

Changing a piece of Seattle Public Art - alison farmer

The first time I set eyes on the entrance to the Seattle Art Museum and its "Hammering Man", I was so disappointed. The shape of this sculpture is unappealing, disproportionately aggravating, and the two dimensional cut out lacks the wonderful fullness and multi-perspective gift I feel sculpture possess. It holds no imagination or excitement and to place it outside an art gallery brings down my enthusiasm for a visit (see attached photo #1).



Figure 1

This iconic eye soar was designed by Jonathan Borofskym in 1991 especially for the SAM. The original SAM had "Black Sun" by Isamu Noguchi outside it which now rests in Volunteer park. Hammering Man is a 48-foot-high black silhouette sculpture of a worker. It celebrates the worker's contribution to society. Borofsky's goal is to have several different Hammering Men placed around the world--all working simultaneously. The USA has a number of Hammering Men and the Seattle one is the second largest one on the planet. A taller version is in Frankfurt, Germany. Other ones reside in Japan and Switzerland.

I decided to move the Hammering Man from the creative site he sits at to a more industrial one as I feel it is sacrilegious to change another artists work. Though Borofskym's execution grates on my aesthetic nerves, his idea is sound and just and the piece itself is an important one as it links Seattle to the rest of the industrialized world. For these reasons I feel it would be better served in a different location that holds historical significance. I have re-sited the Hammering Man in the Pioneer Square district which seems fitting for the working man concept. He now commands more presence and stature towering over an old brick building on the corner of 1st Ave and S Washington St. He resides over the J&M Hotel Building which was built right after the fire in 1889, with the third floor being added on in the early 1900's. It has been a continuously operating bar and card room since the early 1900's and I think the Hammering Man looks good as a pioneer of Seattle and I even like him more.



Figure 2

(see attached photo #2).

New Public Art for SAM entrance

After moving the Hammering Man I could not leave the SAM without an entrance piece so I took the liberty of designing a new piece. Not a required task, but one I was compelled to do as the creative juices burst forth. (see attached photo #3)



Figure 3

The new piece is an interactive metal and glass sculpture. It is primarily a brushed steel tree which reflects our evergreen state and lack of trees on first avenue, but it is sculptured to reflect the shape of the space needle and has a coffee cup on top. It is a bit whimsical and clichéd but I feel any art work outside the gallery should capture an essence of Seattle turned into Art. In the centre of the tree is a double helix staircase that people can walk up and down single file. The stairways are situated close so that people can interact with each other as they travel their opposite directions. The bars between the stairs are alternating steel and glass wavy rods. At the top people enter and exit into the coffee cup which has a transparent blue glass roof with colored native American salmon carved and cast into it. From the cup you enter in and out through a heart

shaped doorway onto a small round glass platform where you can view the busy city street from above. The roots of the tree are embedded steel and glass mosaic in the pavement with carved native American salmon. The tree resembles the tree of life and design comes from a dream. The fish capture "as above as below" and our history. The spiral stair case is inspired by Louise Bourgeois' three towers "I do, I undo and I redo".

The design is very rough and the photo does not capture the color I envision. I have not gone into structural considerations with the design and feel there is a way to incorporate water flow into the design given the cup at the top.