

PUBLIC ART COMMISSION MEETING

A regular meeting of the Public Art Commission took place on Wednesday, February 17, 2010, at 5:30 P.M. at the Cambridge Arts Council.

The following members were present:

Mags Harries
Cynthia Smith
Brent Ryan
Stephanie Boye
Julie Graham

Staff present:

Lillian Hsu, Director of Public Art
Jeremy Gaucher, Public Art Administrator
Rika Smith McNally, Conservator of Public

Also present: Crystal Becerril, BU Journalism Student

1) Ongoing Projects

Dewitt Godfrey Project Status: Project (stacked 3'-8' corten steel cylinders) is on hold while staff researches and identifies an appropriate site. CAC Staff has met with other city departments (Ellen Coppinger, Lisa Peterson, Rich Rossi, Rob Steck, Kathy Watkins) to identify a location within the city. Potential sites include Pacific St, North Mass Ave (although it is DCR property), Concord Ave (future sidewalk improvements). PAC Recommends looking into Fresh Pond traffic circle.

Laura Baring-Gould Project Status: Project that will be located in N.E. Sector Fresh Pond is in research, info gathering, and ideas stage. Her current idea is to create markers along the path that have bronze receptacles that collect water and info/references to the water source and native plants in the area.

PAC Question: How can PAC help artists/projects earlier in the process? PAC would like an earlier meeting with selected artists. i.e. before full proposal meeting.

Action: Lillian will ask Laura to come to March or April PAC meeting to have a conversation regarding the site and her findings (without having to present a full proposal).

Mel Zeigler Project Status: Mel has a 'draft' of guidelines for the school to use for "The Giving Project." City has determined that it can set up a trust, and that the interest will generate \$2000-3000 annually. It is likely that the project will start for the 2011-2012 school year.

See Handout: "Draft for the Giving Project"

2) Other News/Projects

Park Spark: Former MIT student and artist Matthew Mazzotta has presented an idea to use dog waste to create energy to create social spaces (coffee or popcorn cart, lamp, etc.). Lillian and

Matt had a meeting with Paul Ryder at Parks and he likes the idea. There was also a meeting with Sam Corda and Chip Norton of Fresh Pond. They liked the idea but thought Danehy would be easier, given the approval process necessary for Fresh Pond. Matt is fundraising and further developing the technology and hopes to create a 'pilot site' at Danehy Park Dog Run this coming summer 2010.

Handout: "Park Spark"

Upcoming NEA Grant Deadline: CAC Staff plan to apply to an August deadline for NEA 'Artistic Excellence' grant (\$5,000-150,000 range), likely toward the upper end of the spectrum. The project would be to create a temporary Art Park in a vacant lot/space in the city, inviting 5-10 artists to create dynamic, hands on playground/park experiences for all ages.

Americans for the Arts Conference: CAC Staff will be presenting a workshop on Conservation and Maintenance at the AFTA Conference in June in Baltimore.

3) Presentation: Conservation & Maintenance

Lillian Hsu introduced Rika Smith McNally, the recently hired Conservator of Public Art, to the Public Art Committee. Rika has done conservation consulting for the Cambridge Arts Council for twelve years, including selective materials review and sculpture maintenance, but she is just starting a permanent part-time position.

Using a short Power Point presentation, Rika described the current program and plans for the future.

Rika explained that the Conservation and Maintenance Program has three main parts: 1. Pre-Fabrication Reviews (including Artist Advocacy and Materials Support), 2. Conservation and Maintenance (Annual and Routine), and 3. Conservation Treatment ("above and beyond maintenance").

1. Pre-Fabrication Reviews

Rika explained that pre-fabrication reviews are a critical component to the program, in which the materials and methods of artist's proposals are reviewed for longevity, safety, and graffiti removal. She explained that in the Cambridge Arts Council's program, the conservator is not at all the "gatekeeper", preventing materials from being used, but rather an artist advocate and supplier of information to the artist, the arts council staff, and arts commission. The pre-fabrication review sets up a dialogue for discussions about the length of time an artwork is meant to last, and how the artist would like the work maintained. The installation site is also analyzed for expected maintenance issues (potential for damage from use, possibility of graffiti).

As a first example, Rika showed a sample of the paint used for Liam Gillick's "wall of words" installation at the recently renovated Cambridge Public Library. Graffiti can readily be removed from this paint system (a Tnemec brand aliphatic polyurethane).

As a second example, Rika presented Nancy Selvage's materials choice with *Water Wall* at Trolley Square. The artist had considered stainless steel 304, but learned that eventually the steel would rust due to salt exposure. She preferred that the sculpture stay bright metal, and eventually chose stainless steel 316, a higher-grade and more

expensive alloy, instead. The artist chose to make her sculpture smaller in size to have the long-term appearance she desired.

Rika explained that pre-fabrication reviews have occasionally not been successful, such as at Randall Thurston's Yerxa Road pedestrian underpass. Although the ceramic tiles were tested and the best materials specified, it appears that the contractor used a different, but very similar-looking tile that is more difficult to clean. Also, the fabricator for the project has repeatedly had problems with the paint application. Our response to this is to realize the importance of inspections during construction, and to keep a recommended list of fabricators that we can provide to artists.

2. Conservation and maintenance.

Rika explained that the definition of maintenance is action that is carried out on an annual and routine basis. For the bronze sculptures in the collection, this includes annual washing and waxing, and this simple maintenance, carried out since 1998, has preserved the bronzes in the collection. Images used to exhibit this were Murray Dewart's Franklin Street Park artworks, and David Phillip's *Beach Fragments* outside the Galleria Mall and *Untitled* at Riverside Press Park.

Rika also talked about materials used to remove food stains and bird guano (mild enzyme solutions followed by washing), and combining efforts with the Cambridge DPW for water access or ladders (such as washing Carlos Dorrien's *Quiet Cornerstone* in Harvard Square).

Rika also talked about the nuances of artists' choices about maintenance, and the importance of recording those wishes in a manner that can be interpreted for an extended period of time, such as artist David Phillip's choice to have his bronze sculptures slowly age, accept some aging/alteration over time, but have the pieces appear well-cared for and never damaged. One goal of the C&M Program is to interview artists and record their maintenance directions for their works of art, but also extend the dialogue about the "lifetime" of the artwork. With more artwork fully integrated into the built environment, the lifetime of the building, streetscape, garage, park, etc. plays an even more significant role in the longevity of the art.

3. Conservation Treatment

Treatment should not occur often in a contemporary public art collection, except when there are aging materials (artworks that require repainting such as Lloyd Hamrol's *Gatehouse* and Madeleine Lord's *Revolutionary War Figures*, and the upcoming *Otter Fence* by Gail Boyagian at Larch Road Park. The importance of working with other city departments is noted at Larch Road. [There are 3 painted steel fences in the park, but only one is public art, and parts of the fences have been very poorly repainted. The arts council has located a very good vendor and specified an appropriate paint. The C&M Program will pay for repainting of the public art fence, and the City will pay for the other too].

However, vandalism and widespread graffiti, such as that happening at Danehy Park and Yerxa Road, cut into the annual budget and time allotment for conservation, and occasionally go beyond "routine maintenance". Graffiti has become a serious issue, and

both Lillian and Rika would like to spend more time addressing this problem, partly by reaching out to local schools and art programs.

This year, in addition to repainting *Otter Fence*, the program expects to finish the repair to Vusumuzi Maduna's *Totem* on Callendar Street, and repair Ritsuko Tahoe's brass cylinder chimes *Multicultural Manifestoes* in Central Square. We have had some difficulty determining how to remove these pieces for treatment. Mags Harries had some suggestions on finding the original fabricators, and will give that information to Rika.

Looking forward:

The Cambridge Arts Council will be presenting a workshop on the conservation and maintenance of public Art conference in Baltimore in June, and has received a grant from the Foundation of American Institute of Conservation for Funding (\$1,500.00). Lillian and Rika will be presenting.

A future goal (1-2 years) will be to look for outside funding to create a database on the public art collection that will include all materials information, photographs, and scans of drawings/sketches to make all the information we have more readily accessible as we care for the collection.

4) Approval of November Minutes

Delayed for approval to next meeting, to give members a chance to review.

5) Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at 7:30 P.M.

Next Meeting: March 24, 2010