

Spokane Sculpture Walk

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The Spokane River experience is enhanced by more than 25 works of public art which inhabit a rich landscape with a waterfall, dams, trails, bridges, giant basalt boulders and an amazing array of vegetation.

This area of the City of Spokane is promoted as the “Sculpture Walk.” The Sculpture Walk was developed as a project of the Spokane Arts Commission (City of Spokane), the City of Spokane Parks and Recreation Department and Riverfront Park, the Spokane Public Facilities District, Spokane Public Library, and many community groups. The Sculpture Walk was formally adopted in 1988. The most recent plans for extension of the “walk” were adopted in July 2011 by City Council.

The Spokane River runs through the city. Riverfront Park was developed with an environmental theme during Expo ‘74, the world’s fair in the smallest city to ever host the world’s fair. The Sculpture Walk has as its centerpiece the Riverfront Park and the walk extends the length of the City from the UDistrict on the east to the Monroe Street Bridge. The west end of the Sculpture Walk - from the Monroe Street Bridge to the Sandifur Bridge – exists as a concept.

The Sculpture Walk is a tourist destination in and of itself but its proximity to the Spokane Convention Center, the INB Performing Arts Center, the Spokane Veteran’s Memorial Arena, area hotels, and downtown, make it a fine amenity for the whole city. Schools, universities, service clubs and community groups schedule tours and activities around the art.

The site chosen for the Sculpture Walk extension is one of great physical transformation and potential economic growth. Yes, it looks like a pile of dirt but soon Kendall Yards, a new urban community that will eventually consist of homes, retail shops, offices, and restaurants, will be developed.

Several artists are featured prominently in the collection of the Sculpture Walk including the “granddaddy” of the Spokane art scene, Harold Balazs, and the “world’s oldest art making nun,” Sister Paula Turnbull.

Balazs is best known for the “Riverfront Rotary Fountain” which was created as collaboration with architect, Bob Perron, with sponsorship and support from Rotary 21 and numerous community members in 2005. This is a work of art but also functions as “a big sprinkler” for play in the hottest days of summer. Balazs also created the Untitled columnar sculpture next to the INB Performing Arts Center that looks somewhat like a Japanese lantern and is often referred to as the “transcend the bullshit sculpture” because of the saying on top (should you be daring enough to crawl up there!) The Centennial Sculpture floats on a catamaran like structure with four anchors in the Spokane River and was commissioned by the Spokane Chamber of Commerce and its members for the centennial of the City of Spokane.

Sister Paula Turnbull not only created the Garbage Goat in a “goat grotto” and the Australian Sundial for Expo ‘74 but was significantly involved with inviting other artists to be a part of the Fair. The welded metal Garbage Goat was designed to encourage young people to pick up their trash. The goat has a four and half inch tube connected to a vacuum fan which will suck trash through the goat’s mouth into a trash container. Some goat lovers have objected because it perpetuates the misconception that goats are omnivorous or suffering from pica. Kids of all ages love it!

Another very popular work is “The Childhood Express” which is a much larger than life “Red Wagon” created by Ken Spiering. This sculpture was created in honor of the Washington State’s 1989 Centennial and was a gift to the City by the Junior League of Spokane. It serves not only as a work of art but as a “slide” for children’s play.

George Tsutakawa created the Expo ’74 fountain at the corner of Spokane Falls Boulevard and Washington. This fountain is 18 feet high and weighs 8,200 lbs. This piece is a fine early example of Tsutakawa’s work and shows sign of wear and a bit of corrosion after more than 37 years. The sculpture was crafted from aluminum because of Spokane’s long history with aluminum manufacturing and a sponsorship from businesses in this sector. Tsutakawa also created fountains for Expo ‘70 in Osaka and for the Sao Paulo Biennial in 1955. Our fountain is one of 80 created in his lifetime.

Themes are featured prominently - the environment (the theme of Expo ’74), Spokane’s notable people and events, art that can be enjoyed interactively by children and adults, and art by Spokane’s most prominent artists.

People commemorated include:

- Vietnam Veterans depicted in a figurative bronze memorial by Deborah Copenhaver-Fellows, 1984;
- Hard rock miners depicted in “From this Earth”, a bronze created by Glenn Emmons for the centennial of the Mining Association in 1994;
- Astronaut, Michael Anderson, who was killed in the Columbia Space Shuttle Tragedy, is remembered in a bronze by Dorothy Fowler;
- The founding Sisters of Providence of Sacred Heart Hospital. This bronze, “The Call and the Challenge,” by Ken Spiering depicts nuns in the health service and a workman who worked to build Spokane’s hospitals. A fun fact is that the model for the workman is the artist Harold Balazs whose work is adjacent.
- Sister Cities of Spokane past and present – one example being the copper sculpture entitled, “Shamil,” which was donated by our previous Sister City Makhachkala, Russia.
- Boy Scouts in the sculpture by Deborah Copenhaver-Fellows, “Footsteps to the Future” which reflects the core values in scouting and recognizes a long standing leader, Dean Dinnison.

Some of the work is by artists from the area now working in other parts of the country. Jim Hodges, now living in New York, created the “Alive, Lively, Living” abstract sculpture on the Washington State University’s campus in the UDistrict. Nationally acclaimed writer and Spokane Indian, Sherman Alexie, created a poem in the park adjacent to the Spokane Public Library on Spokane Falls Boulevard. This poem called, “The Place Where the Ghosts of Salmon

Jump,” reflects on the life of the river which is now dammed to create hydroelectric power and the lives of native people in the region.

Funding for the Sculpture Walk has been put together through a variety of sources and entities. Some of the works were projects of Expo '74 and were funded by sponsors including community groups such as the Junior League of Spokane, Women's Council of Realtors, Washington Mutual Savings Bank, the Women's Architectural League, Goodwill Industries, the Aluminum Industries and others. Some of the Expo '74 sculptures were temporary and some remain. The Sculpture Walk is a living place – with new works being created and as developments occur sculptures are relocated and sometimes deaccessioned. Some have been created through the City of Spokane's "Percent for Art" ordinance. Many of the new works have been created with funds from the "one half of one percent" of the Washington State capital budget which is administered by the Washington State Arts Commission and are part of building projects in the UDistrict. New works in the extended area of the Sculpture Walk will be privately funded and will require maintenance endowments. Some new temporary works will lead the development of the Sculpture Walk extension into Kendall Yards and eventually larger, permanent works will be installed. Fundraising has begun on the pilot project phase of the extension but there is much work yet to be done.

Most proposals are brought to the Spokane Arts Commission where the staff ferries the projects through the approval process and helps with various aspects of the project management. The Sculpture Walk properties belong to a variety of public entities, universities, and city departments thus the guidance of the projects through the various bureaucracies is critical.

Maintenance is provided through a variety of arrangements – some endowments, some scrappy fundraising and in-kind contributions from city workers, utility companies and even the rescue dive crew from the Spokane County Sheriff's office helped with fixing anchors on the floating sculpture.

The City of Spokane has more than 200 works in its public art collection. About 20 percent of the collection is in downtown and in the Riverfront Park. For more information about public art in Spokane, go to www.spokanearts.org/publicart.aspx. The Spokane Arts Commission can be reached through (509) 625-6050 or by emailing arts@spokanecity.org.