

# Plaza Skirt Submissions

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# Nessa Ledesma

## (Team Lead)

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## Plaza Stage Skirt Proposal Narrative Watsonville Artists Team

This stage skirt design comprises four sections to create a continuous 62-foot composition at a height of 26 inches. Developed collaboratively by artists raised in Watsonville, the design celebrates the community's rich cultural heritage, artistic traditions, and shared history.

The first section centers Indigenous imagery, honoring the wisdom rooted in sacred traditions. It includes references to local danzante groups, whose ceremonial dances open and bless many community gatherings, symbolizing respect, continuity, and spiritual connection.

The second section transitions into vibrant Latino cultural imagery, highlighting the joy and energy of the culture, including folklórico dance and mariachi music—art forms that are deeply woven into Watsonville's community celebrations and cultural identity.

In the third section, the design reflects the historical bridge to European folk influences, acknowledging their combined contributions to the region's agricultural heritage and the labor, resilience, and creativity that have shaped the Pajaro Valley.

The fourth section honors the historic Filipino, Japanese, and Chinese presence in the Pajaro Valley, showcasing the beauty and craftsmanship of their traditional arts. This final section reinforces the theme of cultural interconnectedness and the enduring impact of these communities on the region's social and artistic landscape.

Throughout the design, flowers and plant imagery connected to each culture and the Pajaro Valley are integrated alongside visual references to cultural art forms, symbolizing growth, creativity, and the diversity of the community. A unifying decorative border inspired by local agriculture features imagery drawn from the crops and farming traditions that sustain Watsonville and connect its people to the land.

Together, these four sections form a unified visual narrative that reflects Watsonville's diversity, honors its history, and celebrates the living cultures—and fertile land—that continue to shape the community today.



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Jasmine Rocha-Ortiz

## “Watsonville is Love”

Created to represent the vibrancy and culture of our town, “Watsonville is love” tells a story. Our town is filled with talent that cannot be contained, often showcased at the historical downtown center for residents to enjoy and participate in. These shared experiences are memorable and allow us carry pieces of Watsonville everywhere we go, especially in our hearts. I chose to incorporate a bold color palette as we are nothing short of a bold and unique town. References to local dances, instruments, cultural groups, and the overall hometown energy can be seen throughout the design. I hope to spark a sense of belonging for viewers and assure them that Watsonville is a safe space for self-expression and creative freedom.



Jasmine Rocha-Ortiz



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Josefina Rocha

I was recently asked, “What does being from Watsonville look like to you?” and I found myself taken aback. I couldn’t come up with a solid image because, to me, Watsonville has never been just one thing or the other. To me, it is more like a feeling. I took time to reflect, and the memory that prominently surfaced was this: driving into Watsonville from Riverside Dr at daybreak, when the sun’s first rays begin to peek out from behind the green hills. The windows are down, the air carries the scent of earth, and the fields stretch endlessly ahead. In that moment, I am aware of the land I am crossing through, land shaped by the hard work of our families, land that feeds our town. It is a feeling of belonging and pride. I am home. That moment, when the fields are bathed in soft morning light and carry the stories and cultural pride of countless communities, is my first thought of Watsonville.

This design draws from that memory. It centers on a field in Watsonville, surrounded by the abundant hills that hold us. Growing up here, I have always admired my surroundings, not only for their beauty, but for what they represent. The fields, the sloughs, the crops, and the fruits of our labor speak to Watsonville as an agricultural town, one built on resilience, care, and collective effort. The inclusion of fruit is also a nod to our weekly farmers market and the local businesses and workers who show up each Friday, sustaining both our economy and our sense of community.

At the base and throughout this piece are the people of Watsonville, those who live here, those we admire, and those we love. The design would be a warm welcome in the Plazita, as it is a shared and cherished space: a place where people may gather for lunch, meet friends, take walks, rest, and feel safe. It honors moments of camaraderie and quiet reflection, as well as the comfort of being in a place that feels like home.

Books at both ends of this design symbolize our stories, histories, and cultures, acknowledging the importance of recognizing, celebrating, and speaking up for them. They also represent education as power: education as resistance, as a tool for growth, self-development, and liberation. The pages transform into butterflies and hummingbirds, symbolizing resilience, hope, and our stories taking flight. Migration is also honored as a shared experience of beauty and trust woven into the soul of our community.

Native-inspired basket-weaving elements are included to acknowledge the Indigenous people of this land, with cempasúchil flowers to honor cultural traditions, memory, and reverence for ancestors. Advocacy for farmworkers and community rights is also shown in the piece, recognizing the labor and dignity of those who sustain Watsonville.

The sarape is prominently woven into the design as a powerful cultural and spiritual symbol, representing warmth, protection, joy, and belonging. Traditionally, sarapes are made of many threads woven together, much like our community, each individual essential to the whole. It reflects cultural pride, celebration, and the shared experience of living and thriving together in Watsonville. A strawberry also transforms, symbolizing growth, change, and the many phases we experience as individuals and as a community, especially the journey from childhood to adulthood. The cactus represents resilience and endurance, while its flowers remind us that love, beauty, and softness can exist despite hardship, that the soul blooms even in challenging conditions.

The hands are central to the composition, representing purpose, creation, and collective power. They hold the corazón eterno, a symbol of eternal love, unity, and spiritual continuity; love as an enduring force that transcends struggle and grounds us in compassion and connection. To me, love is the essence of Watsonville: to be heard, to be seen, to be celebrated, and to celebrate one another. Unity, creativity, and equity live here. And these hands are the hands of everyone.

The arts are deeply embedded in Watsonville and shown in the design because expression is an essential part of our lives, whether through visual art, words, music, or cultural tradition, etc. The arts nurture our internal growth and uplift our community, shaping who we are and how we connect to one another. As Watsonville embraces its role as a Cultural Arts District, this piece reflects my hope for a vibrant, creative future where all forms of expression are recognized and valued.

The sky is set at daybreak, as the sun lays its rays gently over the town. It felt fitting to name this piece *El Almanecer*. Daybreak represents renewal, opportunity, growth, and reset: new connections to make, local places to explore and support, neighbors to get to know, and creativity ready to be ignited. Newer and grander days ahead.

As someone who grew up in Watsonville, studied the arts in my higher education, and returned with the intention of inspiring others and creating access to creative opportunities, this design is personally near and dear to my heart. It is made with love, care, and respect for my neighbors and for the town many of us call home.

Thank you for your consideration ~



Josefina Rocha



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Jessica Soriano



## Mosaic Artwork Proposal for the Watsonville Plaza Skirt in Watsonville "The Path We're On"



Inspired by Watsonville's rich history, "The Path We're On" is a piece dedicated to showing how this city came to be. With elements tied to the Ohlone (Costanoan) tribe as well as many other cultures from around the world, I created organic, natural elements to depict true diversity in the Watsonville community. We each walk our own paths in life, but as a collective, there is at least one path where we can all walk together. We all strive for connection, acceptance, and safety. This piece depicts the bold, vibrant, and distinct path the Watsonville community has taken to become what it is today. The lines and organic shapes are simply guides for the final mosaic, allowing artists to be creative and explore with various colors and shapes.

# PANEL 1

We start the design on the left side. Pajaro is the unceded ancestral territory of the Mutsun-speaking Ohlone (Costanoan) people, specifically the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. I drew a woodland strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*) to represent the native, edible, and medicinal plants of Watsonville. A bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) flies across the mountainous landscape of Watsonville, leading us on a journey about strength, connection, and growth.



Woodland Strawberry  
Flower (*Fragaria vesca*)

Watsonville rolling hills /  
mountainous landscape

Bald Eagle  
(*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

Partial flower of a  
Red Carnation  
(*Dianthus caryophyllus*)

Dimensions: 7'3" x 26"



## PANEL 2

A red carnation (*Dianthus caryophyllus*) signifies the time when the Spanish settled in Watsonville around the mid-1500s. As the national flower of Spain, the red carnation symbolizes passion and deep admiration. The brown background signifies fertile ground, ready to grow and cultivate for the community. An orange marigold (*Tagetes erecta*) represents Mexico's settlement and its connection to faith, family, life, death, protection, and joy.



Partial flower of a  
Red Carnation  
(*Dianthus caryophyllus*)

Vast fertile  
ground  
Flower petals

Orange Marigold  
(*Tagetes erecta*)

Rolling fields of grass, wheat,  
and grain

Dimensions: 8' x 26"



# PANEL 3

An influx of Europeans in the 1800s brought more cattle ranching, whaling, potato, wheat, fruit, and dairy farms to Watsonville. Grain, cows, and apple orchards are depicted on rolling, colorful hills to represent the vast landscape and opportunities they had to build their communities.



Rolling fields of grass,  
wheat, and grain

Wind and other  
natural elements

Apple trees in an  
apple orchard

Cow resting under  
an apple tree

Dimensions: 8' x 26"



## PANEL 4

Watsonville has vast rolling fields where fruit and veggies can grow, and sometimes between the farms, there are rushing rivers that host a diverse group of wildlife. A great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*) opens its wings in preparation for a hunt. Schools of sacramento blackfish (*Orthodon microlepidotus*) swim in Watsonville's rivers.



Apple trees in an  
apple orchard

Sacramento Blackfish  
(*Orthodon microlepidotus*)

Great Blue Heron  
(*Ardea herodias*)

Dimensions: 8' x 26"



## PANEL 5

Here we have the national flower of Croatia, the Croatian Iris (*Iris croatica*). It represents strength, wisdom, passion, and hope. In the late 1800s, Croatian immigrants dominated the apple industry in Pajaro Valley, and to this day, Watsonville is known for its apples. A bait ball of sardines pays homage to our Chinese and Italian fishermen. The fish swim towards a sampaguita / jasmine flower (*Jasminum sambac*), the national flower of the Philippines.



Croatian irises  
(*Iris croatica*)

Bait ball of sardines  
(*Sardina pilchardus*)

Partial sampaguita / jasmine  
flower (*Jasminum sambac*)

Dimensions: 8' x 26"



## PANEL 6

The sampaguita / jasmine flower represents love, simplicity, strength, and hope. It represents the resilience Filipinos had to persevere in a land unfamiliar and unwelcoming to them. Petals of a peony drift to and fro the jasmine flower to a full yellow peony. China is a very large and diverse country, so instead of having one national flower, they have multiple flowers that symbolize different values. I chose the Delavay's tree peony (*Paeonia delavayi* var. *lutea*) because it is endemic to China and represents honor, elegance, and prosperity.



Partial sampaguita / jasmine  
flower (*Jasminum sambac*)

Peony petals

Abstract organic design  
to represent rolling hills

Delavay's tree peony  
(*Paeonia delavayi* var. *lutea*)

Dimensions: 8' x 26"



# PANEL 7

As our eyes move along the fields and move past the peony, there are rolling fertile farms filled with sprouting seeds. They could be lettuce or any other leafy vegetable or fruit. That is up to interpretation :) The official state flower of California is the California Poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*), and it reminds us of where we are and how special it is to live here.



Rolling fields and farms

Sprouting seeds

California poppy  
(*Eschscholzia californica*)

Apple tree leaves

Dimensions: 8'6" x 26"



## PANEL 8

The last panel is a culmination of everything we have just viewed and experienced. Watsonville is known for many things, especially vegetables, apples, berries, and cut flowers. The gerbera daisy (*Gerbera L.*) completes the design, honoring the Japanese-American flower growers who brought more color and vibrancy to communal and private spaces. Ready to pick fruit and the continuation of rolling hills offers us a glimpse of what we can do when we work hard, respect the land, and care for nature and our communities.



Apple and apple leaves

Strawberries

Abstract organic design  
to represent rolling hills

Gerbera daisy  
(*Gerbera L.*)

Dimensions: 6'9" x 26"



# Final Words

Where we began the design with a woodland strawberry flower, at the end, we see strawberries ready to be picked. This piece shows the cycles of life and death, exploration and settlement, and beginnings and endings. The color palette was intentionally made to create symmetry and balance. “The Path We’re On” honors where Watsonville has been, what the community has done, and how, as a collective, we can grow. By remembering our past, we can understand what makes Watsonville so unique. By learning from our past, we can come together, share stories with one another, and appreciate the beauty in diversity.



“The Path We’re On”

Thank you for your time and consideration!



Jessica Soriano