



SCULPTURE SAMPLER

Reviving an '80s tradition, Pier Walk reinforces the city's commitment to public art

By Lisa Finn-Graznak  
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

If the beginning of a cultural movement can be traced to any one defining moment, then the 1967 arrival of the Chicago Picasso must surely be recognized for its role in consecrating the city's sculpture community.

Dame Picasso is Chicago's own Statue of Liberty, bringing a message of freedom that announces the liberation of contemporary outdoor art. More than that, she is a kind of Cubist huckster whose very existence validates sculpting as a profession of expression. Her legacy is on view in the streets and plazas of Chicago, forming a museum al fresco graced with hundreds of sculptures from artists all over the world.

The latest addition to this rich heritage is Pier Walk, an outdoor sculpture exhibition at Navy Pier now in its third year. The current



juried and invitational show, on view through October, features 113 sculptures from nine countries.



"ANEMOTIVE KINETICK 4/97"  
by ROBERT MANGOLD

Since its debut in 1995, Pier Walk has tripled in size. According to its founders, sculptors Michael Dunbar and Terrence Karpowicz, it is now considered the largest outdoor sculpture exhibit in the world. "We wanted to give artists who work on a large scale a chance to have a consistent venue to show pieces," said Karpowicz, whose "Orbits of Io" is part of the '97 exhibit. The largest of the large is "Katmandu," a 16-ton steel plate sculpture by Dunbar.

The Navy Pier show serves as the dessert tray of the city's sculptural smorgasbord, offering a wide array of tasty morsels. This show is not about one particular sculptor, movement or trend, but rather a sampling of international works, ranging in size, shape, color, material, construction and message. Some of the noted artists who are included are Robert Mangold, Ruth Duckworth, Jerry Peart, John Henry, James Surls, John Ruppert, Bruce Beasley, Joel Perlman and Nina Levy.

The Pier Walks have revived an artful tradition at Navy Pier that began with the 1982 Mile of Sculpture. This five-day show displayed sculpture inside the shipping storage sheds that were the main buildings on the pier before its recent renovation. The exhibit, which ran for about five years, itself capitalized on a trend toward public shows that began nearly a decade earlier.



"Exhibitions started to take hold in the early '70s at places like Pioneer Court and Grant Park, putting sculpture before the public in a grand way," remembers

SEE SCULPTURE, PAGE 4

"ORBITS OF IO"  
by TERENCE KARPOWICZ



"CURIOSITY"  
by NINA LEVY



"MOLECULAR REFLECTION"  
by CHRISTIANE T. MARTENS

Sculpture

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

sculptor Richard Hunt, one of Chicago's best known artists and an organizer of the 1982 show.

What grew out of those shows was an overall acceptance by the general public of contemporary art. A taste developed for sculptures that are more abstract and less definable than a statue of a war hero.

In 1978, a municipal ordinance was enacted to require 1.33 percent of the cost of renovating city buildings be used to obtain and display public art. Since the program's inception, hundreds of works have been installed.



John Henry's Santa Fe Moon graces the lawn west of Navy Pier as part of its Pier Walk.

Also as a result of the ordinance, the Chicago Public Art Program was created to present public art exhibitions. This summer, Chicago artist Dan Peterman created a 100-foot-long picnic table from recycled plastics. It can be found in Grant Park north of the Art Institute of Chicago.

"We encourage people to sit and eat at this table and experience artwork that is user-friendly," Mayor Daley said when it was installed.

The unique aspect of the Navy Pier show is that it was conceived and is run completely by artists. (Funding from Sears enables it to remain free to the public.) The exhibit is not confined by the restrictions of a museum or a gallery.

"It's artists standing up for themselves," said Rob Lorensen, whose "Vortex" is prominently placed near the entrance of Navy Pier.

These sculptors are taking things into their own hands, shaping and forming, building and designing, creating not only an

exhibit but something personal and substantial — a sculpture community.

"Within a 200-mile radius of Chicago there is a terrific core of active sculptors," Dunbar said.

As cities go, Chicago is a place a sculptor can call home. In addition to the city's ongoing commitment to public sculpture, Midwesterners enjoy plenty of relatively affordable studio space and easily available resources that are more inaccessible to artists on the coasts.

"Anything that you can conceive in your mind is only a phone call away from being in your studio in about a week," said Karpowicz. In Chicago proper there are steel mills and monument companies that ship in stone from all over the world. Wood and other stone comes from forests in Michigan and Wisconsin and quarries in Missouri and Minnesota.

There are also a lot of artisans who are available and willing to help sculptors learn new techniques. Scratch any sculptor and you're likely to discover his or her tool of choice: perhaps a carbide chisel, a welder, a grinder, a cutting torch, a diamond saw. "Sculpture is about appropriating technology for artistic means," said Lorensen, whose current favorite tool is the plasma cutter, which is popular among artists for cutting and drawing on all types of metal.

The Pier Walk draws prominence from its position between two other important art events at Navy Pier: Art Chicago, a five-day exhibit held each spring, and SOFA (Sculptural Object Functional Art), a fall show featuring new art forms.

Last year's Pier Walk caught the eye of Jeanne Pond, director of the International Sculpture Center in Washington, D.C. Now the center has chosen Chicago as the location for its next biennial conference, "Sculpture 17," in May 1998. The center hasn't held a conference in the Midwest in more than 20 years, and this one is expected to draw more than 2,500 people from all over the world.

"The interesting thing about Chicago is that there is a concentration of sculpture," said Pond. "The way that it is thoughtfully put together and juxtaposed with the architecture is very compelling."

The Picasso, of course, stands out in the city's sculpture collection. Standing 50 feet tall and weighing 162 tons, the ambiguous work represents something different to everyone.

"The Chicago Picasso is the cultural icon of this city; it was the turning point in contemporary sculpture that opened the gates up," Dunbar said.

But there is much more to be seen. Chicago sculpture's greatest hits (plotted on the accompanying map) include works by Joan Miro, Jean DuBuffet, Claes Oldenburg, Henry Moore, Marc Chagall, Alexander Calder, Isamu Noguchi, Frank Stella, Lorado Taft, Louise Nevelson, Richard Hunt, John Henry and Jerry Peart — just to name a few.

And Chicago's sculpture community is hard at work in the studio — with all of those cool tools — to keep the city at the forefront of public art.

"Until you create it, it does not exist," Dunbar said. "It's not dependent upon the market; it's dependent upon the creator."

Tribune photos by Chris Walker