



Star Telegram, May 2, 2009 "Fort Worth to flip the switch on artist's steel sculptures Saturday," by Gaile Robinson

## Star-Telegram

### Fort Worth to flip the switch on artist's steel sculptures Saturday

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The silver dirt devils twirl down the street in a Rockettes-like unison. They are all tall and slender, with showy animation and glittery surfaces that belie their steel construction. Their spacing is a little off, as they have been placed where the traffic median allows and the street isn't quite straight, but this adds to their animated qualities.

This conga line of silver twisters is the newest addition to the public art holdings of Fort Worth. The six beauties that pirouette down the median of Lancaster Avenue are called the *Avenue of Light* for their nighttime radiance. They are capable of imitating any color in the rainbow and will do so for appropriate holidays or festivities.

(Their first public performance was scheduled for tonight but has been postponed until further notice due to swine-flu precautions.) Then, the public can judge the work of Venice, Calif., artist Cliff Garten: Are these vertical columns of pierced and twisted steel or the most beautiful dirt devils they've ever seen?

Garten doesn't think of the 36-foot towers as tornadoes. "They do not remind me of tornadoes, nor did I think of a tornado when I made them."

He was inspired by an art deco chandelier found inside the T&P Terminal building. He made computer renderings of the chandelier shape, made it a solid mass, extruded it and then cut that into dozens of cross sections. He punctured each slice with slight differences so that there are 100 lacelike layers in each tower. These slices then torque upward aided by almost-invisible vertical supports.

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Plans are to change the sculptures' colored lights for holidays and special events. CLIFF GARTEN



"I wisting the plates achieved their height and upward movement," he says, but adds that he understands that people will have their own perceptions based on their experiences.

"It is sometimes easier for people to attribute their experience to an object, rather than comprehend the object for its abstract qualities. The sculptures are, depending upon your vantage point, transparent or solid. So if people see the twist in the form of the sculptures, they are looking at the more solid aspect of the form. The next time they drive by they may see them as transparent or as vessels filled with light, when they are at just the right angle.

"The way the sculptures gather light during the day and at night is a primary concern for me and because they gather light differently — at different times they appear more solid or more transparent. When they are filled with light, their luminosity pervades and the form moves to the background, but when the light or the viewer is at another angle, you perceive the outer form."

### **Standing tall amid giants**

From eye level, the twisting plates are almost invisible. From directly underneath, the layers become a solid. During the day, with only natural light to illuminate them, they look delicate and twinkly. At night, each sculpture is illuminated by nine LED (light-emitting diodes) pods embedded in the sidewalk and support pedestals, and they change dramatically when lit.

There are USB ports in the bases, and when the sculptures are hooked up to the program, the colors can change. When lit with white lights, they appear almost like melting icebergs. Bathed in gold light, they look like large chunks of jewelry; blue lights accentuate the cold, metallic aspects, and they appear like futuristic computer components. Garten says there is ongoing discussion about holiday lighting and celebratory lighting — how to do it, when to do it, and what events are deemed worthy.

*Avenue of Light* represents the best public art acquisitions by the city of Fort Worth. The six sculptures are beautifully integrated with their surroundings, which include the Fort Worth Water Gardens (designed by Philip Johnson), the newly opened Omni Hotel and the early





1930s Wyatt Hedricks-designed buildings along Lancaster Avenue. Most people will engage the sculptures in drive-by mode, and the art accommodates the motorized patron.

They subtly reveal themselves, then disappear into the clouds or morning light, with no fast moves that would cause alarm or an accident, just slow shape shifting. Or they can beguile a personal encounter with a more dramatic dance of positive and negative appearance.

### Changing Lancaster

By day, the sculptures look like accessories on the dramatic landscape of architectural behemoths. At night, they dominate the street with their exuberant colors and the buildings recede into the roles of supporting cast. The interplay of presence, disappearance and changing mass due to color variations makes these seemingly simple sculptural columns a dynamic physical force. They hold their own among the architectural giants of the neighborhood.

Their incorporation is part of an entire streetscape makeover. The city has installed park benches and waste cans that have a silver sheen similar to that of the sculptures, so that the entire area looks cohesively designed. There is still a landscaping plan to execute that calls for 30 up-lit white tree-form crape myrtles and native grasses placed between the sculptures. Once the trees are installed, the resulting artscape along Lancaster Avenue should make this formerly blighted area one of the city's most beautiful boulevards.

A few weeks ago, Garten was in town tweaking the final installation, and he talked about the inspirations for these lights and how he approaches a public art commission.

"I go to a place and try to understand the social history and the urban context in which the art will be situated, so that there is something about the place embedded in the art," he says.

He marveled that the city would move a freeway to save the three stately Hedrick-designed buildings — the post office and the T&P terminal and warehouse. He took his design cues from these structures.

Working in his California studio was frustrating, he says. The scale was problematic, and he wasn't sure how the sculptures would look when enlarged to almost 40 feet tall. The time element was equally troubling.

Garten designed the sculpture four years ago. "Once the vision was there, it was done," he says.

Everything else has been logistics.

"I have an axiom about public art," he says. "It's my one-third rule. It takes three minutes, three days or three weeks of inspiration, then three years of suffering for three seconds of recognition."

Garten's public payoff will come soon. It is suspected that there may be a reflexive side to his one-third rule. The accolades should resound for days, the appreciation for his artwork for decades.

Online: Watch for rescheduling information at [www.fwpublicart.org/nu\\_site/page.php/id/featured\\_project](http://www.fwpublicart.org/nu_site/page.php/id/featured_project).

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By the numbers **.5 mile:** How far *Avenue of Light* stretches

**38 feet:** How tall the sculptures are

**100:** Plates of brushed stainless steel per sculpture

**250-800 feet:** Distance between the sculptures

**\$1.7 million:** Total cost of project

**\$20:** Estimated electrical cost per month for all six sculptures

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