

Mountain View: New sculpture reflects on journeys

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"We've come from so far" by Indra Arriaga and Christina Barber. Arriaga, left, and Barber with some of the foam they used to create the concrete mold. Three red, humanlike forms stand in a cluster on Mountain View Drive just north of the Glenn Highway. Each figure, 1,500 pounds of concrete, is anchored to the ground with a steel pipe and, in the minds of its creators, with a sense of community in Mountain View's diverse population.

Anchorage artists Indra Arriaga and Christina Barber collaborated on the project, an endeavor funded by the city's [1% For Art program](#) in coordination with the Mountain View Drive Revitalization Project. It's the third of four such public art installations to be installed for the Mountain View project.

The piece's title, "We've come so far," refers to a newcomer in a foreign place, the artists say. It might also refer to the creation of the piece itself. Barber and Arriaga said the project has been in the works for years and fabrication alone took about ten months.

[Arriaga and Barber](#) first created the shapes with in purple insulation foam glued together. Next, they created a fiber-glass mold around it, which later gave shape to poured concrete. Production challenges arose, as did the challenges of artistic collaboration and communication.

"We're different artists and we have different visions most of the time," Barber said. "Finding that halfway point was huge, because we didn't always agree on everything."

Now that it is done and installed, "We've come from so far" stands in colorful contrast to its various backgrounds on a busy thoroughfare. Depending on where a viewer stands, its warmly colored shapes front either snowy woods, industrial garages on a main drag or a fast food restaurant.

But it's the varied backgrounds of the neighborhood's people that the piece conceptually represents. "Given our per-



sonal histories, mine and Christina's, we both have this experience being immigrants from somewhere else."

Arriaga came to the US from Veracruz, Mexico, and has also lived in Texas and California. Barber, who is from Anchorage, said she spent six years living in Amsterdam, Italy and Germany during her studies.

Barber said they hoped to capture a feeling that might resonate with many in Mountain View. "You go to a new place, you don't speak the language, you don't have any

family, you have no friends. You start over. How do you do that? Where do you start with that?," Barber said.

The forms are more evocative than detailed, a rope that surrounds each is plainly recognizable. It appears to dangle on the lower portion of each "person." For the artists, it symbolizes both the ties that a new resident brings with them and the ties he or she will soon make.

"We were very careful to make it look loose," Arriaga said. "It's not binding someone."

Inevitably viewers will have their own interpretations, they said. Arriaga said one viewer felt the sculpture reflected a continuing struggle. "To this viewer, the ropes meant that immigrants are still being oppressed. Fair enough," she said of the interpretation.

Both said installing the project and the dialogue they've had with viewers since has been very gratifying.

"I think it is the most rewarding experience I've had also in the arts, really on a personal level. As well as the most challenging," Barber said. "I guess sometimes those things go hand in hand."

