

David A. Parker
MCA First Fridays: Project Submission Proposal

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Title of project: FOUNTAIN

“Fountain” is a participatory sculpture proposed for temporary installation in the MCA Sculpture Garden on the “First Friday” evening of August 5, 2005, between 6 and 10 pm. It will be a pyramid form of 5 rounded tiers made of plywood, 5 feet high, with a base of 100 inches (about 8.3 feet), painted gold. At its core will be a high-powered outdoor floodlight, aimed at the sky through a hole in the apex of the sculpture. This beam of white light will be a major formal element of the work. Visitors will be supplied with bottles of soap bubbles, and will be invited to blow bubbles in the courtyard, particularly into the beam of light, which will carry the bubbles skyward on a pillar of heat and energy.

This object is intended to serve as a linchpin on many levels. Formally, it exists as a monument in dialogue with Buckingham Fountain to the south. In addition, its color and vertical orientation connect it to the historic Water Tower to the west. The work also refers to the “Tribute in Light” work memorializing the World Trade Center collapse, and thereby serves as an indirect monument to the Chicago Fire of 1871. In the same vein, the work takes its color and formal cues from the ancient Greek Delphic Oracle, a priestess who, seated on a tripod of gold over a fissure in the earth, issued prophecies based on interpretations of gases rising from the deep. Since Delphi served as the chief temple of Apollo, Greek god of light and the arts, “Fountain” pays homage to this key figure of Western civilization. In its connection with Delphi it also alludes to the powerful activity happening unbeknownst to us below our feet, including the decomposition (perhaps resulting in flammable methane gases!) of the Great Fire debris upon which nearby Lake Shore Drive is built.

Conceptually, the work also refers to its placement in a museum, often considered a “font” of culture and learning. The gold color therefore both pays respect to that role and presents the work as a ritual object. However, this perhaps gaudy surface and the sculpture’s lightweight construction undermine the object’s obvious Modernist associations in hopes of making a point: that the “illuminations” promised by prophets and others are, in fact, to be found everywhere, if anywhere. In other words, insight is to be found right where we are; a sculpture proclaiming “sublime centeredness” dropped into the world collapses under its own comedy to show that in the end, hope and insight must come from within each of us. Bubble-blowing is therefore both a gesture to heighten such comedy, and a celebration of the hope that must “spring eternal” from us all. By regarding the shaft of light as a means of emotional ascendance, people can enjoy themselves by sending their wishes in the form of bubbles into the starlit heavens. And, one hopes, leave the museum more “uplifted” for the experience.

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