

**THE CLOSING**  
 THE HUMAN SIDE OF COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

**Downtown L.A. Beautified  
 By Art Requirements for  
 New Developments**

*Developers get creative when it comes to finding just the right artist to create a piece of public art*

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In the past 12 months, the Downtown Art Advisory Panel reviewed a total of 25 public art projects, making it one of the most active of the three panels that advise the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles. In her



10 years on the downtown panel, Glenna Avila, artist and director of the Community Arts Partnership and CalArts, has seen not only the number of projects coming under the panel's review increase but also a shift in the types of public art being proposed.



"There is more sophistication when it comes to the use of materials," Avila said. "[Developers use] more durable materials, certain stones and tiles as opposed to painted murals or other art that can be ruined by vandalism and graffiti. The use of light and digital technology has definitely increased over the last decade."



Developer-initiated public art, from top, "Corporate Head" by Terry Allen, "Origami Horse" by Natalie Krol, "FaceFinder" by Steve Appleton, "Johnny Carson" by Ernest Shelton, "Symbols of Unity — The Idea of Freedom" by Charles Dickson and "John Mendez Legacy" by Wayne Healy (background).

Developers' means of employing just the right artist for their public art projects mirror this shift in materials from simple, painted murals to high-tech light installations, through the creative use of partnerships or artist-consultants like the one sponsored by Held Properties Inc. in April.

Done in conjunction with Jonathan Novak Contemporary Art, the invitational involved California public art sculptors who were invited to create a work that included the element of water for Held Properties' Century City building at 1880 Century Park East, which is undergoing an \$8 million renovation.

Originally, Held had commissioned its own architects to design a piece of art that would go with a pre-existing water pond. When the design was unveiled, however, it was decided that the firm would hold an invitational to generate other ideas for a piece to complement the water pond.

"[The design] was a response by the architects from the requirements the ownership needed to make this artwork work," said Robert Held, president and chief executive officer of Held Properties. "It was the practical side of a piece rather than the beauty, function and form, but I have to commend the architects. I thought they did a great job."

The final five artists in the invitational, selected by a committee composed of the owners from Held, Jonathan Novak and HGA Inc., received \$5,000 to create a model of their sculptures for a second round of judging. The winning artist will receive \$250,000 to create the real sculpture, which will sit just outside the building's entrance.

"It's kind of a novel concept: a non-required piece of art," Held said. "It's probably one of the few pieces of commissioned artwork for an exterior fountain that is done for the sole sake of art."

Unlike some of the developer-proposed pieces of art throughout Los Angeles County, the winning piece of art for the Held invitational will not have been created to meet the CRA/LA's Public Art Policy.

Established in 1985 as a means of redeveloping three specific project areas in downtown, the art policy continues to justify the extent to which responsibility for a neighborhood's revitalization should sit with a developer.

"I can imagine developers have differing views on public art and culture," said Lisa Padilla, another downtown panel member and principal at CITYWORKS Design, "but I would say one of the benefits

of the CRA's program is that there are several options for developers [in adhering to the policy]."

Private development projects with costs above \$500,000 are required to either incorporate some type of public art (reviewed and approved by the committee) equal to 1 percent of development costs or contribute that money to the cultural trust fund.

Developers can also build a cultural facility, as was the case with the California Plaza Partnership, which met its public art requirement by building a \$23 million cultural facility for the Museum of Contemporary Art.

Making it even easier to follow the art policy is the shift in buyers' attitudes when it comes to the aesthetics of the real estate they buy today.

"There are a lot of housing and loft projects integrating art, which is seen as a real amenity to people purchasing those places," Padilla said. "Developers are marketing to a pretty sophisticated, urban clientele pretty attuned to art, culture and music. [Art] is very complementary to what tenants are interested in."

This is very much the case with John Laing Homes Urban, which entered into a partnership in August with LA-ART, a nonprofit art organization that has its own public art initiative program.

"I think [the 1 percent policy] is a critical model to be able to produce public art projects in the city," said Lauri Firstenberg, director and curator of LA-ART. "I think that it is necessary in a place like Los Angeles to be able to bring artists together with these types of venues and developments."

Under terms of the partnership, John Laing will give an undisclosed amount of money to LA-ART annually for an indefinite number of years to create at least one exhibition for display in the courtyard area of its mixed-use Madrone development project near the intersection of Hollywood Boulevard and La Brea Avenue. The piece will not be unveiled until after construction is complete, which is not anticipated until September or October.

"The idea of art in public places has been viewed as a burden and an annoyance that has to be implemented," said Philip Simmons, president of John Laing Homes Urban. "[This partnership] is a way to take something truly artistic and unique and incorporate it into an artistic building to set new standards for the way art in public places is done." ■



An artist's rendering of John Laing Homes Urban's mixed-use project Madrone near Hollywood Boulevard and La Brea Avenue.