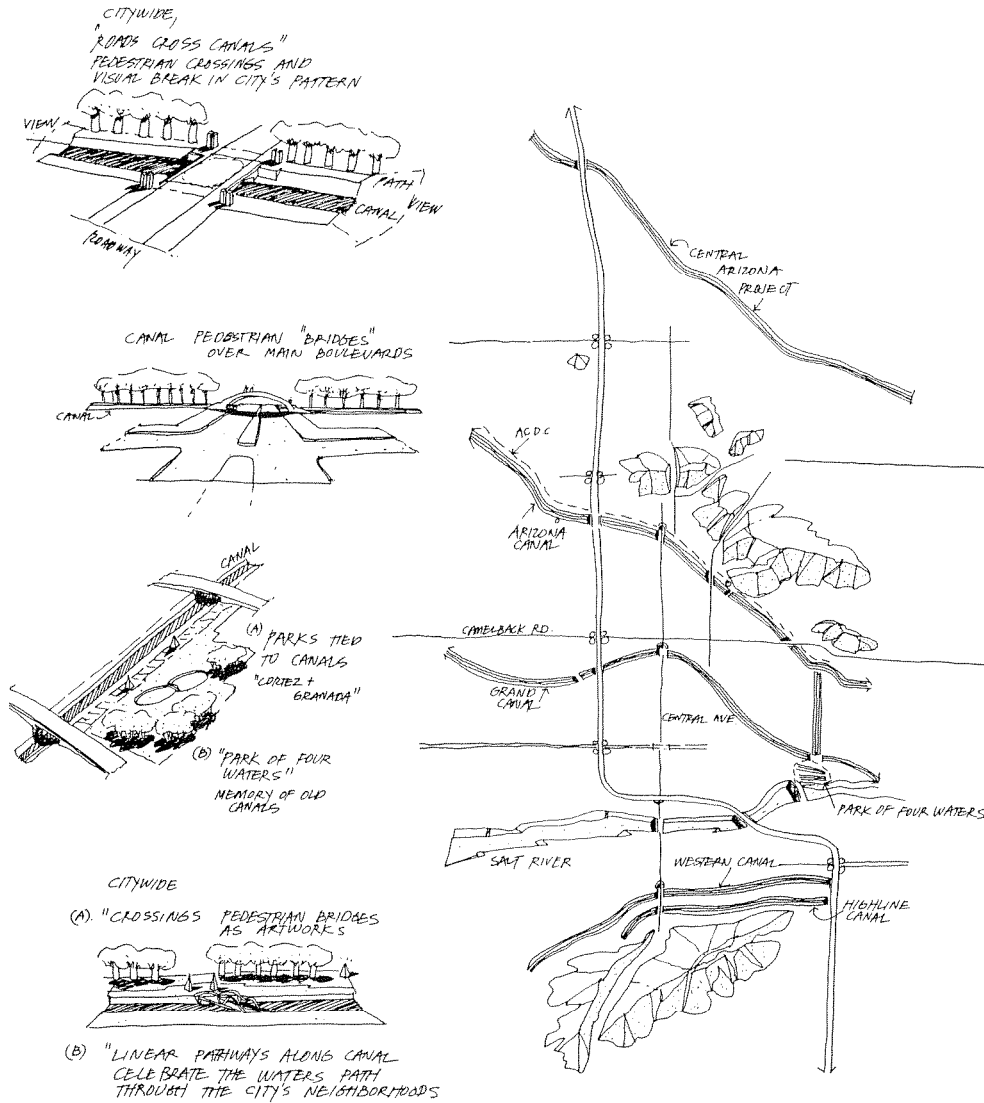
## Mountain Parks (Working Zone 11.0)

Zone Description: Unique to Phoenix are the magnificent mountain parks that frame the city's vistas. The parks include North Mountain, Squaw Peak, and South Mountain Park.

Observations: Forming a semicircular ring around the valley of Phoenix are rocky desert mountains. They are key landmarks in describing Phoenix as a distinctive urban place. Without intruding into preserve lands, art works can be used to heighten the experiential quality of these gigantic islands which rise from the urban sea. Artists can help define the gateways and boundaries of the parks, as well as collaborating in the design of the functional elements for areas of the park that are to be developed for recreational use.



## Canals (Working Zone 12.0)



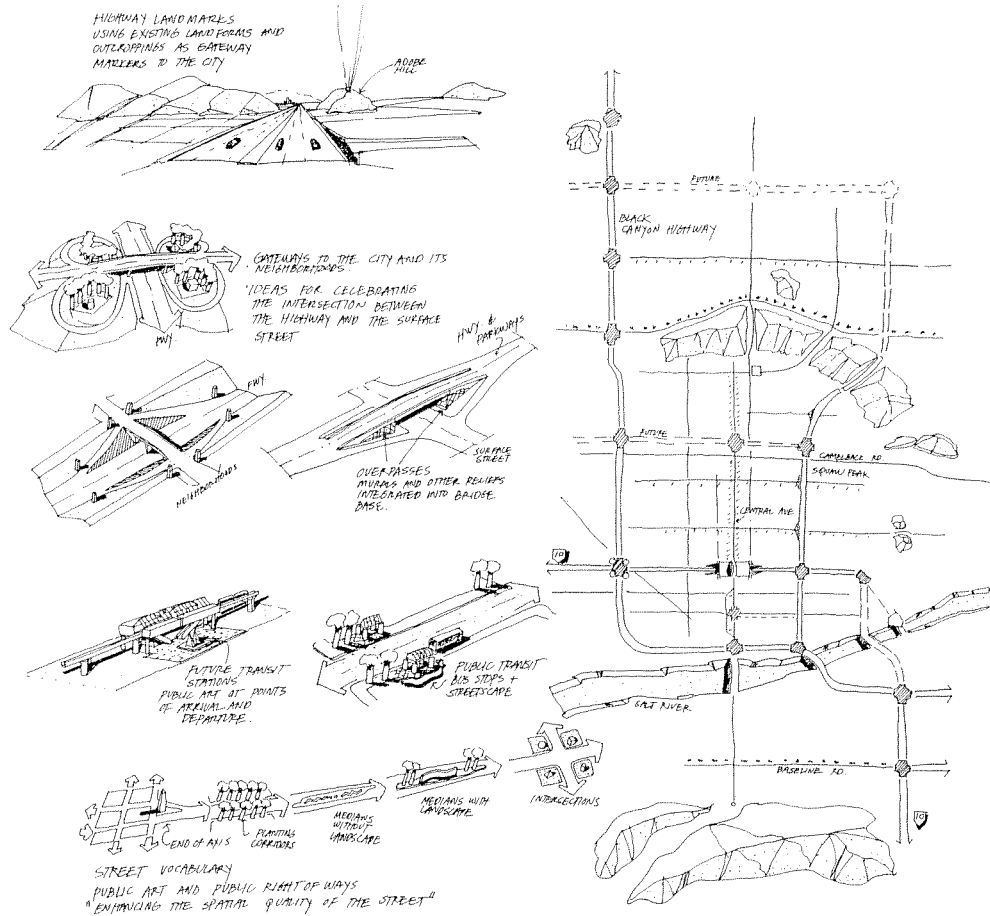
Zone Description: Canals carry water and cut diagonally through the grid of the city. The major canals are Central Arizona Project, Arizona Canal, Grand Canal, and Western Canal.

Observations: The canal system that passes through the village is one of the oldest urban systems in the city. Within the canal, the city's lifeblood, water, flows to its various destinations. The development of sites and works along the canal routes is seen as a mechanism to heighten the presence of the system within people's perception of the city and its history. It is a unique event, when traveling across the sprawling grid of the city, to suddenly cross a canal flowing diagonally under the street. It is projected in city plans that the canal levees will be developed as pedestrian trails. Art works can enhance this pathway system providing interesting destinations or creating functional elements such as seating, shade, and drinking water rest stops.

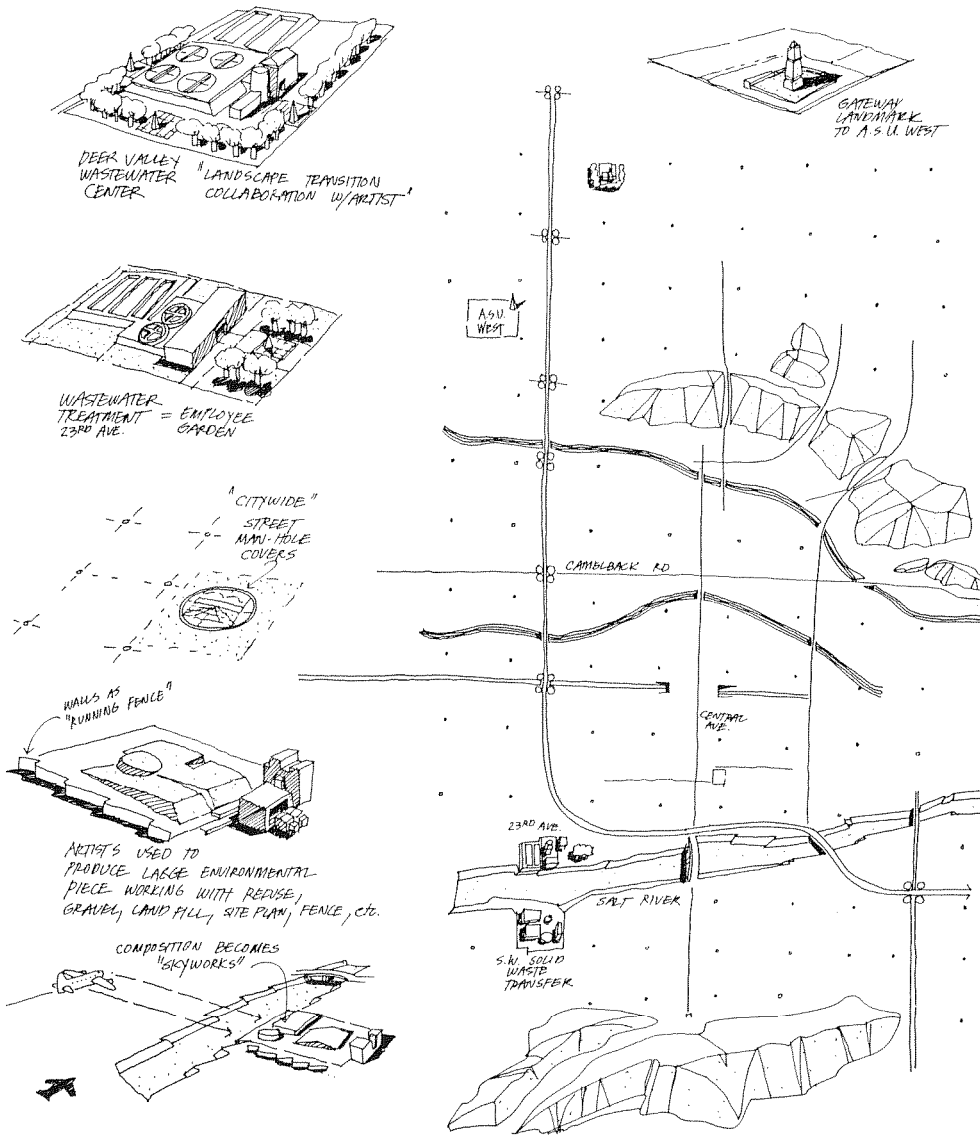
## Roads, Freeways, Transit (Working Zone 13.0)

Zone Description: Major traffic routes across the city in all three categories.

Observations: Roadways crisscross in a grid-like fashion across the valley floor. They have mainly been perceived as utilitarian viaducts for moving traffic efficiently between destination points. This strict utilitarian rule is beginning to change as new development emerges along their right-of-ways. People are becoming concerned not only about what the view to the road is; just as important to them is the view from the road. Because the city, county, and state are involved in an extensive revamping of the road network, there exists a unique opportunity to introduce the sensibility of the artist in an attempt to enhance the sense of movement, space, time, and orientation experienced in our daily travels. The first step is to explore this idea through design studies in order to define the appropriate design vocabulary and project descriptions.



## Special Projects (Working Zone 14.0)



Zone Description: Any project that does not fall into the previous 13 zones, located anywhere in the city.

Observations: Special projects is a working zone category that contains sites which are primarily "one of a kind" projects scattered throughout Phoenix. Currently the individual sites are envisioned as one-time-only developments; however, they may emerge as the first prototype for future working zones.