

CITY OF ANN ARBOR

# ANN ARBOR PUBLIC ART COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2021



*Horizon*, by Laurie Borggreve of Edina, MN -  
Manhole cover at Main & Liberty

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## Introduction

2019-2021 was a challenging couple of years for everyone including the Ann Arbor Public Art Commission. While there weren't many new projects during this timeframe, the commission continued to make big changes and achieve many pivotal things towards the improvement of and enhancement of public art in Ann Arbor.

In November of 2019 the commission welcomed two new commissioners, Peggy Leonard and Sophie Grillet. Sophie Grillet has been a resident of Ann Arbor for 22 years and an artist for the past 15 years. Grillet is a cartoonist (political and editorial) originally in England; she then took up fine art in Ann Arbor focusing on painting and sculpture work. Grillet also helps to organize the Westside Art Hop, a neighborhood art group that happens

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in May. Peggy Leonard has been an art teacher with the Ann Arbor Public Schools for over 20 years. She is a “townie” with three kids and an interest in service.

In early 2020, Commissioner Colleen Crawly stepped down after completing her three years with the commission. Mary Thiefels also stepped down in mid 2020 due to bylaws prohibiting her ability to bid on projects that could provide necessary income for her as a professional artist. More information on this bylaw and its eventual change is addressed later in this report. In their place, the commission was joined by Sarah Fuller and Wasentha Young in August of 2020. Fuller's background includes a majority of her career in art sales in support of local artists in San Francisco. After returning to Michigan, Fuller joined Motawi Tileworks in 2016 as their Retail Manager. Young is an artist, writer, and the founding director and master instructor of the [Peaceful Dragon School](#), in Ann Arbor. Although art has been a part of her life from childhood, most recently she has focused on mosaics, inspired by her travels to Spain, Greece, and Italy and is a member of the Mosaic Artists of Michigan. Young also writes poetry, enjoys journaling and creating short stories.

In March of 2021, Sarah Fuller became the commission Vice-Chair, as Deb Mexicotte resigned. Allison Buck was unanimously reappointed as Chair for one final year, as Buck reaches her term limit (3 years).

City Council member Ali Ramwali was replaced by City Council member, Travis Radina in early 2021 as the commissions City Council representation and liaison.

With commissioner Debra Mexicotte and Jonah Copi leaving in spring of 2021 the commission will welcome new commissioners Marianetta Porter and Jamall Bufford in August 2021.

## **Capital Improvement Project (CIP) Enhancements**

Attached you will find the complete list of current council approved potential CIP enhancements (Appendix A).

The only project that moved forward during this timeframe was the installation of several manholes cast in early 2019 that included the Horizon design (shown above). These covers continued to be installed across Ann Arbor including along First and Ashley during the

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corresponding street construction projects as well as the one pictured at the intersection of Main & Liberty. The two other manhole designs were cast and will begin to be used starting in late 2021.

As a reminder, in early 2018 - managed by The Ann Arbor Art Center, three designs were selected to be turned into manhole covers for projects spanning the next several years.



Above: *Horizon*, by Laurie Borggreve of Edina, MN; *Kayak*, by Taylor Mentzer of Ann Arbor, MI; and *Tower and Tree*, by Shaun Whitehouse of Ann Arbor, MI

## Maintenance of Public Art

A complete list of public artworks and the scheduled repairs/maintenance was created by Venita Harrison with support from other city staff. This list is integrated within the city's maintenance system (Cityworks) and is inclusive of costs, instructions, materials, etc. and may be accessed and updated by each of the departments that have and maintain public artworks. During late 2019 staff worked with each of these departments to update the maintenance plans including costs and plans moving forward for all the works in the collection. Additionally, this software will allow a work order for the units for preventative and annual maintenance with an A2 Fix It feed into Cityworks. As part of this process, upon the commission's request, city staff had the works appraised so that the value of each work could be reflected and included in this database. This helped to make sure works were properly insured as well as increase the understanding of their full value. A copy of the current projects and scheduled maintenance schedules is attached (Appendix B). Due to COVID and getting staff up to speed on use of the system; only approximately 30% of the pieces have been reviewed.

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Unfortunately in 2020 a vehicle crashed into *Tulip* by Ray Katz, necessitating the piece to have repairs. The artist has picked up the work and repairs are currently being made. No other projects required immediate attention. As the works continue to be evaluated and the Cityworks system is updated, any identified repairs will be handled by the responsible department.

## **AAPAC Efforts to Promote Public Art**

In 2018-2019, the commission was proud to oversee the creation of a public art inventory, tour, and online catalogue by Public Works intern, Olivia Pearce and managed by city staff, Venita Harrison. This inventory catalogues the city's current collection of works and the resulting digital tour can be found on AAPAC's webpage here:

<https://www.a2gov.org/departments/public-services/Pages/Public-Art.aspx> so that all may enjoy the full collection. This catalogue also informs the maintenance schedule attached as Appendix B.

In 2019-2021 AAPAC leveraged this tour by sharing it in various ways such as inclusion in the A2 Residential newsletter, review at public meetings, and sharing it as a resource whenever possible. Work continues to add additional images/links and works as they are added to the collection.

Through this cataloguing process, city staff also identified which works still lacked identification/plaques on-site. The commission reviewed designs, content, and advised staff on a final concept that was used to identify several pieces of the collection that previously lacked acknowledgements and signage including bronze plaques that were installed at *Leaven* and *Arbor Winds*. City staff also consulted with UMMA Chief of Staff, Natalie Vasher, who indicated that the design follows current standards in regards to the content included. This design will continue to be used as a template for future signage so that moving forward the works are identified in a consistent manner. These plaques are an important part of promoting the public art collection and educating viewers about the works.

The **Development working group** (made up of commissioners: John Kotarski, Jonah Copi, Mary Thiefels, and David Esau) worked with the city attorneys to adapt the language of the Design

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Review Board Bylaws in order to allow a representative from the AAPAC to be a part a non-voting member of the Design Review Board. Specifically, [Ann Arbor Ordinance 1:239](#) added (c) which states: “The Ann Arbor Public Art Commission may appoint 1 of its members to serve as a nonvoting liaison to the Design Review Board for the purpose of providing comments to petitioners regarding the potential for incorporating private artwork into projects under review by the Design Review Board. The Ann Arbor Public Art Commission liaison shall continue to serve until they are no longer members of the Ann Arbor Public Art Commission or until the Ann Arbor Public Art Commission appoints a different member.”

The primary function of this representative is to advise, promote, and educate private developers about the incorporation of public art within their designs and thus enhance our public spaces throughout the city. This representative, John Kotarski in 2020-2021 was able to encourage developers to include public art in many different projects and help advise them on best practices or help them develop ideas when necessary. By educating local developers on the benefits of including public art within their projects, the AAPAC hopes that more private projects will embrace public art and incorporate it within their buildings. In line with this, The work group also created a public art checklist/idea book that can be offered to developers for their use to define and better understand opportunities for inclusion of art enhancements.

## **Donated Public Art**

In late 2020, The city accepted the donation of a fountain from the University of Michigan. *Hamilton Fountain*, created by Albin Polasek in 1919 was a “gift of Francis Hamilton, mayor of Ann Arbor 1905–07, who bequeathed money to the City of Ann Arbor for a fountain in this location (he died in 1914). The figures in the bas relief represent Youth, Labor, Poetry and Philosophy. The artist stated that it was his aim to make something ‘dignified, with a touch of youthful delight.’ The fountain was unveiled at Commencement 1919 and dedicated at the 50th anniversary of Hamilton’s graduation from U-M (1869).” This piece can be found at the corner of State Street and N. University and in the city’s online public art collection.

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## **Funding for Public Art**

In spring of 2020, the Commission received a \$50k donation which was placed in the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation's (AAACF) Ann Arbor Art in Public Places Endowed Fund, established in 1999. Placement within the AAACF endowment will allow the commission to use the interest that is earned, which will grow each year. This doubled the overall amount within this fund and is a substantial donation that the commission is very excited to receive.

This donation also sparked the commission to re-evaluate the terms of this fund and expand the identified potential uses of these funds. The commission came up with revised language which expanded the previous terms, "maintaining and preserving public art throughout the city". The new language adopted by the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation in spring of 2021 allowed the funds to be used for "the purchase, installation, maintenance and preservation of public art throughout the city".

In mid 2021, with \$5,000+ of interest available for use, the commission (with advice from the communications & marketing working group) decided to take out \$2,500 to be used towards advertising and spreading the word about the current collection, the art tour available online, and the Golden Paintbrush Award winners. These ads will be included in several local publications both online and in print in the fall/winter of 2021. The commission felt using the funds in this way was important due to the need for more avenues of communicating and celebrating the public art works currently taking place in Ann Arbor in order to continue to educate the community about as well as grow good will towards the city's collection.

## **Additional Working Group and Commission Activities**

The commission as a whole supported and provided recommendations and resources for the following projects:

- Main Street Area Associations Youth Art Month which included two public art installations commissioned by local students (March 2020);

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- Ann Arbor Art Center's Mural Project - supported and made recommendations for public inclusion (Summer/Fall 2020);
  - The University of Michigan Climate Blue Public Art Project - the commission offered guidance and encouragement to efforts of the University of Michigan School for Environment and Sustainability (SEAS) and the Climate Blue Club in their development of a public art project that draws awareness to climate change in the Ann Arbor community (November 2020);
  - A2 Zero Mural installed in Gallup Park-commission reviewed the design, provided feedback to project managers at the Office of Sustainability and Innovations (OSI), and several commissioners participated in the painting of the mural (June 2021);
  - Allen Creek Berm Project Public Art - encouraged staff to include art work and supported selection of space and continue to advise as project moves forward (ongoing);
  - Pickel Street Murals - acted as a resource and encouraged them to proceed by providing information on the process for installation of art on city owned property, permits required, application process, funding options, etc. (ongoing);
  - Ann Arbor City Flag redesign - Special Projects work group is providing oversight and support for this project recommended by Mayor Taylor (ongoing);
  - Survivors Speak Black Lives Matter Project - commission provided resound support of the project and further insight in site selection. Councilmember Radina to help support the initiative to begin the process to request a change in code or an XX so that they can use more permanent material on the street for this installation (ongoing).
  - Water Treatment Plant Stairwell Mural - after meeting with members of the CIP working group, Glenn Wiczorek (Senior Utilities Engineer) has spearheaded an effort to include a mural project in the stairwell of the Water Treatment Plant as an art enhancement. (ongoing);
  - The Alleyway Project - lead by Center Design Studio's Jason Ennis and supported by the Ann Arbor Art Center has brought the Alleyway Project to Ann Arbor. The Alleyway Project looks to create pedestrian friendly environments in unexpected places, like alleyways,with semi-permanent/permanent art installations. Ennis presented the project to the commission and a member of the commission participated in the Voting Selection Committee (ongoing).

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The commission also worked with the city attorney's office, and supported by city council liaison, Ali Ramwali, through a vote at City Council, the commission was able to change its current bylaws to allow for commissioners to bid on city projects. This bylaw prohibiting the participation was put in place when the commission oversaw the percent for art program and played a much more pivotal role within the selection process. Currently, the AAPAC is predominantly an advisory commission and does not participate directly with the selection of works or the call for art process. The wisdom of currently practicing artists volunteering on the commission is pivotal to the success of AAPAC. This Bylaw change was desired to allow practicing artists to offer their experience and expertise as AAPAC members without crippling their ability to continue their professional work. The change was approved at the City Council's November 5th, 2020 Meeting.

The **Youth Outreach working group** (made up of Commissioners: *Jonah Copi, Mary Thiefels, Peggy Leonard, and Wasentha Young*) supported the city clerk's office with the management of the "I Voted" Sticker competition. Several winners were selected in various age categories and despite the pandemic and many voters voting via mail, the stickers were circulated and very much enjoyed by the community.

The **CIP working group** (made up of Commissioners: *David Esau, Allison Buck, and Sarah Fuller*) put together the included CIP enhancement recommendations, attached.

**Special Projects working group** (made up of Commissioners *John Kotarski, Sophie Grillet, Wasentha Young and Peggy Leonard*) revived the Golden Paintbrush Award which recognizes adults, children and organizations who have encouraged creativity in Ann Arbor's publicly visible spaces. Awards will be given for art which demonstrates collaboration and excellence, and which adds a bit of magic to our daily life. Visual, music and other arts, including online, are eligible. Submissions were collected in Spring of 2021 and the 2021 awards will be announced in August/September 2021.

Originally established in 2009, the Ann Arbor Public Art Commission granted this award annually until 2013. In 2021, the award was revived with the intention to annually recognize citizens, businesses and organizations who have encouraged creativity in public spaces. Further work has started on an annual tile to be created with support from Motawi

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Tileworks (a previous Golden Paintbrush recipient) and given to the winners to acknowledge this achievement each year.

The **Recruitment Working Group** (made up of Allison Buck, Deb Mexicotte, and Sarah Fuller) worked to fill all vacancies on the commission as members left. Efforts were made to bring more diversity in both age, gender, and ethnicity to the commission.

The **Leadership Forum Working Group** (made up of Allison Buck, Deb Mexicotte, and Peggy Leonard) was established in 2020 with the intention of cultivating appreciation and support for public art, with the support of the rest of the commission. The group sought to achieve this by creating an AAPAC Leadership Forum made up of community leaders, artists, and citizens who are interested in public art and the important role it plays in the cultural and economic life of the community. This group would also serve as both key communicators and advocates to their networks of friends, colleagues, and associates, as well as serving as an advisory board on behalf of our community constituents. This group will also serve as a source of commission candidates for the AAPAC, and may well contribute to membership and participation in other city and civic commissions, boards, and forums. This is predominantly a work in progress and something that will hopefully be formalized in 2021.

## Conclusion

Although the AAPAC was able to achieve many great things in 2019-2021 the pandemic did slow the progress of the commission and public art projects in general. In lieu of these challenges the commission was able to make great policy and bylaw changes that will have a positive impact on the future ability of the commission to achieve its goals.

### Attachments:

- Appendix A - CIP Enhancements
- Appendix B - Public Art Maintenance