

The Sundial

This Sundial tower was created in 1993 by Gallery 37 apprentice artists under the direction of Jose Andreu for the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum. The sun unifies humanity. All pre-industrial cultures had calendars relating the earth to the sun. As societies emerged from specific environments and histories, they developed methods for sorting the phenomena of time. There have been as many time keeping systems as there have been mythologies and reasons for marking time. This sundial tower represents some of humanity's time keeping traditions, symbols, and elements.

The first bottom circle has the Western zodiac going clockwise. It consists of the solar year divided into a twelve-month cycle. Each segment is named after the principal constellation in the sky at that time. It is based on ancient Mesopotamian traditions that believed the position of the planets and constellations on the date of one's birth affected an individual's personality and destiny.

Going counterclockwise, the second circle has the day signs from the Aztec calendar based on ancient pre-Columbian traditions. In reality it is two calendars in one, the civil or solar calendar and a sacred calendar of 260 days. The solar calendar consisted of 18 months of 20 periods of 13 days. The two calendars intermeshed like cogged wheels resulting in a 52-year cycle before a specific day repeated itself. Each day was protected or influenced by a god or gods. The Aztec calendar gave the precise time of the equinoxes, the phases of the moon and Venus, the length of the years of Mercury and Mars as well as solar and lunar eclipses and the appearances of comets.

The third cycle has a simplified anthology of traditional African time keeping. Divided into seasonal festivals, it represents an organic approach to the calendar. Starting north is the symbol of the sun, a summer festival of power, protection, and growth. Moving west is an Orisha, a spirit of fertility and the power of nature. Next is a representation of Onile, the owner of the earth. Facing south is the symbol of the soul, a festival of renewal, then the symbol of community unity and harmony. Finally the antelope represents the power of animals and agriculture celebrated by spring planting festivals.

The fourth circle has the Chinese zodiac consisting of a cycle that repeats itself every 12 years. Each year is named after a different animal that imparts distinct characteristics to its year. They believed that the year of a person's birth is the primary factor in determining that person's personality traits, physical and mental attributes and degree of success and happiness throughout his or her lifetime. It also defines who can be one's best and worst relationship.

The fifth circle has the phases of the moon in a landscape with architecture that has been associated with time keeping. Northeast is Stonehenge. Southeast is a Maya temple. South are the pyramids with a new moon. Southeast is an oriental pagoda and temple. Northeast is the Door of the Sun in South America and the full moon is north with Chicago's skyline.

The sixth circle has the planets in counterclockwise sequence. Starting northwest, Mercury and Venus then Earth and Mars. Jupiter faces south followed by Saturn and Uranus then Neptune and Pluto. Facing north is the dedication on the flag of the city of Chicago.

The top seventh circle has the sun facing north and a water molecule to the south surrounded by universal symbols for man, woman, life and eternity.

Jose Andreu