

San Francisco Survey

2013 – 2015



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A disclaimer:

the limits of “measuring” public art

When I first began documenting art in public spaces, I had *very* naive notions about my power to capture, represent, and analyze the art I came across. My goal was to create a cohesive, comprehensive look at who our public art represents, who is allowed to create and install it, and what it says about the communities it exists within.

The fact that I’m writing this in the year 2020—when this project of documenting San Francisco’s art began in 2013—speaks to the sheer unsustainability of this process of

collecting, documenting, and synthesizing information about public art, at least as I had originally conceived it.

Of course, the process I first came up with was unnecessarily tedious, even if it was intended to be incredibly comprehensive. Beginning in the northeast corner of San Francisco’s 7x7 square miles (which seemed manageable at the outset!), I started “walking” down each street on Google Street View, noting murals, sculptures, and other public art interventions as I “saw” them. Then, once a neighborhood was virtually trekked, I’d take the ferry in from Vallejo and comprehensively document the art I’d found on Street View. When it had been months and I was still in the Marina District, I realized I had to switch things up if this project was ever going to have an end-date.

About a quarter of the way into documenting the art of this urban peninsula, I changed things to a research-first method, finding art hotspots through Google searches and only using Street View for spot-checks or to check for art in places where you frequently find it—like parks or busy intersections.

This process was similar in that I was charting out art to find, and going out and documenting it as comprehensively as its current context allowed for. Unfortunately there were often parked cars blocking the largest, most beautiful murals, and I encountered a really troubling connection between public art

and the city's homeless population. I'd find the housing-insecure sleeping or with temporary homes set up in front of murals, and did my best to document what I could while maintaining the privacy of the person who had chosen this site intentionally as a place for shelter.

After documenting the artworks, there'd be a subsequent research phase on what I found out in the real world, so that the process in total consisted of "research-photograph-research" — including the additional layers of photo editing and taxonomic application, as I began developing a methodology around a tagging system that allowed for the distinction between an artwork's content, function, site of installation, and other forms of categorization.

When the eastern half was complete, I learned that I'd be returning to the East Coast for grad school the following fall, so I started expediting the documentation process. The art in the Mission took so much longer to document than any other neighborhood—**practically every street had something to say**—so being met with that sheer volume halfway through the project slowed me down. I was overwhelmed, but elated. This amount of art, the number of artists it takes to create a neighborhood like the Mission, the joy in the visitors and residents in traveling to and living within what is essentially an open-air museum—it told me I was not alone. There were others who saw every spare wall as canvas, as an opportunity to say something that needed saying. And

although I had never felt like I had something to say that would have been deserving of that space, I was fascinated by those who did, and by the artifacts—sometimes completely untraceable, at least online—that they left behind.

While this gives you some insight into my motivations for beginning this work, the comparatively small number of individual artworks (534) documented during my time in San Francisco, the continued changes in methodology in finding work, and the limited amount of research that could be done online for each artwork and artist, indicates that this project's culmination isn't at all what I'd originally set out to create. Instead, what you'll find in the pages to follow is an imperfect snapshot of the public art one person was able to find across the two years that she called the City by the Bay home—a moment in time, and an attempt to categorize and calculate public visual expressions across all methods and means of creation.

What comforts me though, is that I don't think it would ever be possible for me to truly complete this project. It's definitely not something I could ever do alone, and for more than a single, temporary snapshot, decades—not years—are needed in a place practically exploding with so much creativity.

Highlights

534 artworks documented

average age of a public artwork
23.37 years

oldest artwork: **1862***

Artists with most artworks

13: **Reyes**

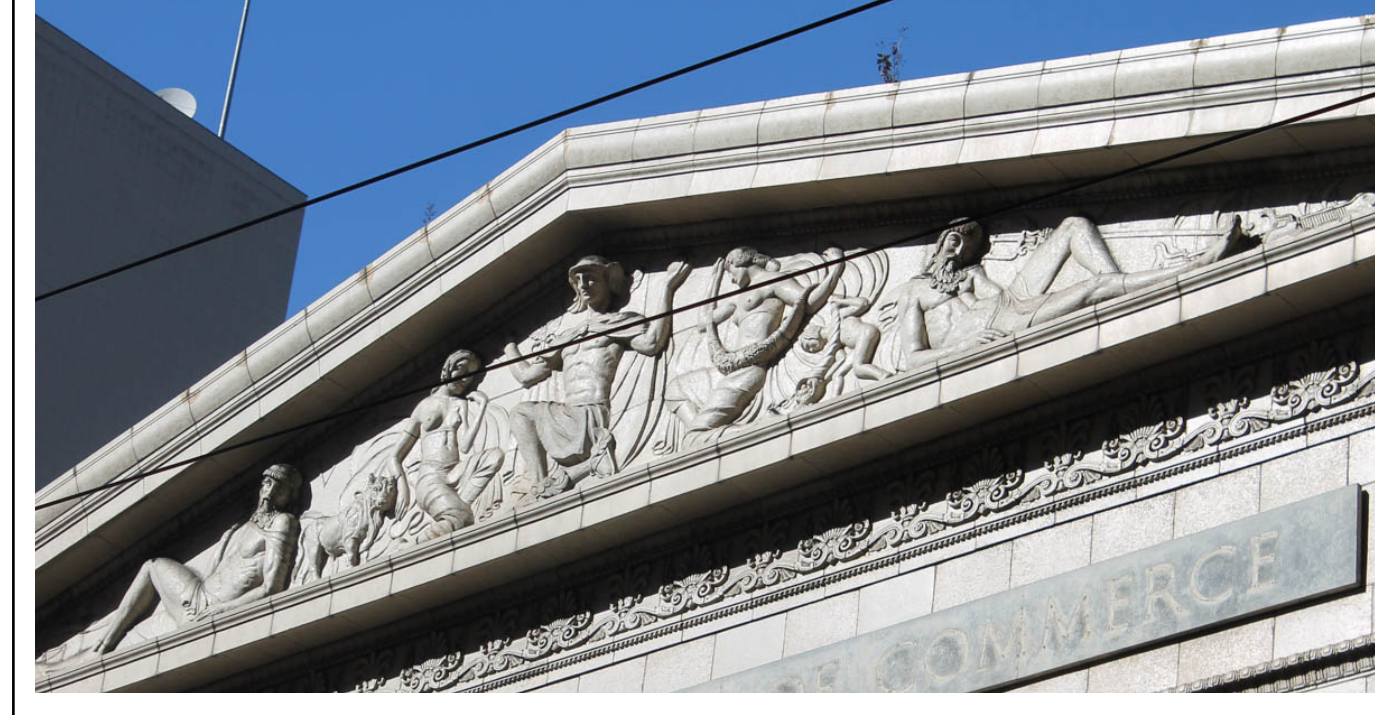
12: **Precita Eyes Muralists**

12: **Benny Bufano**

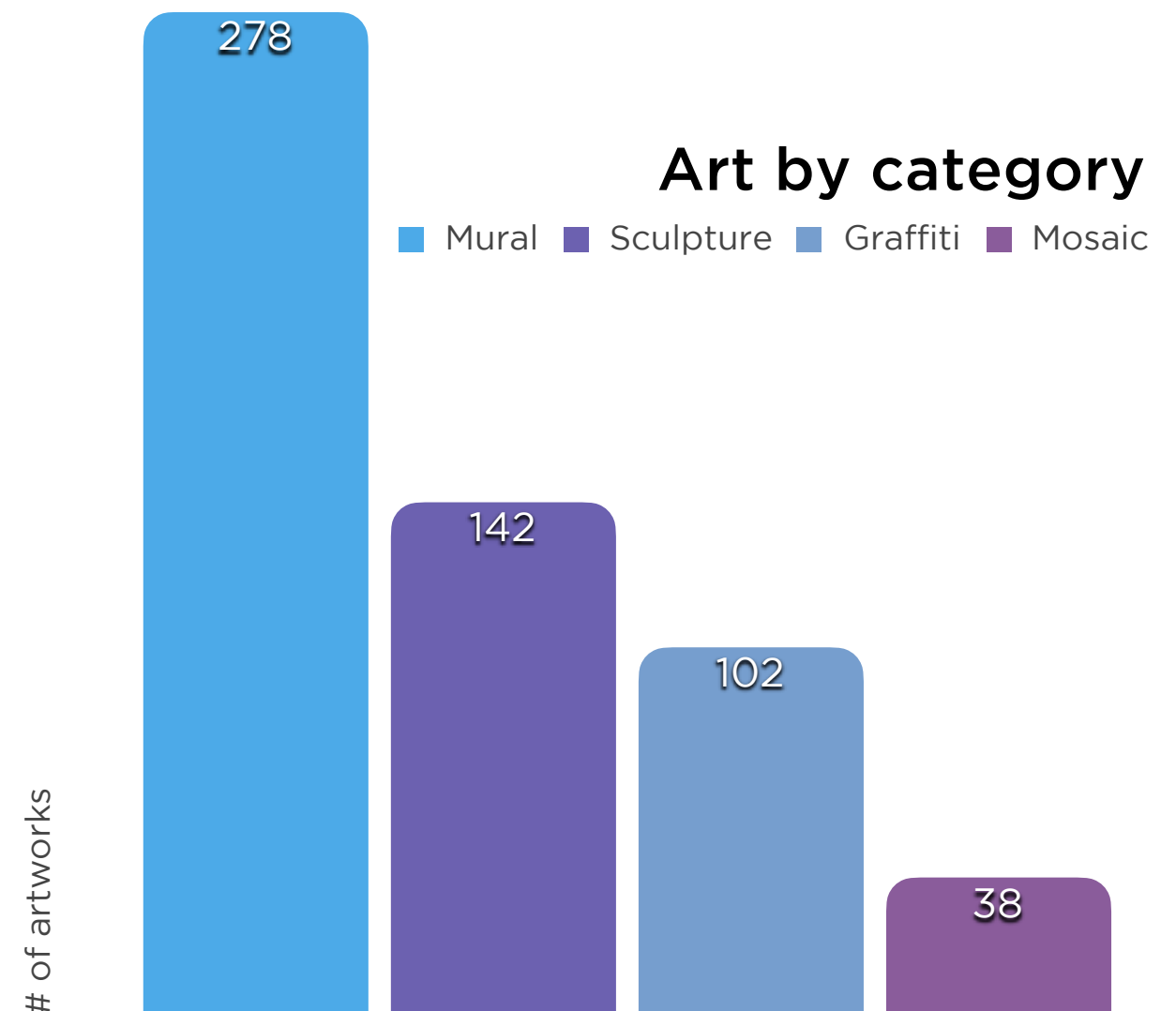
11: **Jet Martinez**

7: **Twick**

7: **Johanna Poethig**



** Jo Mora's San Francisco Mining Exchange Pediment from 1862 (152 years old).*

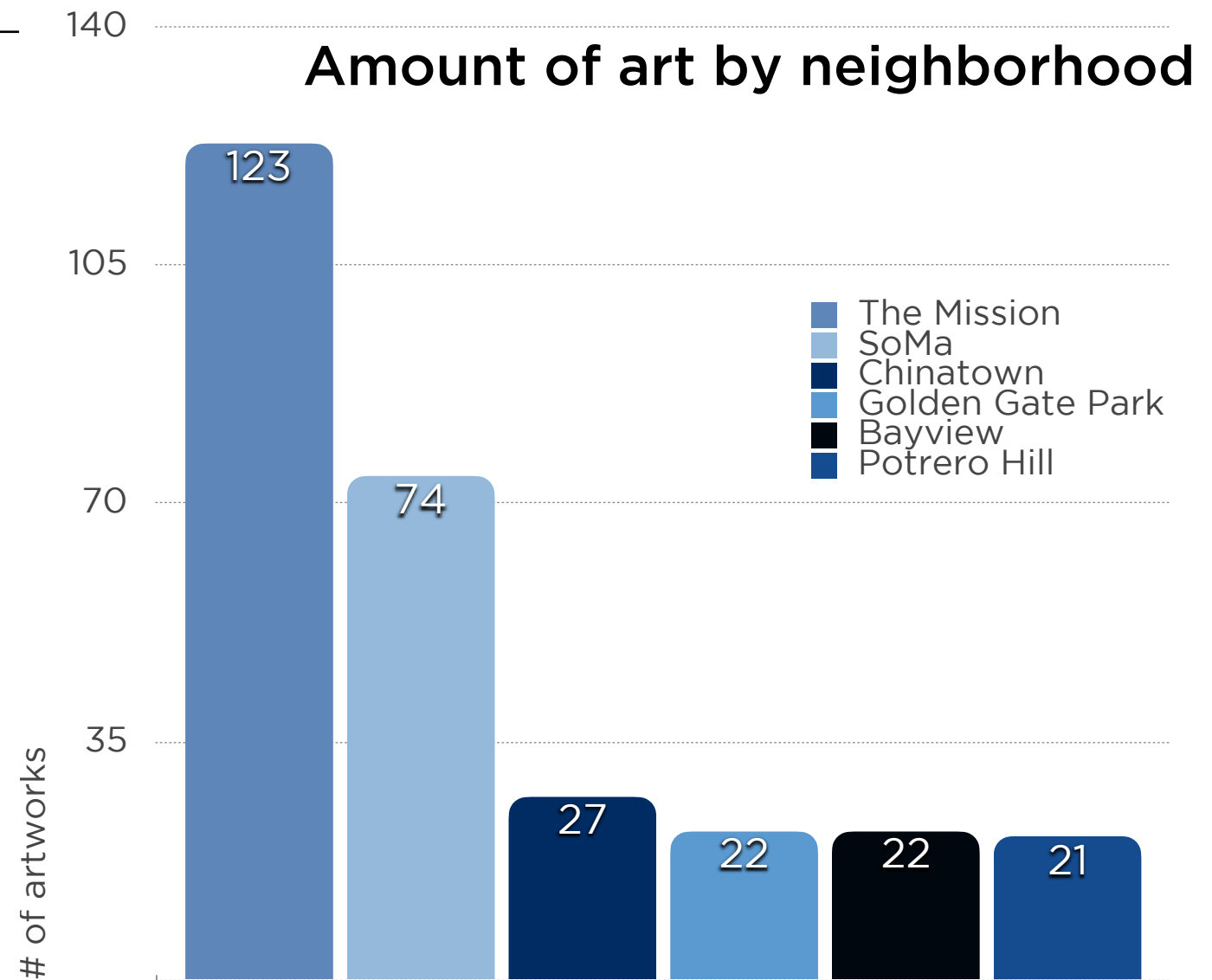


Where

neighborhoods, location installation sites

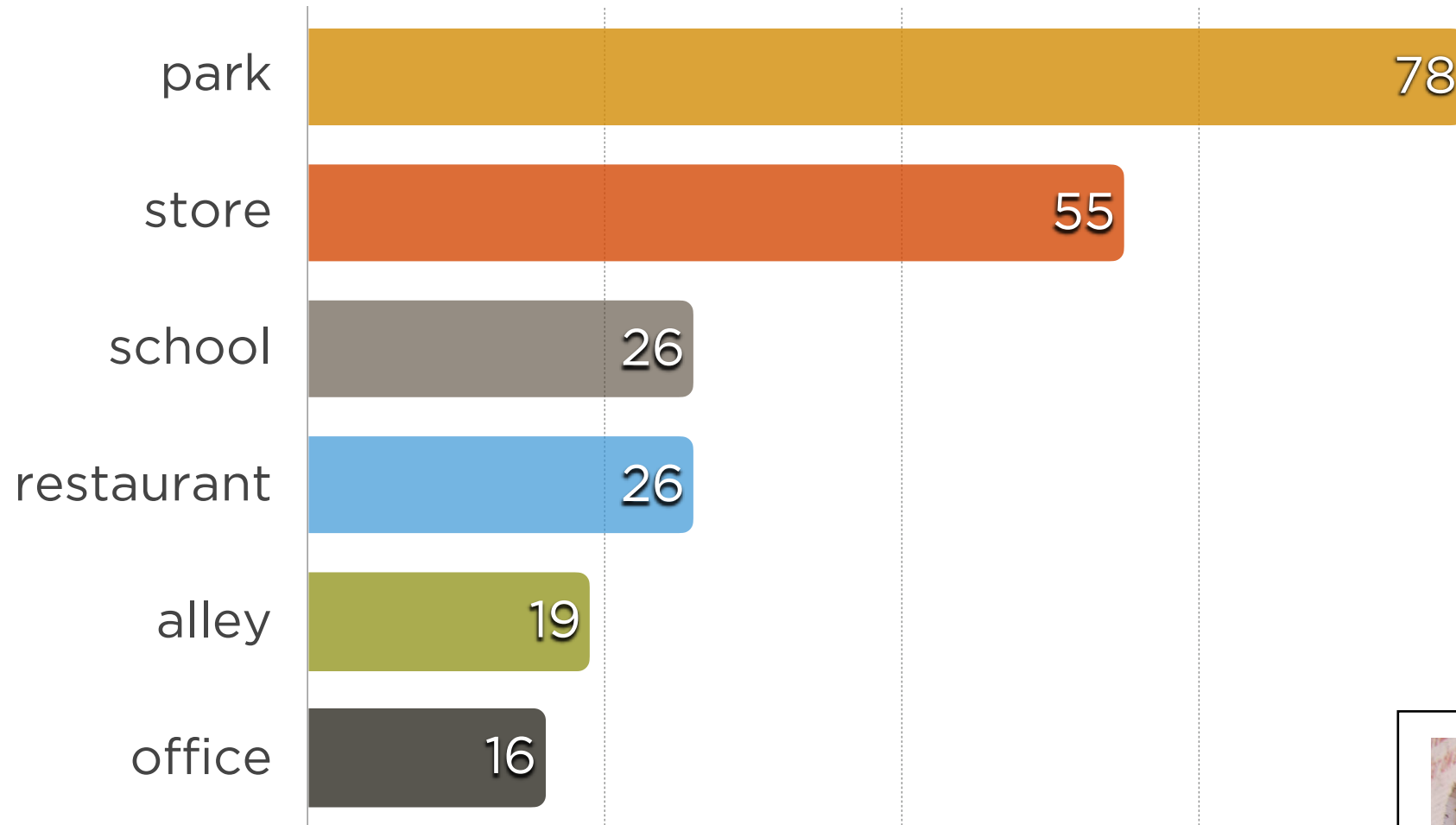
Where ended up being more complicated than simply which neighborhood in San Francisco a work happened to be in. The borders between various neighborhoods were more opaque in some places than others, but ultimately I attempted to mirror Google Maps' neighborhood names and outlines.

Another important means of comparing various **where's** was noting the location of installation. As existing publicly maintained shared spaces, it makes sense that most public art would be found in parks. But public art also plays a big role in the storefronts of private businesses. Of the 55 artworks outside of "stores," 13 included a commissioned painting of the "store name."



Potrero Hill mural, artist unknown, at the corner of Connecticut and 17th Streets.

Location of installation



Gustave Dore's Poeme de la Vigne (1877-1878), in Golden Gate Park.

While there are exceptions to every rule, comparisons of location installation proved helpful in **generalizing the commissioners of work**, as the art found in parks and schools seemed publicly funded in some way, while the public art outside of stores, restaurants, and offices were predominately privately funded, created, and maintained.

There were commissioned murals in alleys, but this location site exists alone in that the majority of its work takes the form of some guerrilla reclamation of space.



Artwork by Reyes in Avery Alley.

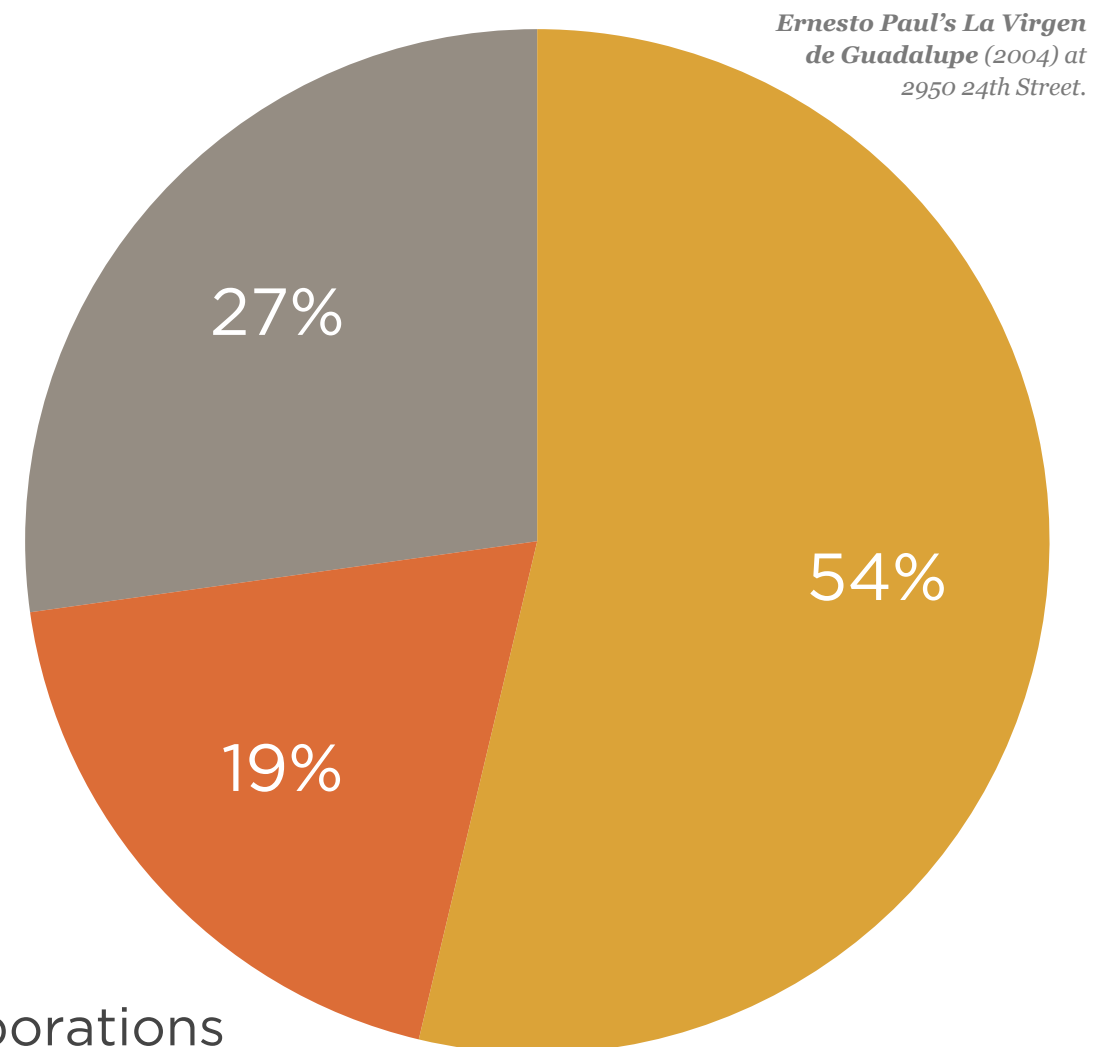
Who

who creates work
& who is represented by it

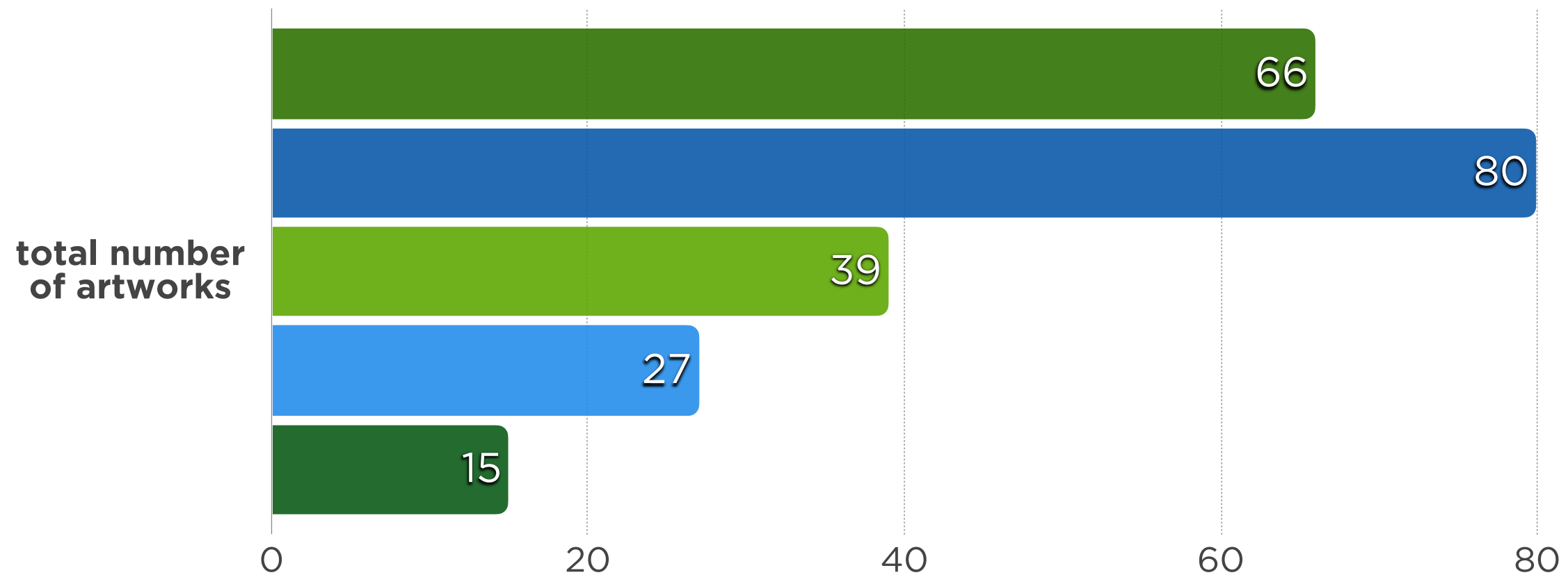
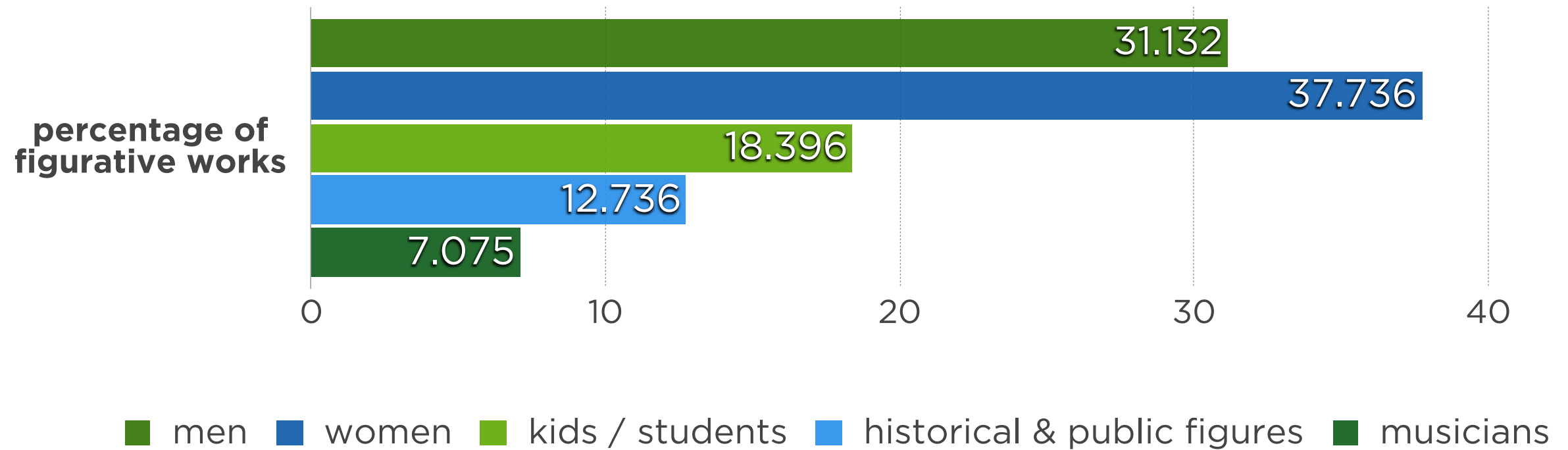
Questions of **who** involve both creator and creation—who is represented alongside who is allowed to create that representation.

It wasn't surprising to find that the majority of public art was created by men. And although it may seem promising that the majority of figures represented are women, **most of these women depict allegorical ideals**—not real women with lived experiences being recognized for their work and achievements.

● works by men ● works by women ● collaborations



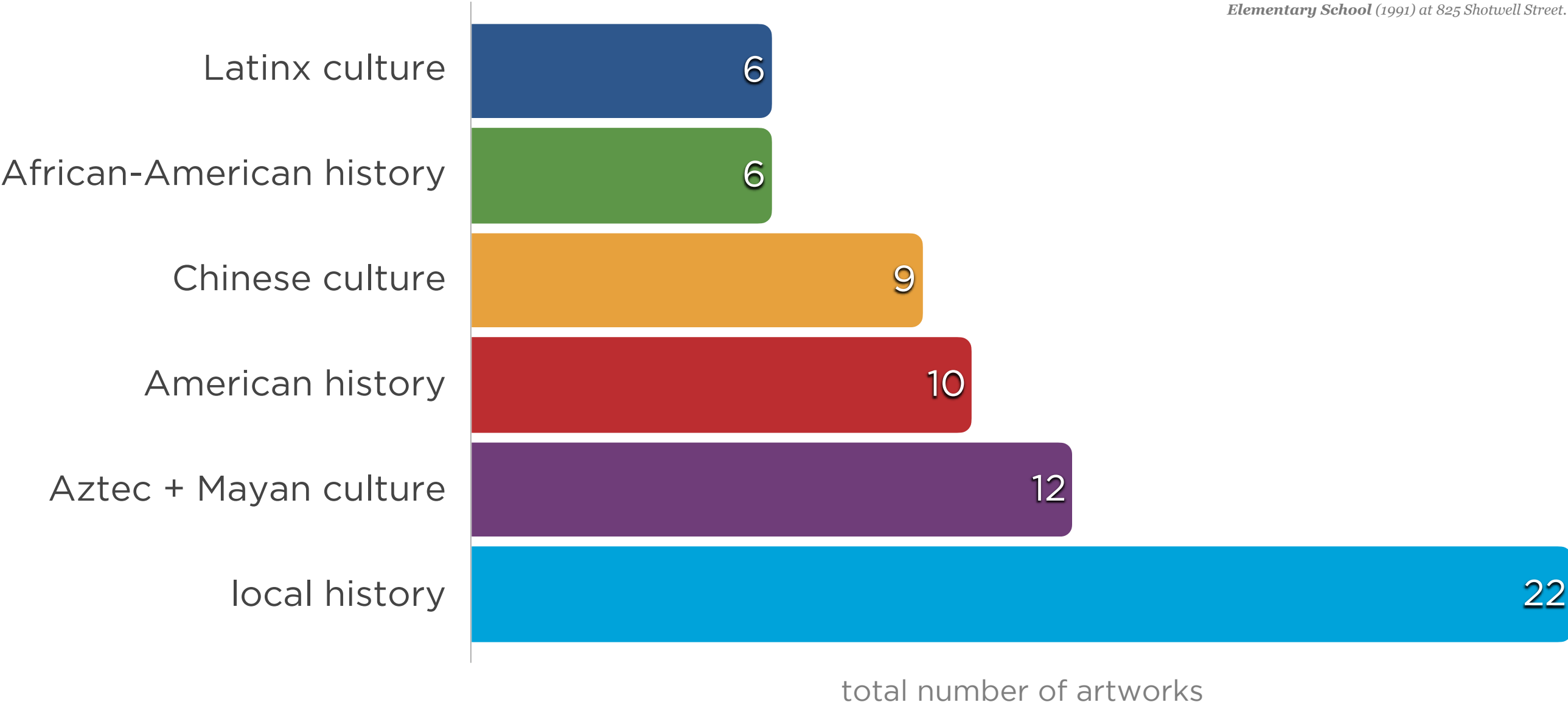
Who is represented?



Whose cultures & histories are memorialized?



Susan Cervantes & Juana Alicia's mural for **Cesar Chavez Elementary School** (1991) at 825 Shotwell Street.



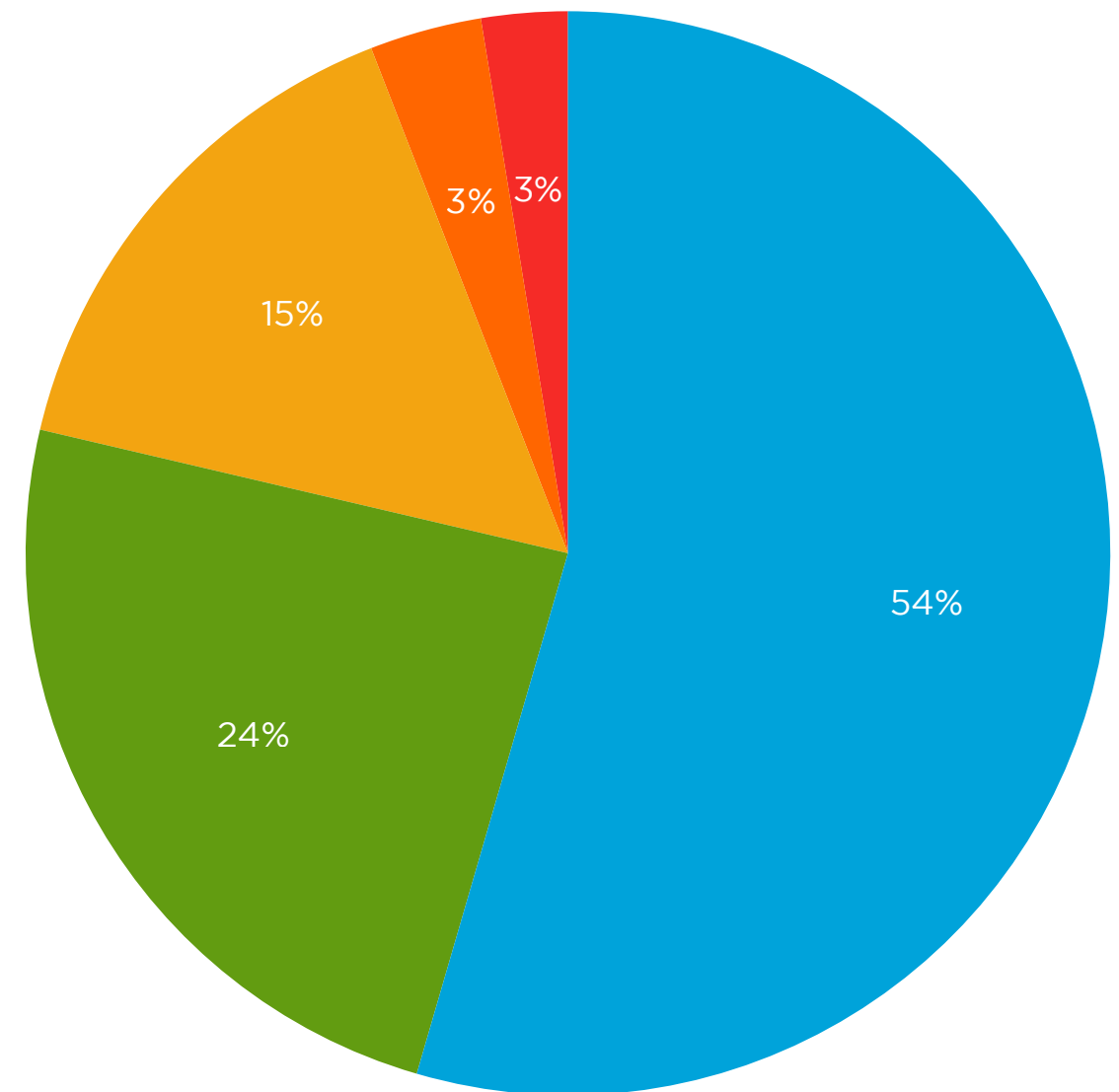
What

styles, themes, the natural world, animals, & colors

What considers the content of the public art I found in San Francisco: the styles, themes, and even the minutiae of what's depicted.

I took a **zoom-in approach** to content, tagging artworks by style—what's being generally depicted—from tags to figurative to abstract works. And then moved inwards, tagging animals, nature, figures for works depicting people, and so on, moving into the specifics of each work until arriving at toucans, dragonflies, thumbs, and much more.

Artwork styles

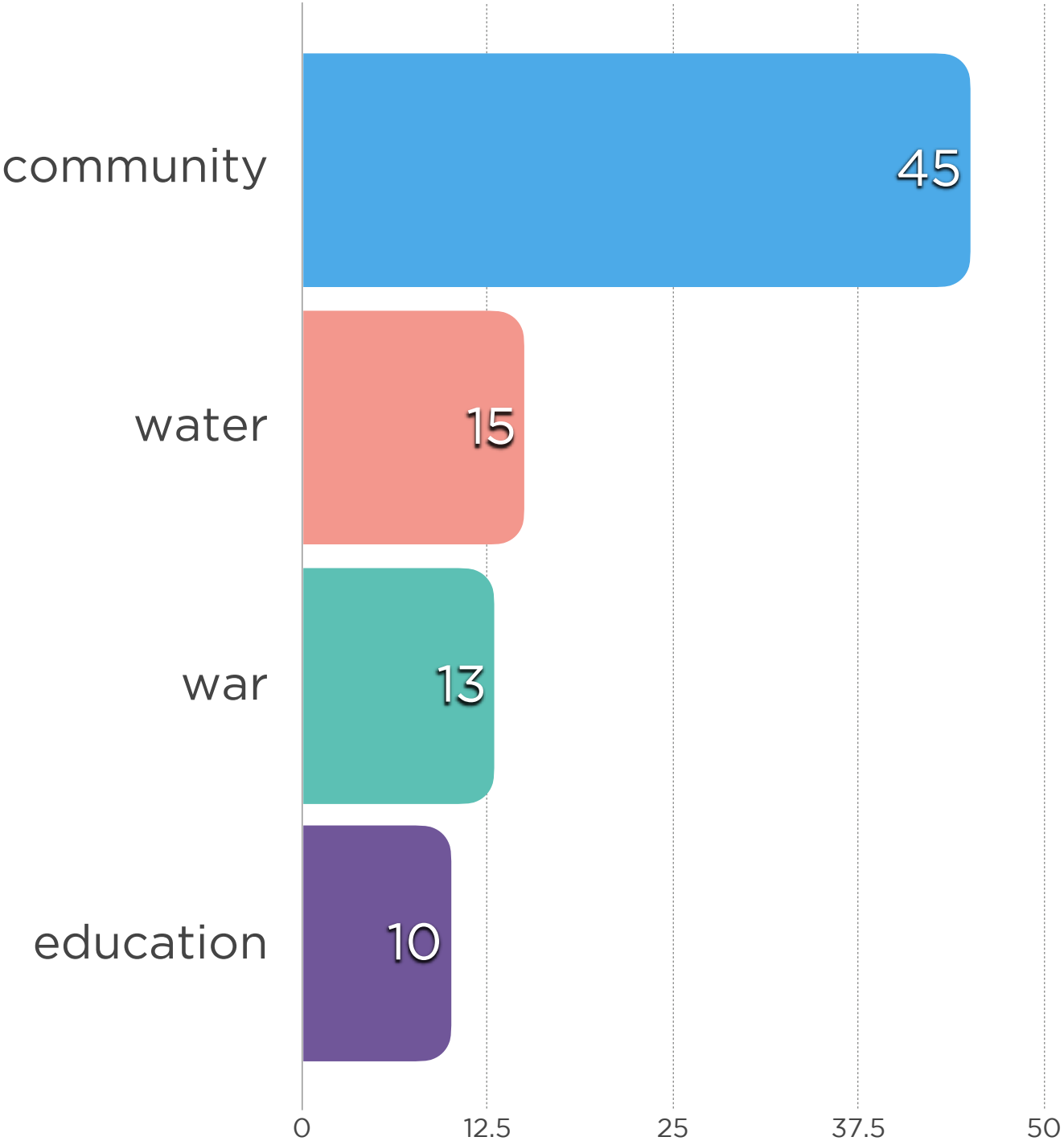


● figurative ● abstract ● tags ● mythical ● surreal

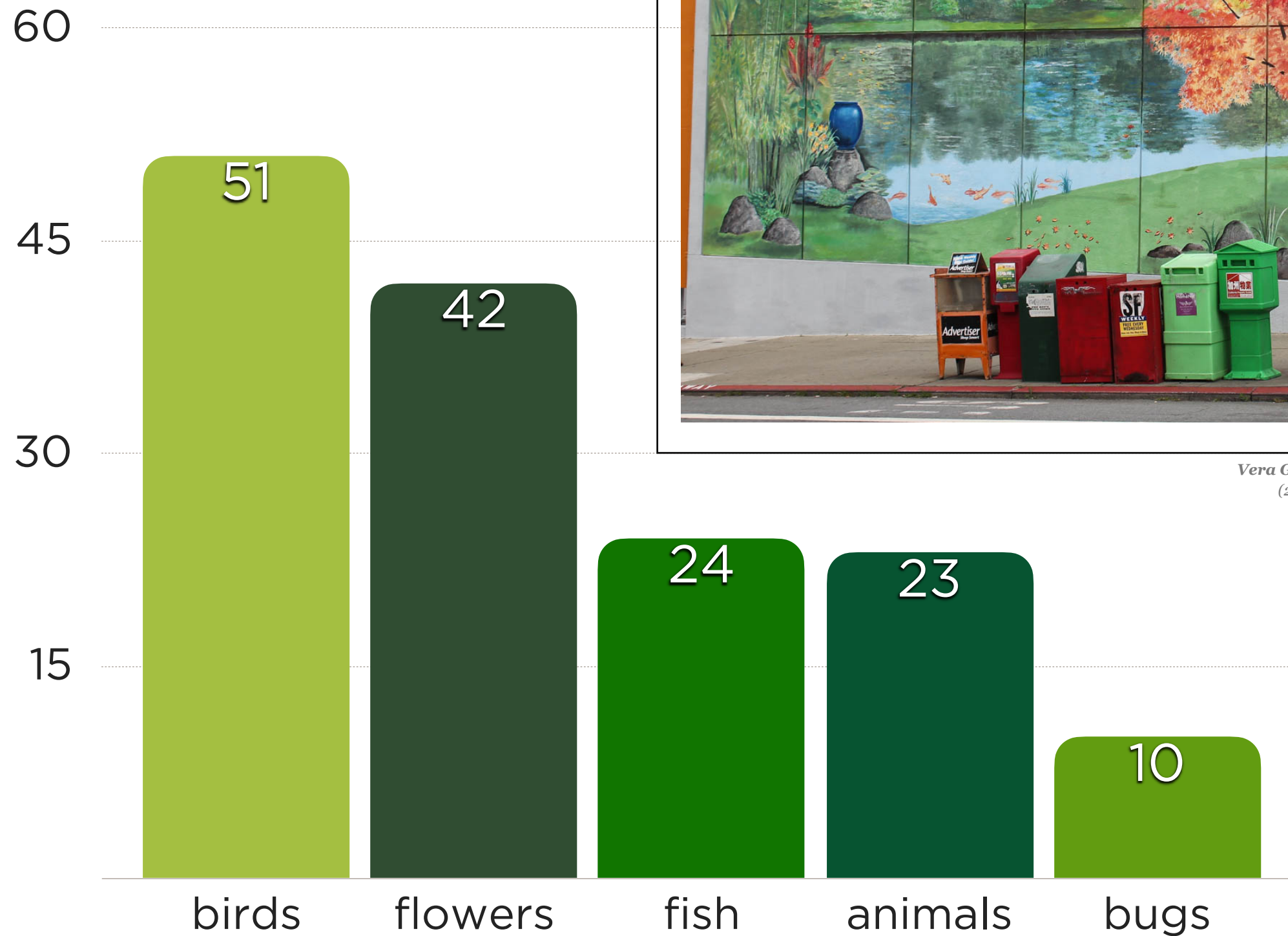
Common themes



Precita Eyes Muralists' Soul Journey (2000) at 1625 Carroll Avenue.

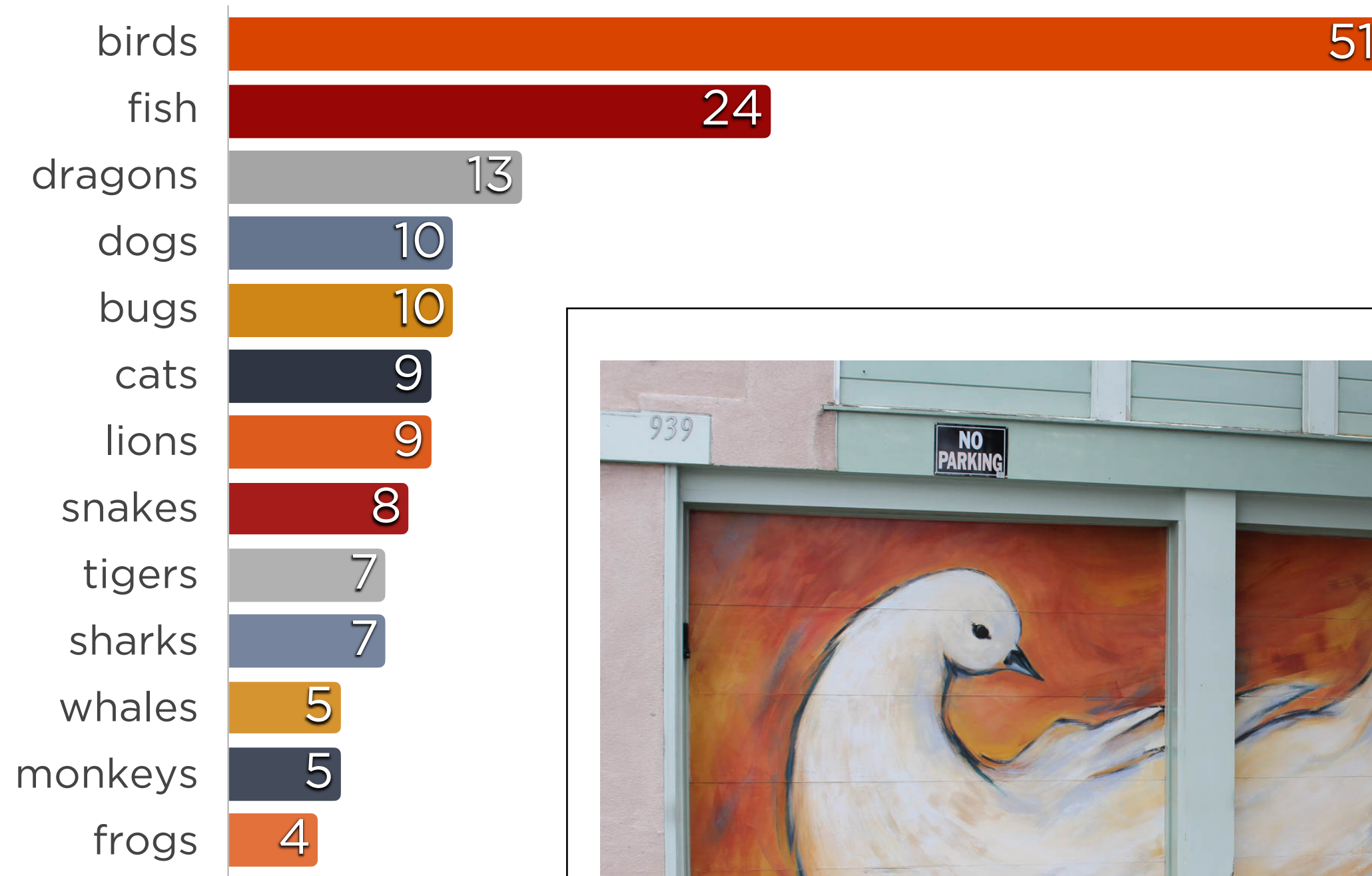


The natural world



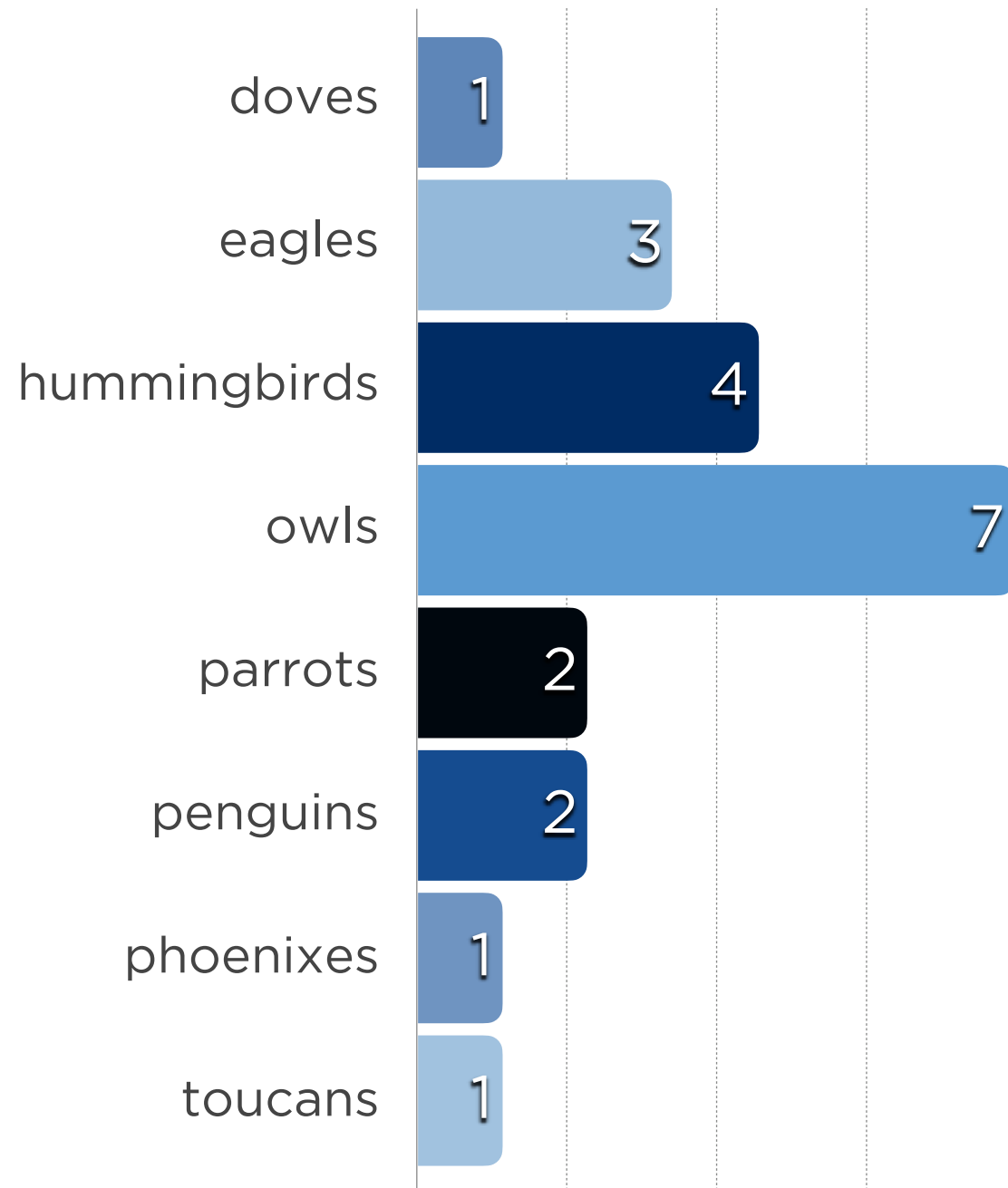
*Vera Gordeev Lowdermilk's Zen Garden
(2010) at 22nd Avenue & Noriega Street.*

Animals (>4)

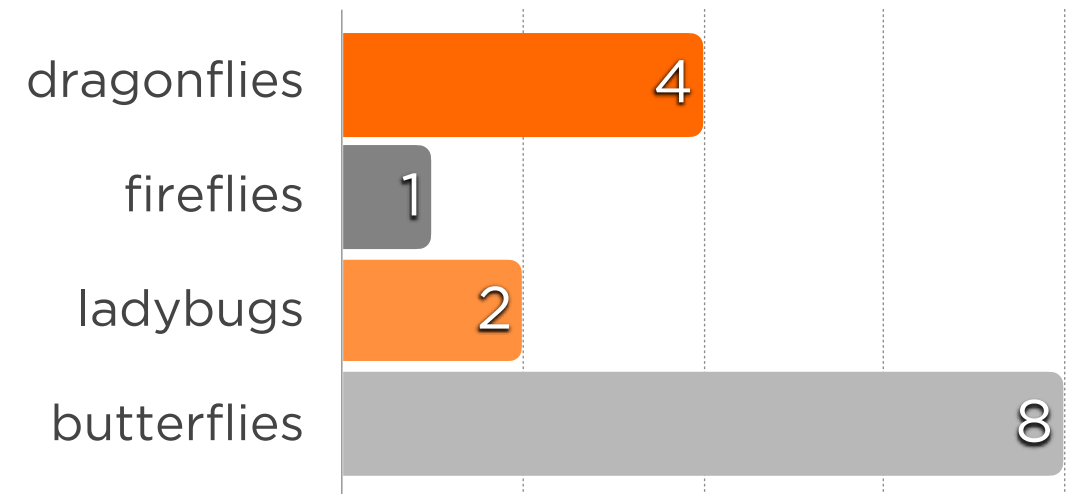


*Minna Eloranta & Mona Caron's
Mission Dove (2003) at 939 Shotwell Street.*

Birds



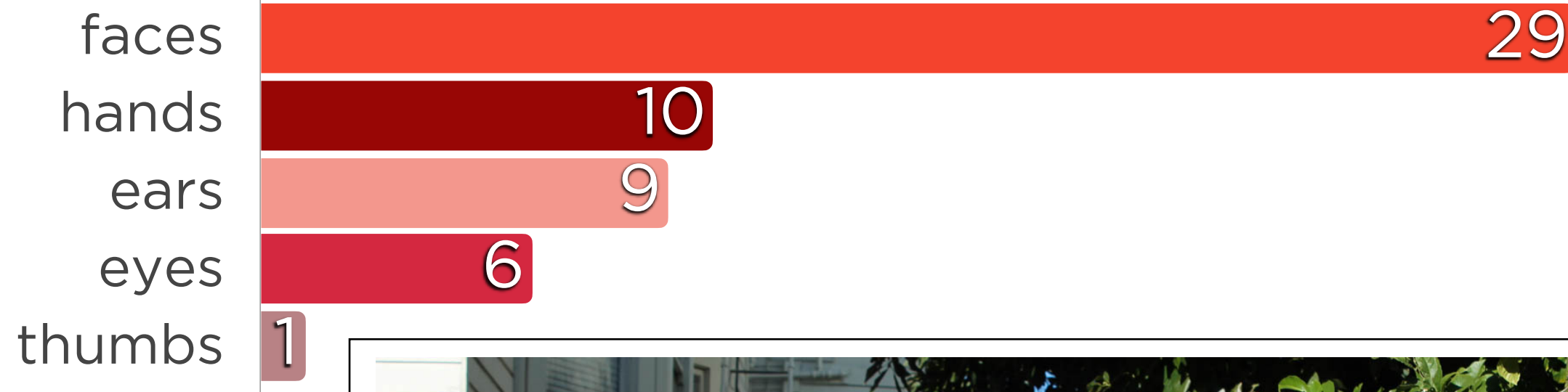
Bugs



*Andrew Schoultz & Aaron Noble's
Generator (2003; restored in 2013) at
18th and Lexington Streets.*

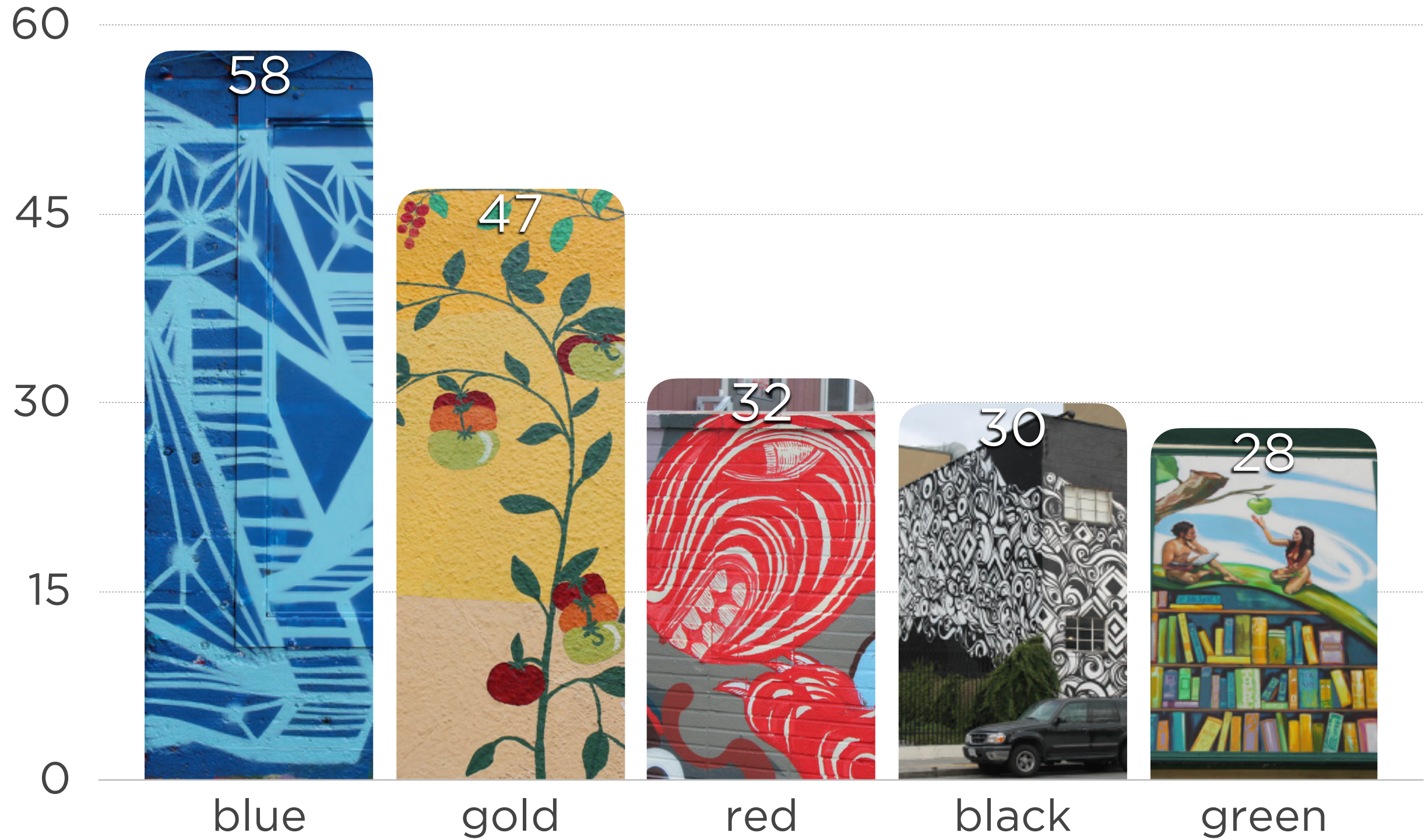


The human figure



*Colette Crutcher's Tonantsin
Renace (Tonantsin Reborn)
(1998) on 16th at Sanchez Street.*

Colors



*Artworks represented: **blue:** unknown artwork on Osage Street; **gold:** an unknown artist's farm-to-table mural at 40 Oliver Street; **red:** Andrew Schoultz & Reyes' San Francisco Fire Department's Red Tiger (2013) at 2310 Folsom Street; **black:** mural by Victor Reyes at 1420 Harrison Street; **green:** Bryana Fleming's 2013 mural at Green Apple Books.*

How

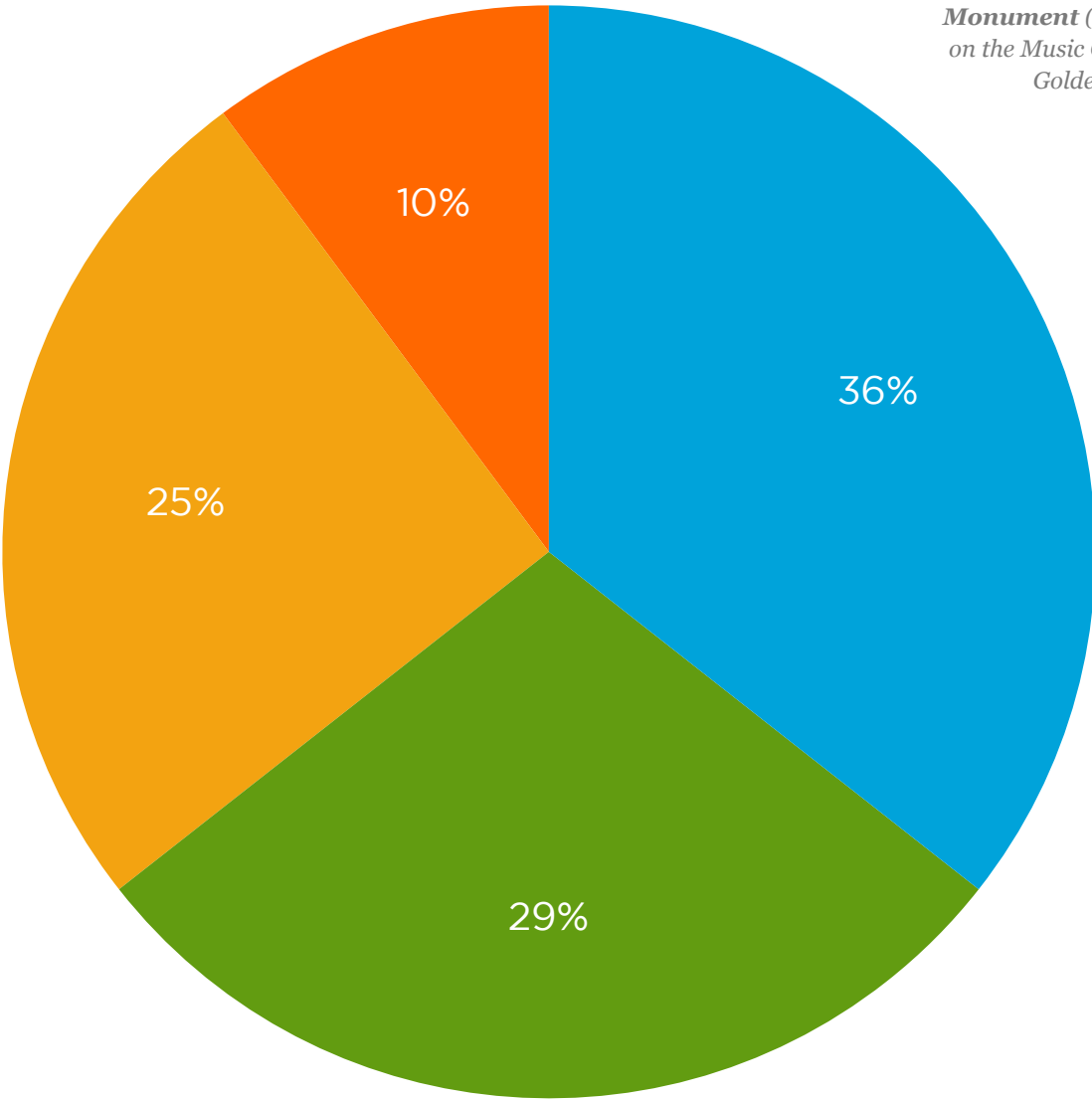
function, material,
commissioners

How examines the materiality and impetus behind public art. How did each work come to be here? Who paid for it, or was someone fined because they created it? What is it made of, and what is its function within the psychological and physical landscapes?

The following offers a look at the most common functions, materials, and commissioning statuses of this collection of San Francisco’s art.



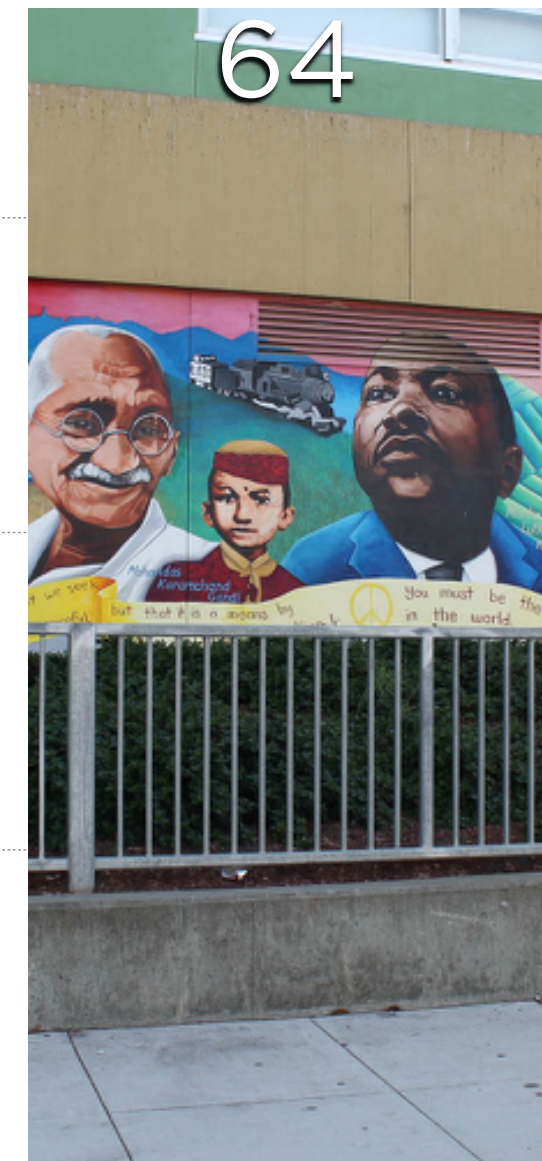
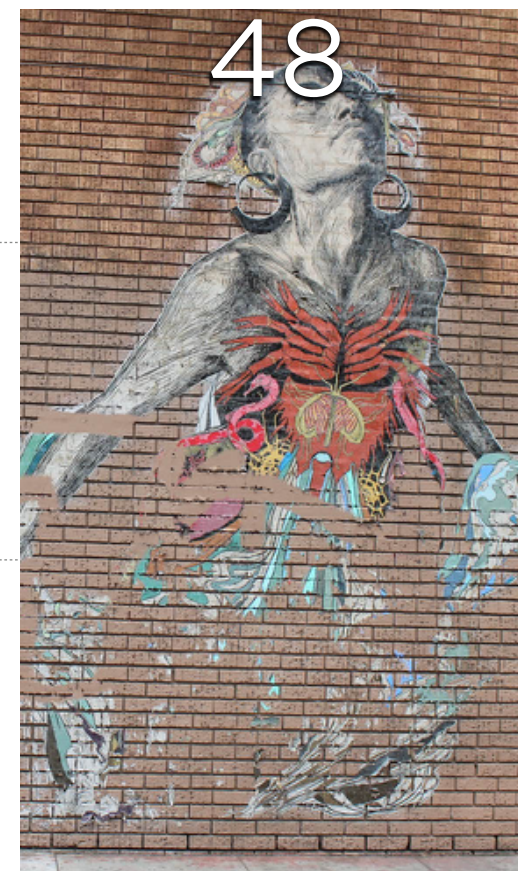
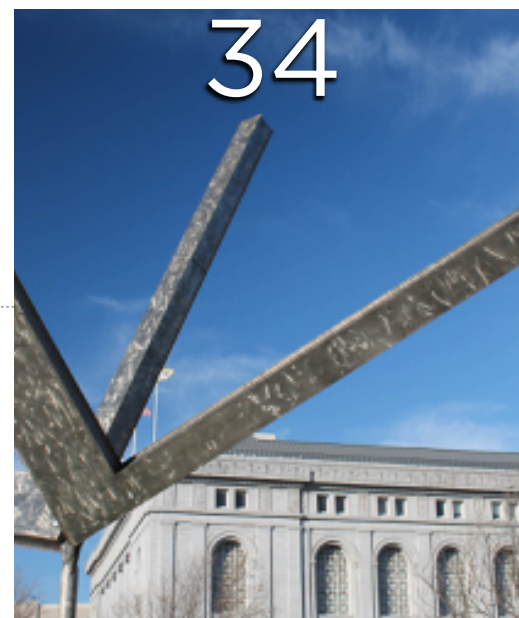
Henry Baerer’s Beethoven Monument (a bust; 1915) on the Music Concourse in Golden Gate Park.



● portraits ● relief ● monument ● bust

Material

total number of artworks



bronze



steel



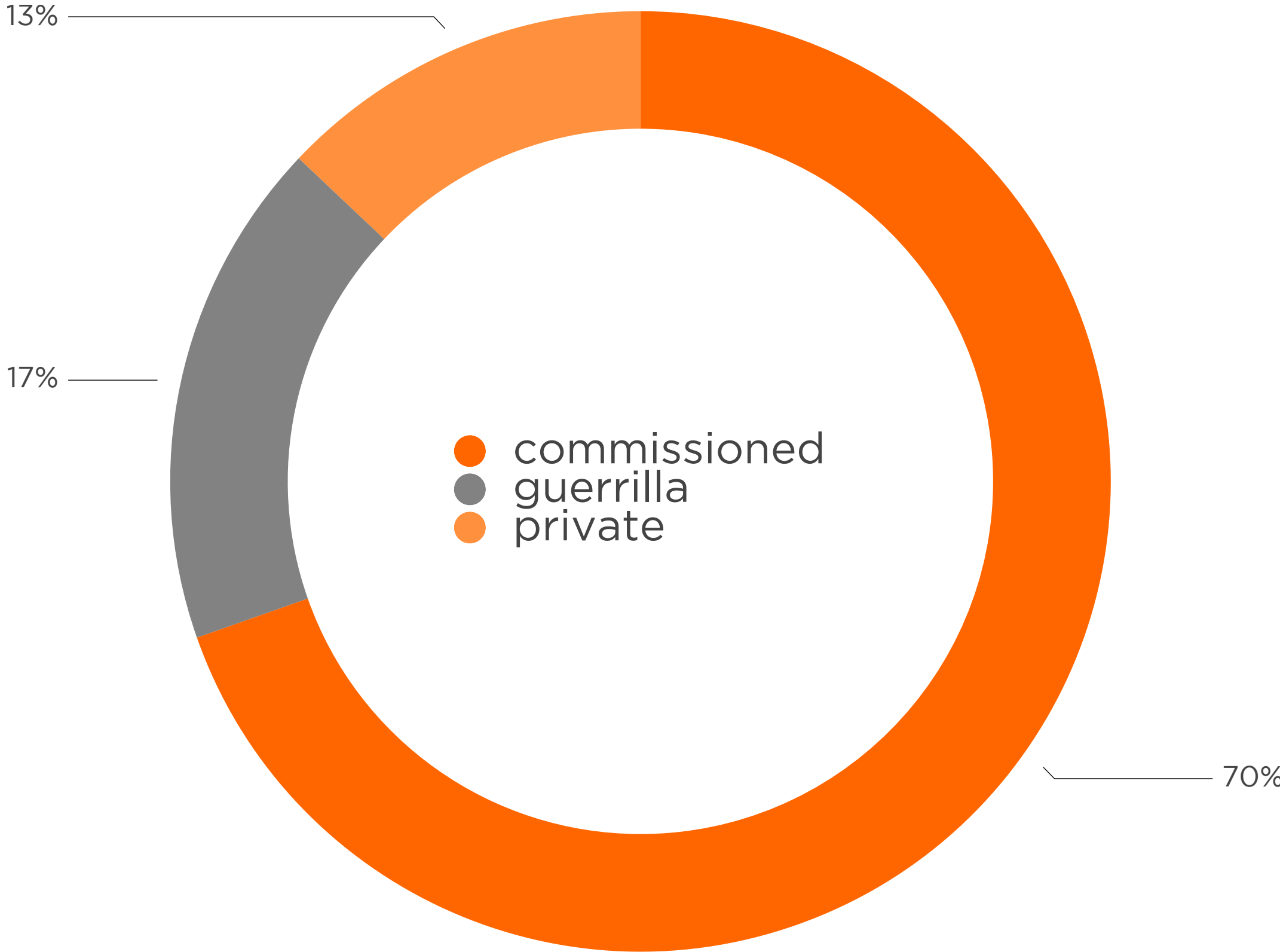
street art
(wheatpaste / graffiti)



paint
(acrylic, etc.)

Artworks represented: **bronze:** Anna Vaughn Hyatt Huntington's Joan of Arc (1922) outside the Legion of Honor; **steel:** George Rickey's "Double L Excentric Gyratory" (Double Excentric Gyratory) (1982) outside the San Francisco Public Library at Larkin and Fulton Streets; **street art:** Swoon's Gazing Seaward (2012) at Zheng's Cleaners on Hampshire Street; **paint:** Marina Perez-Wong's Peace Makers (2008) at MLK Jr. Academic Middle.

Commissioners



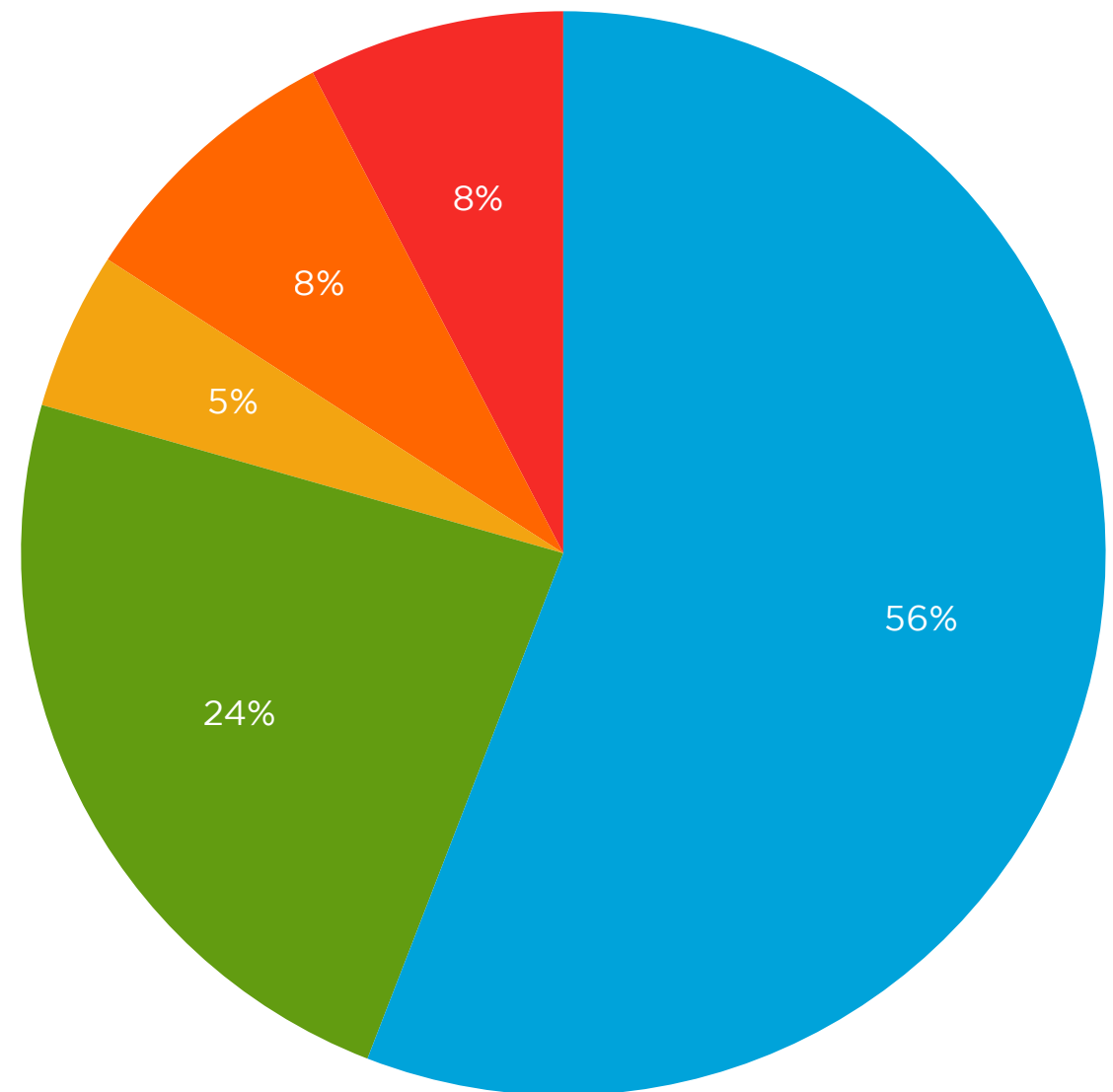
When

decade & length of time the artwork has existed

When tackles one of the most interesting aspects of public art: its longevity—some statues have stood for over 100 years, but the majority of San Francisco’s public art, 56%, was created in the last ten years (2005-2015 at the time).

This tells us that **more than half of San Francisco’s public art landscape is remade at least every 10 years**, and is in a state of happening continuously, every day, in both collaborative and commissioned spaces.

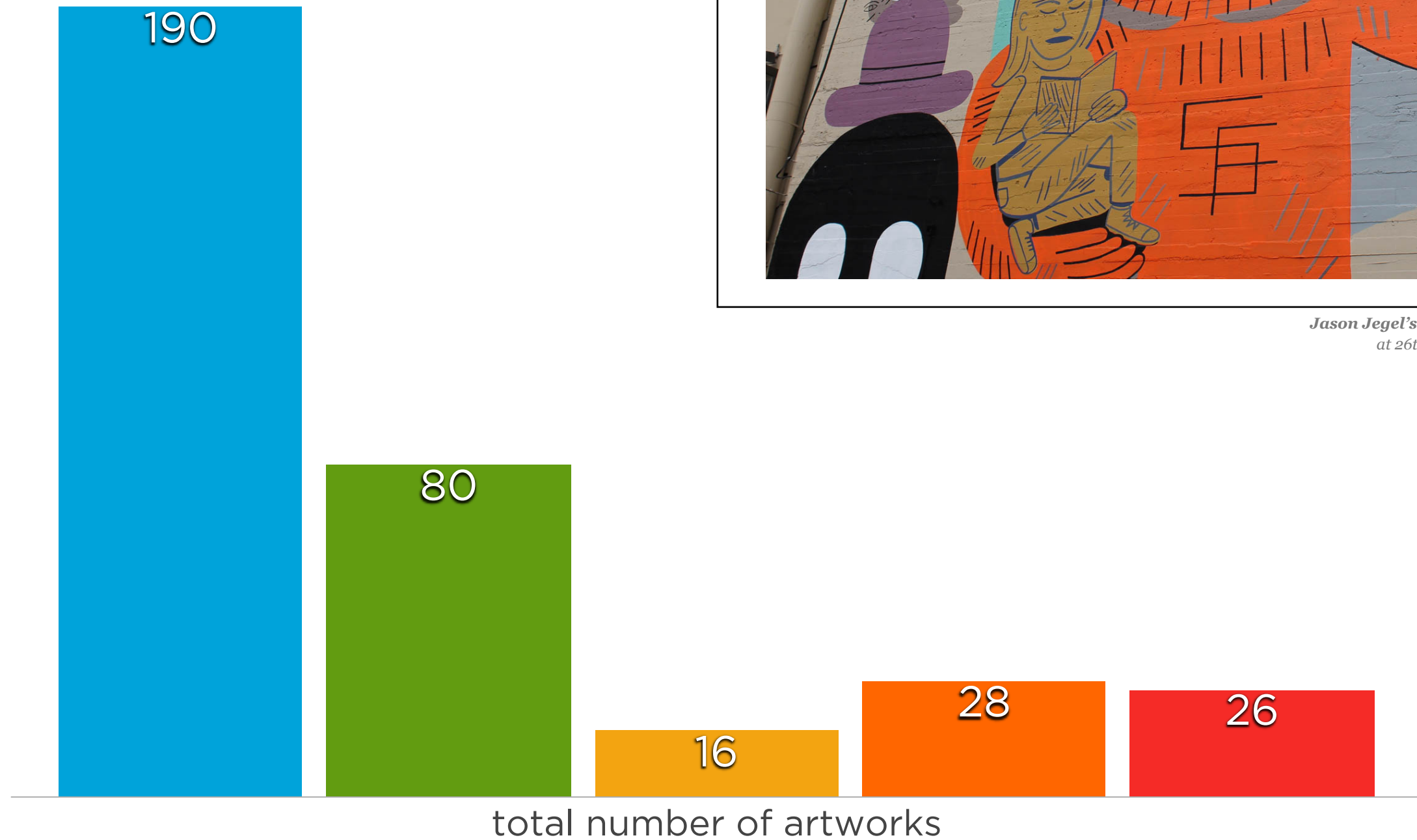
Length of time in existence
*percentage of total known



● <10 years ● 11-24 years ● 25-49 years ● 50-99 years ● >100 years

Length of time in existence

*by total number of artworks

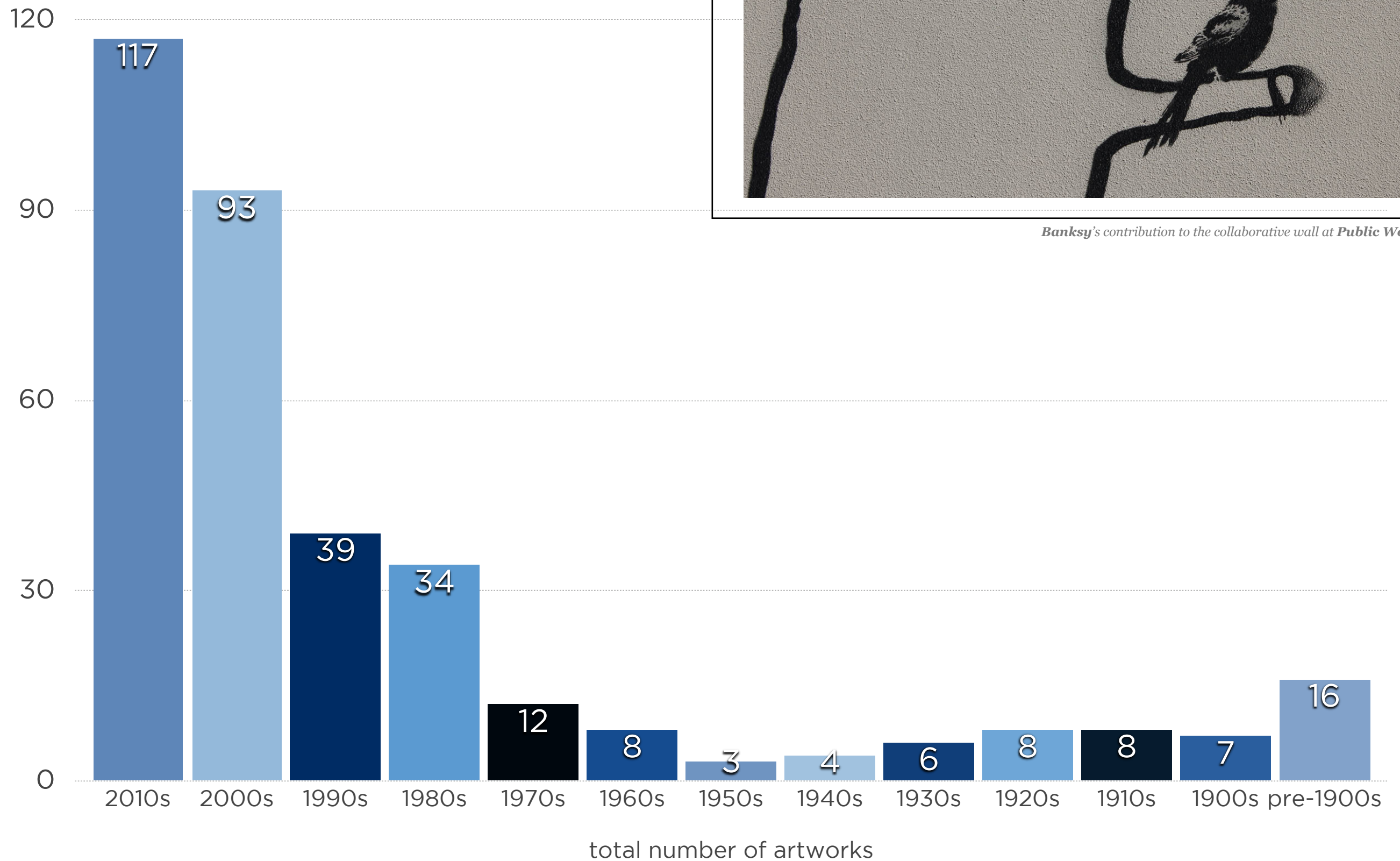


■ <10 years ■ 11-24 years ■ 25-49 years ■ 50-99 years ■ >100 years



*Jason Jegel's Park Pets (2015)
at 26th and Lilac Streets*

Decade created



*Banksy's contribution to the collaborative wall at **Public Works**.*

Closing findings

After documenting and researching these 534 works, none of what's revealed in this analysis was surprising. Most works are figurative and commissioned—we prefer art that reflects idealized versions of ourselves and our past back at us. Most works are blue and gold, depicting skies and scenes full of sunshine that are recognizable and comforting. This leads me to understand public art's majority function as one of **societal comfort**—a continuation of its history as bronze expressions of monumental power.

What did surprise me was the volume and frequency of public art's continuous creation—if you cast a wide net and recognize the smallest interventions as their own artworks. **Public space is public canvas**, in San Francisco, and everywhere we choose to see it.

Afrika 451, a mystery artwork installed at the intersections of Lombard and Taylor Streets in Russian Hill.



ArtAround Analysis

This **ArtAround Analysis of San Francisco** was based on a **manually compiled and indexed data set of 534 artworks** photographed across the 7x7 square miles of the city, in a documentary endeavor conducted between **June 2013 and May 2015** by **Lindsey Mancini**.

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*Cover image: A photograph of **Jet Martinez's Valencia Bouquet** (2012) at 413 Valencia Street.*

