

**PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

**STAFF REPORT**

**DATE:** JULY 11, 2018  
**TO:** ARTS & CULTURE COMMISSION  
**FROM:** ROCHELLE BRANCH, CULTURAL AFFAIRS DIVISION MANAGER  
**SUBJECT:** 711 E WALNUT – MW LOFTS  
REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF ARTIST AND CONCEPT ART PLAN

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Application for Preliminary Consultation: December 1, 2015  
Concept Design Review: August 22, 2017

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends that the Arts & Culture Commission:

1. Approve the proposed artist Joe O'Connell of Creative Machines;
2. Find that the proposed art concept of a site-responsive immersive installation—with suspended sculptures, metal screen, lighting design and didactic signage—and the proposed artist comply with the goals, objectives and eligible criteria outlined in the City's Public Art Guidelines as follows:
  - a) The proposed artist currently works in the public realm, has demonstrated past experience and proven technical and aesthetic ability to successfully create artwork responsive to the site and community;
  - b) The proposed artist is of the highest artistic merit, sensitive to the City's cultural diversity and can contribute to the characteristics, contribution, aspirations and unique expressions of Pasadena's values;
  - c) The proposed artwork encourages public dialogue and interaction with art in public places;
  - d) The proposed artwork supports the inclusion of a broad range of works of art, reflective of the overall diversity of current works in the field of public art; and

- e) The proposed artwork supports a public art collection composed of artworks of varied genres, styles, scales, media, form and intent, and reflects trends and disciplines in art on a local, regional, national and international arts level.
3. Approve the proposed art concept of a site-responsive immersive installation—featuring suspended sculptures, a laser-cut metal screen, lighting design and didactic signage—with the following considerations:
- a) The artwork shall be appropriately lighted and the applicant shall submit a Final Lighting Plan, including Lighting Field Test results to be reviewed and approved by Cultural Affairs Staff for Final Signoff;
  - b) The artwork shall remain publicly accessible during normal business hours without enclosure;
  - c) The artwork shall be sited without interference from commercial signage;
  - d) The developer shall submit structural plans for review by the City's Building and Safety Division to determine if a Building Permit is required;
  - e) The construction budget (materials and labor) for required elements that will be replaced by approved public artwork must be integrated within the public art budget;
  - f) The Arts and Culture Commission shall conduct a Final Art Plan review that will contain a detailed public art budget, Final Art Plan narrative with the selected artist's fully developed concept, refined visual materials with dimensions and true to scale rendering of the artwork as it would appear in situ (via a maquette or digital simulation), and maintenance plan;
  - g) The final artwork shall be consistent with all aspects of the approved Final Art Plan. Any proposed alterations to the Final Art Plan must be submitted for advance staff review and approval. Those proposed changes to the Final Art Plan that are not approved at the staff level must be presented to the Arts and Culture Commission for review and approval;
  - h) Staff shall conduct a final site inspection after project installation for review and approval prior to issuance of any Certificate of Occupancy/Final Sign Off.
  - i) Staff shall review for compliance and approve all final documentation materials including a detailed budget showing all actual expenses for design, fabrication and installation; a detailed maintenance plan including product and application methods; a project documentation summary and photographs; and
  - j) The developer shall record the artwork maintenance stipulations in the OPA or DDA under covenants affecting real property at the time of installation to ensure ongoing, permanent maintenance of the artwork and provide documentation of such to Cultural Affairs Staff within a period of one year from the Final Sign Off date.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

On August 22, 2017 the Design Commission approved the Concept Design for the 711 E Walnut Street development (MW Lofts). The development team wishes to commission an onsite public artwork for the mixed-use development by proposed artist Joe O'Connell of Creative Machines. The artist has proposed a site-responsive immersive installation—with suspended sculptures, metal screen, lighting design and didactic signage—illuminates the literal alignment of the MW Lofts site with Pasadena's Jet Propulsion Laboratory and Cal Tech Campus. The intention is to familiarize and educate viewers with the significance of the site relative to Pasadena's leadership in space exploration and scientific discovery. The artist's designs were inspired by the first clear images that the Voyager Mission sent back from the outer planets and their moons, and also incorporates aesthetics from the Disco movement that was thriving in 1977 when the Voyager 1 and 2 spacecraft were launched.

## **BACKGROUND:**

### Site

MW Lofts will be located on the NE corner of Walnut Street and El Molino Avenue. Located in the Playhouse District and Economic Enterprise Zone, the project is a \$25 million, 126,000 square foot mixed-use development. The project is one building designed to appear to appear as two—one five story and one six story—featuring 115 one-and two-bedroom residential condominium units, 10 of which are affordable for very low income residents. The building will have a 6,388 square foot roof garden for residents, and includes ground-level as well as subterranean parking onsite.

Contextually, the MW Lofts project is intended to respond to the revitalized, contemporary vision for Pasadena's Central District, which makes downtown housing a crucial component to the realization of a vibrant new urban core with a thriving, walkable metropolitan center. The building will provide a 2,625 square-foot ground floor restaurant space with an 843 square foot outdoor dining area. There will be approximately 7,188 square feet of commercial retail/office space with Walnut Street frontage to stimulate the street throughout the day.

### Artist Selection Process

The art consultant, Beatrix Barker, identified multiple artists working in diverse media who were invited to propose for the project including:

- Roman de Salvo (San Diego)
- Ann Gardner (Seattle)
- Jan Hendrix (Mexico City)
- Hybycozo (Los Angeles)
- Deborah Mersky (Blanco County, Texas)
- Brad Howe (Los Angeles)
- Joe O'Connell/Creative Machines (Tucson, AZ)

Artist Joe O'Connell and his team at Creative Machines studio were selected because of their multi-disciplinary artistic approach, their engineering and fabricating capabilities, their thorough research of the site and community, and their awareness of Pasadena's Public Art Master Plan and Private Development Guidelines.

## ART CONCEPT:

The proposed public art project would become an immersive, site-responsive art environment consisting of two suspended sculptures—a large planet inspired by Jupiter and a small moon inspired by Io—that slowly revolve in the space with swirling light projections at night, a laser-cut metal screen, and signage that describes the history of the Voyager mission and its connection to Pasadena.

The Voyager Mission was launched in 1977 and, over the next several years, sent back a series of images of the outer planets and moons that dramatically expanded humankind's understanding of the outer solar system.

As framed by the artist Joe O'Connell:

*Some of the scientists on the project thought that it might be the last best thing that humanity would create and leave behind. Two phonograph records were included aboard both Voyager spacecraft launched in 1977. The planning and design of the Voyager mission also coincided with the Disco movement - with the launch coinciding with the peak of Disco's mainstream popularity. By the time Disco had fallen from favor and the Reagan era begun, the Voyager spacecraft were safely past the orbit of Jupiter, emissaries of a unique moment in American cultural history that began right in Pasadena.*

*The Voyager mission can be considered a work of art - perhaps the greatest work of art to emerge from Pasadena - and the artwork proposed is a tribute to it.*

### Site Responsiveness

The Voyager Mission was developed in Pasadena, not far from the location of this project. In fact the lobby of 711 E Walnut lies directly on a line connecting Caltech and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, the two institutions primarily responsible for the Mission.

The site where the art will be located is the main entry to the east building; as well as the entry to both buildings from the parking structure. It is the link to the arcade along East Walnut Street that will host all of the ground level commercial spaces.

Creating identity and acting as a visual focal point, the proposed artwork will have daytime and evening presence and will be visible to pedestrians and drivers alike.

### Sculptures

The suspended sculptures will be made from stainless steel and colored glass, fabricated at the artist's studio in Tucson, AZ. The architect's structural engineer indicates that the loads can be accommodated and they will account for the sculptures in the reinforcement of the slab.

During the day, the sculptures will reflect the colors around them as well as colored accents from the pigmented glass with which they will be made. At night, the rotating bodies will project slowly revolving patterns on the surrounding walls, floor, and ceiling using Creative Machines' unique point-source light fixtures. The concrete floor treatment under the suspended artwork will remain plain to better highlight these reflections. The slab will be simple with control joints to limit cracking.

The content for these sculptural bodies were chosen for their contrasts: Jupiter is the largest of the planets, made of swirling gas so it is not very dense. Io is a small dense moon and the most volcanically active body in the solar system. The artist has juxtaposed a very large object with a small object with consideration for the range of distances and points of view from which people will experience the installation.

### Screen

The metal screen (tentatively stainless steel) serves to create a separation between the Walnut Street entry from the entrance to the ground level parking structure and residents' mail area, as well as the courtyard on the second floor. The width is approximately 26 feet with a total height of approximately 25 feet.

The two-story screen, while providing constructional function, is a key component of creating the immersive art installation. With its adjacent position to the suspended sculptures, it will also include imagery inspired by Jupiter and Io. Photography of Jupiter's South Pole indicates swirling circular patterns evocative of planets, but also of eastern mandalas and other terrestrial patterns.

Designed by the artist, the architect will oversee the fabrication and installation of the screen. A potential fabricator is the Monrovia Water Jet company in Irwindale that the artist has researched.

### Lighting

The artist's lighting of the artwork will be designed for implementation in such a way that the overall levels can be increased/decreased, if need be, to ensure that the architect's current lighting plan fittingly interacts with the artwork. There will be additional electrical circuits installed to accommodate the suspended artworks and their fixtures.

### Artist's Draft Didactic Panel

*Space is the new nature and will increasingly come to inspire humanity's imagination as images from other planets, solar systems and galaxies filter in. Since the 1960s, images from space have been entering human culture in a trickle that has steadily grown as more space telescopes and deep space missions are launched. Space images affect people's knowledge of other worlds, but also creep into their imaginations – offering new landscapes both terrifying and sublime, providing tantalizing glimpses of entire worlds outside of human experience, and offering vast landscapes filled with patterns that don't fit neatly into current concepts of 'nature'. Images from space are stretching humanity's imagination in the same way that images from the American West changed the artistic and cultural imagination of people living in Europe and the eastern United States in the 18th and 19th centuries.*

*Much of this imagery already came to us from the Voyager spacecraft launched in 1977. The spot where you are standing lies on a line directly connecting Caltech and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, the institutions that designed and managed the Voyager program.*

(With a map that shows MW Lofts' site in direct alignment with JPL and Caltech – see attached Concept Art Plan.)

## Artist Team

Led by artist Joe O'Connell, Creative Machines is a studio based in Tucson, AZ comprised of visionary artists, engineers, and fabricators creating work for clients all over the world. They are a multi-disciplinary firm whose abilities span exhibition design, sculpture, and monumental public art. Since 1995 they have been making dynamic experiences for museums, science centers, libraries, hospitals, university campuses, transit stops, art museums, trade shows, and public spaces across the globe.

The artwork created by Creative Machines is rooted in science, perception and history. As documented in the attached Concept Art Plan, Joe O'Connell has led the development and completion of nearly 70 diverse public art projects, several of which have been recognized for their excellence. The artist and his team are very seasoned in the field of public art and well-prepared to deliver a strong new artwork to Pasadena's Public Art Program Collection.

## Maintenance

Specific to graffiti, the hanging sculptures are out of the public's reach and shouldn't be easily accessible to damage. For any graffiti or staining to the screens, the artwork may be cleaned using *Tagaway* graffiti removal products. If these methods fail, stronger solvents may be used, as stainless steel is impervious to most chemicals.

The suspended sculptures feature glass inserts. Glass is generally resistant to scratching, fading, and graffiti and can be cleaned with the same *Tagaway* material recommended for the stainless steel. If a glass piece breaks or falls out, it can be glued back in using the Loctite adhesive noted in the materials list in the Concept Art Plan.

To remove minor scratches in the metal, a non-woven abrasive pad may be used. The steel used is essentially the same as high quality stainless steel cookware and a range of kitchen cleaners, scrubbers, polishes, and other materials may be used safely and effectively. For more serious scratches, a random-orbit sander with successively finer grits may be used.

No routine maintenance is required for the lighting system. LED lights become dimmer over tens of thousands of hours and may eventually require replacement. The source for the LED fixtures is Creative Machines. If other components of the lighting system fail (such as cables, connectors, power supplies, timer), they may be replaced by an electrician with an equivalent part. The hanging sculptures will be designed to include a concealed access panel for easy access to electronics.

## Conservation

If Creative Machines is not available to do unforeseen conservation work, skilled metal workers, a lighting company, or an art fabrication company could complete any structural repairs.

## Accessibility

The Accessibility Issues Coordinator with the City of Pasadena Human Services and Recreation Department, was consulted by the artist, art consultant, and Cultural Affairs Staff, to proactively be mindful of the artwork's accessibility to all.

Thought there are not currently Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines specific to light and motion elements of artworks, the following issues were discussed and agreed upon:

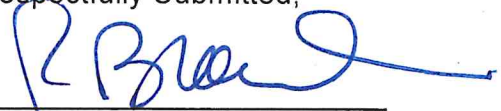
- The overhead sculptures will be designed with the capability to vary intensity of light and motion, should the kinetic properties or contrasting shadows ever become problematic.
- The planets will rotate at a speed of 1RPM or less. The artist will build in variability and the exact speed will be determined at the mock up stage in effort to not trigger any disorientation for anyone with spatial sensitivities.
- There will be possibility for overall light in the space to be increased at a later date to reduce the shadows cast.
- Stairs will have contrasting treatment on the edge of each step in the flight to assist visual acuity.
- Stair lighting will receive special attention and there will be light under the railing.

## CONCLUSION

Staff finds that the proposed artist, Joe O'Connell of Creative Machines, has demonstrated the ability to implement a thought-provoking, site-responsive artwork that would create a meaningful sense of place at the site and make a significant contribution to the City's Public Art Collection. The project has the capacity to provide an engaging and educational experience for residents and visitors, with a playful aesthetic that would complement the building's design and enhance the neighborhood's surroundings. The installation may also catalyze visitors' deeper inquiry into Pasadena's achievements in space exploration and contributions to science.


The proposed artwork is consistent with the Public Art Guidelines that are intended to "create a more unique and human city, engage our citizens and visitors, and enhance the built urban environment." Per the Guidelines, the proposed public art project by Joe O'Connell is "responsive to the site and community" and can contribute to the characteristics, aspirations and distinctive expressions of Pasadena. In addition, the project is in alignment with the Public Art Master Plan which supports the incorporation and integration of civic art into private development to enhance community character, reinforce local identity, highlight qualities of place and assist visitor orientation.

Respectfully Submitted,



Rochelle Branch  
Cultural Affairs Division Manager

Prepared by,



Wendy Miller  
Public Art Curator

Attachment A – Joe O'Connell/Creative Machines Concept Art Plan