



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

San Diego Public Library

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Friday, September 21, 2007

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WORKS BY NOTED SAN DIEGO ARTIST JOYCE CUTLER-SHAW EXHIBITED AT THE NORTH UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY BRANCH LIBRARY

SAN DIEGO – Selected works by internationally known San Diego artist Joyce Cutler-Shaw are on display at the recently dedicated North University Community Branch Library. The exhibition was organized under the auspices of the library's Visual Arts Program to celebrate the opening of the new facility and will remain on view for several months. Among the pieces that can be seen is the artist's most famous work, *The Alphabet of Bones*, in addition to ten artist's books related to the *Alphabet of Bones* theme. Nearly a dozen gesture drawings from Cutler-Shaw's "Aikido Series," drawn on location in martial arts studios, are also part of the exhibition.

Cutler-Shaw expresses herself in a variety of genres and media, including public sculpture, installation, drawing, poetry, and artists' books. Her works are represented in museum and special library collections throughout the world, but to San Diegans, she may be best known for the award-winning architectural elements, sculptures, and other forms of art she created for the Mission Valley Branch Library and the Activity Center of Balboa Park.

Cutler-Shaw's unquenchable thirst for knowledge and her attention to detail in conducting painstaking and exhaustive research for her projects (which can span decades) evince her passion and support for libraries worldwide, whether public, membership (private), or those serving the research and academic communities. One of her most ambitious endeavors occurred in 2003 when she debuted "Library Quartet," a large retrospective exhibition of her works that was concurrently held in four libraries throughout the city, including two branches of the San Diego Public Library.

Cutler-Shaw is particularly interested in the synergies between art and science and art and natural history. She often collaborates with leading scientists or experts in various disciplines to incorporate cutting-edge technologies into her work or to ensure that the most informed points of view are considered. Recurring themes in her art include aging and death; nature and the environment; birds and flight; and language, calligraphy, handwriting, and symbolism.

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Although much of her art is thematically and conceptually complex, Cutler-Shaw's studio skills are awe-inspiring. Her drawings, often rendered in a gestural style, range from rapidly moving figures fighting in an aikido studio to partially dissected cadavers in the anatomy lab of the School of Medicine at the University of California, San Diego, where she has been the artist-in residence since 1992. This is the only position of its kind in the United States.

The Alphabet of Bones, Cutler-Shaw's signature work, has an extensive history dating back to the 1980s. To quote one of her catalogues:

The Alphabet of Bones is an original calligraphy composed of anatomically accurate drawings of the leg bones of the *Columba livia*, or messenger pigeon. It is a unique, copyrighted font that has twenty-six double characters, conceived as a visual dance. Each character has an alphabetic equivalent in English and an electronically generated sound equivalent. It also has a private symbolic code, similar to the pictographic nature of hieroglyphics, in which each character, or sign, has a cluster of referents. With its digitization, English text and poems can be printed out in *The Alphabet of Bones*. At the surface level, texts written in this alphabet read as visual poems.

The Visual Arts Program is seeking donors to acquire *The Alphabet of Bones* for permanent installation at the North University Community Branch Library, as well as other works of art for the library system. For more information, please contact Library Curator Mark-Elliott Lugo at (619) 238-6627.

The North University Community Branch Library is open six days a week and is located at 8820 Judicial Drive. Library hours are: Mondays and Wednesday, 12:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.; Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; Fridays, 12:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.; and Saturdays, 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

The San Diego Public Library's Visual Arts Program is a nationally recognized series of exhibitions, lectures, a television program, and other art-related activities. The mission of the Program is to demonstrate the Library's role as a cultural institution embracing a broad range of disciplines, while assisting San Diego's mid-career and older professional artists in achieving wider local, regional, and national attention. Visual Arts Program exhibitions are made possible, in part, by contributions from individuals, volunteer efforts, and the Friends of Central Library. For more information about the Cutler-Shaw exhibition, or tax-deductible contributions to the Visual Arts Program, the public can contact the library curator at (619) 238-6627 or visit the Library website at www.sandiegolibrary.org.

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