



Arts backers cheer decision on floating sculpture

Connie Cone Sexton
The Arizona Republic
Dec. 11, 2007 12:38 PM

Supporters of the arts are cheering a decision among city leaders to give a \$2.4 million proposed piece of public art another chance.

The artist is also grateful for a swell of community encouragement.

For awhile, it seemed like the floating sculpture proposed by internationally known artist Janet Echelman for the downtown Civic Space park was doomed.

But on Monday, the Phoenix City Manager's office decided to have a council subcommittee review the art proposal and to let the City Council weigh in, some time next week. Originally, Deputy City Manager Ed Zuercher killed the art work, saying it involved complex engineering and that its installation would have delayed the November opening of the planned park.

The 2.77-acre park, located north of Van Buren Street between First and Central avenues, is part of the downtown Arizona State University campus. Echelman was chosen from among 178 artists to create an iconic piece for the site.

She is proposing a 100-foot-wide piece, made of diaphanous, flexible nets to move with the wind. It would rise about 55 feet above the park attached to three towers, the highest being 160 feet. The design is meant to evoke a saguaro cactus blossom.

The city announced the decision to drop Echelman's piece on Friday, a move that chilled several arts groups. Echelman said in an interview that she believed the process was working fine, stressing that she had been in regular contact with the park's general contractor and the architect.

During a meeting Saturday of the Downtown Voices Coalition, which several art supporters attended, city officials listened to pleas to keep Echelman's work.

Several people asked Zuercher why the art work was being suddenly dropped by the city after having gone through several public meetings. Echelman has been paid \$104,000 for the piece and the City Council was expected soon to allocate the project's remaining funding.

Zuercher had said last week that he wasn't going to take the matter to the council. But Saturday's discussion pushed him to seek more public comment. "I was impressed with the passion," Zuercher said Monday of the coalition.

The Arts, Culture and Historic Preservation Council Subcommittee is to discuss the matter sometime Friday afternoon. As of Monday, a meeting time had not been set. The issue is to then go before the City Council either Tuesday or next Wednesday. Echelman said she is "humbled and grateful for the groundswell of support" and is happy that the work will have another public airing.

She said her art work may be unfamiliar to some but she hopes people will see how it fits the Phoenix site.

The piece functions on many levels, Echelman said, and may have people contemplating a cactus bloom in the middle of a parched desert, the formations of clouds across a field of blue, monumental dust storms and rain and "the exquisite patterns of the wind which change in each moment."

Her art is the heart of the park, she said, adding "If you remove its heart, then you can't expect it to function in the same way, can you?"

Some Phoenix residents question spending the money for the art work, even though funding is mandated to be used for art under a city ordinance.

"I'm not at all against public art but it seems to me that \$2.4 million for that particular piece is something I question," said Mike Gipson, the owner of a sign company.

However, Gipson said he believes in a public process and supports having a public airing about the pros and cons of the art work.

Andrea Norman, chair of the public art committee for the Phoenix Arts and Culture Commission, said Echelman's sculpture will be beautiful. "This will really put Phoenix on the map from a cultural perspective," she said.

Norman is glad that the city appears willing to "listen to the voices of the public."

Councilman Tom Simplot chairs the Arts, Culture and Historic Preservation council subcommittee, the group that will discuss the art project Friday.

He helped push to get Echelman's art work back into a public forum for review.

"The community put a lot of time and effort into this and I think it's important that we follow our own procedures," he said.

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Posted Dec-11 1:10 PM

Til the monsoon comes in and the floating piece of tax payer's money being wasted is sent flying to New Mexico

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Posted Dec-11 1:19 PM

Can you say ugly. How is this supposed to make us think of a cactus blossom?

I think the Squaw Peak Parkway Pots were better public art than this horrid thing.

They are going to follow thier own procedures.....let everyone comment on what a waste it is, then do it anyway.

How much will the city have to pay in a settlement once this thing crashes on someone?

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LMAO, it's obvious they don't rely on THIS format for public opinion. Perhaps azcentral should consider raising the minimum-required-age to 18 yrs old to post on these comment forums. Maybe it would cut back on some of the more childish and ignorant posts here, and elevate the quality of debate to ones worth referencing.

What the?!?

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Posted Dec-11 1:23 PM

Holy cow... I appreciate art, but \$2.4 million for one piece of public art?? Is that really a prudent use of that kind of money? Even if the funding 'mandates' that the \$2.4M be used on art, why not purchase several lower priced pieces of art and sprinkle them around Phoenix so more people can benefit from seeing them instead of clustering them all in one spot or even worse blowing the whole wad on one piece of art?? The best idea yet though would be to change the rules so that \$2.4M can be used for a more critical need...

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Posted Dec-11 1:26 PM

This is not a floating catus flower - it looks something like a jellyfish. When will people realize that the desert already has it's own art within the landscape and start utilizing it instead of paying out the wazoo for one artists twisted idea of a sculpture. I am an an artist as well as my husband and my grandmother, my cousin, and my great aunt. I can tell you that none of us would never try to pull something like this off. This is more like a scam at 2.4 million.

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Posted Dec-11 1:52 PM

azgirl- what were you expecting, a southwestern style peice of artwork for Phoenix?

this is the same city that hired a NY architect to design the federal court building.

This artist is nothing but the latest fad, kind of like LR. All of her pieces pretty much look like bunched up curtains. I checked them out, all the same thing.

This is to ENVOKE a cactus flower, in other words its art that kinda, sorta might resemble a flower. For most people it evokes a jellyfish. This picture evokes an alien ship landing. Has she even SEEN a cactus bloom?

Art is fine, I love art. But how about art to be enjoyed by the masses- not bewildering to the masses. This woman has made big \$\$\$ off of scamming governments to pay for what equates to netting in the sky.

anotherGDlefty
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Posted Dec-11 1:54 PM

Let me guess SNS8, you work for the city, the Arts & Culture Commission or the artist?

I laugh at you serious idiots that think this is a forum for actual debate on actual issues. It is an internet bulletin board, anyone in the world can spew on it, and does. Entertainment, nothing more. Loosen up, have some fun with it and you might enjoy it more.

The "artist" should take her 104 grand and run like the bandit she is.

[Julie9673](#)
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And before the "we need to be a world-class city" folks get on, let me just say this: Every world class city has at its heart what it once was. They all preserve their history thru structure, thru culture, thru art.

Phx's plow & go mentality has resulted in a true concrete jungle, and any chance to preserve what it once was is overruled in sake of what is new, and bright and what "they" do in other cities.


Posted Dec-11 2:01 PM

2.4 million in city funds. Can the police dept use that dough to put more cops on the street?

Fire dept, food bank or a Phx school district?

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