
Sculpture chosen for New Orleans evacuation art

By Kevin McGill

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NEW ORLEANS—A Massachusetts sculptor's image of a lone figure with an upstretched arm has been approved as the piece of public art that will be reproduced and placed at 17 points around the city of New Orleans to mark where people without transportation should gather to evacuate for an approaching hurricane.

The selection of Douglas Kornfeld's work was announced this week by The Arts Council of New Orleans and the volunteer group Evacuteer.org, which works with city officials to help those who need aid when evacuations are ordered.

Once installed, the works will be the latest examples of scattered works of public art with a unified theme that have popped up in cities over the years: wildly decorated fiberglass cattle in Zurich in 1998; Cows on Parade in Chicago in 1999; brightly painted fish or miniature streetcars that spread throughout New Orleans in recent years.

Kornfeld's figure, selected by an Arts Council committee after a national search, will serve more than an aesthetic purpose. It is meant to be eye-catching and memorable to frequent walkers and users of public transportation -- people who may be more likely than others to need the city's assistance in leaving town.

"The committee really felt this would be a good opportunity to have a citywide impact for public art and also stretch the definition of what public art means," said Morgana King, director of public art for the council.

Details are still in the works. King said the figure will likely be produced in different sizes for different locations. Kornfeld, who is based in Cambridge, Mass., suggested three size options with the medium being about 12 feet tall, King said.

Designed to last decades and withstand harsh weather and attempts at vandalism, the figures will likely be constructed of tubular steel. Artist renderings show a sculpture resembling a line drawing of a figure slightly bent to one side while reaching one arm skyward, suggesting someone hailing a bus or a cab.

"He was working with the idea: 'What is that universal symbol when you need help or you need a ride?'" King said. "Hopefully, the graphic will translate across any language barriers."

The Arts Council is providing half the \$200,000 cost of the project. Evacuteer.org is raising the other half from donations and had about \$64,000 in donations as of Wednesday, Robert Fogarty, founder of the organization said. He added that having the selected image to show potential donors will likely help fund-raising.

"It's a much easier conversation to have," he said.

Backers of the project hope to have the art pieces installed by Sept. 1 -- the peak of hurricane season, King said.

The art project is the latest innovation in an evacuation system that has been undergoing refinement ever since Hurricane Katrina laid bare the flaws that existed when it hit in 2005. Tens of thousands found themselves trapped in the flooding that followed levee breaches that occurred during the storm.

Fogarty founded Evacuteer.org after serving as an AmeriCorps volunteer and helping out at City Hall when Hurricane Gustav was threatening in 2008. City officials say Evacuteer.org provides valuable assistance in signing up and training volunteers who stand ready to assist evacuees.

Online:

Arts Council of New Orleans: <http://www.artscouncilofneworleans.org/>

Evacuteer.org: <http://evacuteer.org/>

Douglas Kornfeld: <http://www.awaka-inc.com/>

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