



George Tsutakawa polishing bronze gates, Seattle 1975. MOHAI, Seattle Post-Intelligencer Photograph Collection, 2000.107.214.28.06

Meet George Tsutakawa

George Tsutakawa (1910-1997) was a celebrated Seattle painter, sculptor, and fountain maker. He was a second generation Japanese American (Nisei) and lived part of his childhood in Japan where he studied traditional Japanese arts with his grandparents.

His early artwork included block prints, paintings, and wooden sculptures. For much of his 60-year career he created abstract (non-representational works). He often explored the idea of stacked shapes in his sculptures and fountains. He was interested in the concept of obos, or cairns, after learning about the ritual stacking of rocks made by trekkers and pilgrims on high Himalayan Mountain passes.



George Tsutakawa with his fountain at Sixth and Seneca, Seattle 1966. MOHAI, Seattle Post-Intelligencer Photograph Collection, 1986.5.8982.6

Sculpting with water

Tsutakawa began building bronze fountain sculptures in 1960 and eventually created more than 75 fountains in the U.S., Canada, and Japan for parks, city centers, and university campuses – including many in Seattle!

To design his fountain sculptures, Tsutakawa would draw his ideas and experiment with physical materials. He would explore the shapes falling water made over household items like spoons and would make small models of his fountains, sometimes by cutting up ping pong balls. As a young teen his son Gerard became his studio assistant, and later became a sculptor himself.

Explore the shape of water like George Tsutakawa

Watch the video introduction on the MOHAI YouTube Channel!

What you'll need:

- Water-proof household items of various shapes
 - Some that are round – ex: spoons, ping pong ball, teacup
 - Some that are relatively flat – ex: small plate, Tupperware lid
 - Some with holes – ex: straw, strainer, berry container
 - Some objects with interesting shapes
 - Optional: spray bottle
 - Optional: paper and drawing supplies
- Running water – a hose, sink faucet, or pourable container
 - A hose or sink faucet will allow you to easily adjust the pressure
 - A pourable container or hose are easy to move around
- Somewhere it's okay to pour water – sink, tub, outside
 - Going outside means you can experiment with larger objects like an umbrella and you don't need to worry as much about slippery floors
 - Using a sink or tub to catch falling water means you can do this activity indoors and makes clean up a bit easier.



What to do:

- Experiment with how water flows over different shapes. How can you use objects to “sculpt” the water and get certain effects?
- Observe how a steady stream of water flows over the top of the different objects you assembled. Does it change if the object is closer or further away from the source?
- How do the results change if you change the pressure (how much and how quickly water is coming out of the source)? Try going lower and higher!
- How do the results change if the water doesn't come from a stream but is being sprayed at the object? Use a spray bottle or hold your finger over the nozzle of the faucet or hose – watch out, you may get wet!



- Try stacking or arranging your objects together. How does the effect you get from one object change the way the water interacts with other objects?
- Build a prototype of your own fountain sculpture (a model that lets you test out your ideas) or design one on paper!
- After exploring: what is one new or interesting way to sculpt water that you discovered?



Fountain of Wisdom by George Tsutakawa, 1000 4th Avenue, Downtown, Photo: Kelsey Novick



Heaven, Man, and Earth by George Tsutakawa, Maynard Avenue S and S Jackson Street, International District, Photo: Kelsey Novick

Explore further:

With MOHAI

Learn about the art, the artist and the Tsutakawa family legacy. Visit George Tsutakawa's Seattle sculptures in person or virtually with MOHAI's online neighborhood tour curated by his daughter Mayumi through December 21, 2021. <https://mohai.org/program/george-tsutakawas-seattle-sculptures/>

With the Wing Luke Museum

Visit the *Gerard Tsutakawa: Stories Shaped in Bronze* exhibit at the Wing Luke Museum through April 17, 2022. Explore the inspiration, design, and fabrication process of public sculptures by Gerard Tsutakawa as well as their effect on Seattle physically, socially and culturally. The Wing has also created a self-guided interactive walking tour of all of Gerard's public works in the city.

<https://www.wingluke.org/events/gerard-tsutakawa-stories-shaped-in-bronze/>