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2009 Peace Arch Park sculpture exhibit unveiled



Courtesy of Mark Yale Harris

"Crush," by Mark Yale Harris of Santa Fe, N.M., is one of eight artworks to be installed at the 2009 Peace Arch Park sculpture exhibition

By Marisa Willis

As travelers cross through the Peace Arch border crossing this spring, wooden whale tails, bronze acrobats and stainless steel dancers will be just some of the sights visible from their vehicles.

The Peace Arch Park artwork selection committee met January 27 to decide which sculptures would be part of the 12th annual International Sculpture Exhibition. The artwork will be on display from May 1, 2009 to April 1, 2010 including the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver, B.C.

This year's exhibition is the first time the artwork will be available for public viewing for more than several months. Last year's exhibition ran from May to October.

The International Sculpture Exhibition is annually organized by the United States Canada Peace Anniversary Association (USCPAA) to further promote a positive Canadian-American relationship, said Christina Alexander, founder of USCPAA.

"The exhibition is a well known, established, respected tourist attraction," Alexander said. "Art is a universal language and now more than ever we are speaking to a global audience."

Selecting works from all over the world

The selection committee was comprised of art experts, international park and association members and people from the community.

Alexander said this year's jury saw the most international artwork in the exhibition's 12-year history with 55 entries from destinations such as Australia, London, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Israel.

Alexander said the exhibition gains more notice every year and the quality of the artwork continuously improves.

The upcoming Olympics and promised longevity of the exhibition also added to the increased number of entries, Alexander said.

Local artists made a large impact as well, with artists from Washington and Canada submitting the some of the top entries, Alexander added. All entries were judged based on appropriateness to a family-oriented park, craftsmanship, durability and aesthetic appeal.

For Andrew Fisher, an independent art dealer in Blaine, it was his fourth year on the committee. Fisher said this year's entries displayed the best quality and variety he had seen.

"I've been here other years where there was a lot of back and forth and a lot of debate [over the entries]," Fisher said. "Because the overall level of the artwork was so high, there was a lot less difference of opinion. I think people really liked what was submitted this year."

Fisher said he hopes the exhibition establishes the park as a destination instead of a place to simply drive past. He said when the sculptures are added to the beauty of the park it shows what different people and nations can cooperatively accomplish.

"That really speaks to the nature of art," Fisher said. "It transcends boundaries."

Sculptures exhibited during Olympics

The idea to extend the exhibition came from the spirit of the international goodwill of the Olympic Games, Alexander said. She said the Peace Arch Park represents a literal and figurative meeting of peaceful nations, something very similar to what will be taking place in Vancouver.

Bessie Barredo, Blaine Chamber of Commerce director, was on this year's selection committee. She said the park's exhibition is an important contribution to Blaine because it focuses on the beautification of the city.

Barredo said her favorite entries were those depicting human cooperation and the beauty of athleticism because they represented what the park and the games stand for.

She said she looks at the park and its exhibition as a way to welcome people into the country.

"The first impression is always the best impression," Barredo said. "It would be a good thing for the country if visitors see this [artwork] when they first come into the United States."

The final list of artists and artwork that will be involved in the exhibition has not yet been released. Once the entries were judged and ranked by the selection committee, artists must be contacted to ensure installation of their work at the park is possible. Alexander said the list of the 15 accepted entries should be available on the park's Web site sometime next week.

Installation of the artwork is scheduled for April 11 and the opening day of the exhibition is May 1. Alexander said the community is encouraged to attend the opening ceremony on May 23 to meet many of the artists involved in this year's exhibition.

The event is free and festivities include a ribbon-cutting ceremony, refreshments and the first chance for the public to pick up a brochure of the exhibition.

Funding for "Best of the Rest"

Pieces that were not selected to participate in this year's exhibition would normally be considered for the park's Art by the Bay exhibition displayed in downtown Blaine. This year though, Alexander fears a lack of funding will eliminate that possibility.

Alexander said in the past, there have been enough funds left over from the park exhibition to include a small downtown section of artwork.

This year, however, the park received the same amount of city funding for their exhibition, even though the artwork is scheduled to remain for a full year. If the park does not raise enough money through other grants, then the exhibition will be limited to the works installed in the park.

Alexander remains confident that everything will work out as planned, including the installation of several sculptures downtown. Alexander said the park has been working hard to extend their exhibition into the city since 2000 and has no plans of stopping that tradition now.

"We are grateful for the funding and support we have gotten from the city of Blaine," Alexander said. "[The downtown exhibition] is our way to take what we are doing at the Peace Arch and give back to the community."

Barredo said she was disappointed to hear the exhibition downtown may not be possible this year.

"We are in a location that is like a window to the United States," Barredo said. "It would be really nice if we could show visitors from the north that they are coming into a beautiful country."

For more information, visit www.peacearchpark.org.