

## City approves new Norman Forward art project for central library

By Mack Burke | Transcript News Editor | May 10, 2018



Norman's next public art piece has been selected.

The towering sculpture, made of swirling aluminum pages, will ultimately grace the front entrance of the new central public library, which is slated to open in June 2019. Standing at just over 46 feet tall and 26 feet wide, the sculpture will include 275 aluminum sheets.

The creator, English artist Paul Cockshedge, said the sheets are meant to represent the pages in a library and the changing relationship with how people consume knowledge.

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“It’s not always in the traditional way of flipping through a book,” Norman Arts Council Executive Director Erinn Gavaghan said. “It’s online, it’s on our phone, it’s electronic. It definitely represents the ephemeral nature of books and pages.”

Cocksedge’s work was selected from among three finalists from England, New York and Norman. He has exhibits and architectural projects around the world, notably in the collections of the British Council, the London Design Museum, the Museum of Arts and Design and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

The semi-blind selection process undertaken by the Norman Arts Council took months and garnered 204 submissions from 38 states, as well as places like Thailand, Australia, Brazil and Ukraine.

The NAC’s selection was ultimately approved by the Norman Public Arts Board and, on Tuesday, the city council.

“[The process] is as blind as possible. For the first 204 submissions, everyone just goes through and looks at images and ranks them,” Gavaghan said. “Then those were compiled and we averaged them out and talked about them.

“When it gets down to the top 25, you have to get into the artists’ CVs and websites and things like that. Once it gets to a small enough group of people, it’s pretty impossible to keep it completely blind.”

In this case, Gavaghan said the selection committee was floored from the get go by Cocksedge’s submission.

“It was kind of one of those things where when he presented it and that first rendering popped up on the screen, everybody just [gasped],” she said. “It was amazing.”

The city council had similar reactions, praising the selection committee for its work and Norman residents for getting behind the public art movement with its overwhelming support of Norman Forward. The \$140 million initiative, funded by a voter-approved half-cent sales tax, includes a 1 percent-for-public-art component for each project.

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“I was so excited the first time I saw a little picture of it,” Mayor Lynne Miller said. “I thought it was just really stunning. I think it’s going to be something that everyone who visits here will really want to see.”

With an estimated cost of about \$39 million, the central library is the largest Norman Forward project. By extension, the new sculpture is the largest public art piece, coming in at a cost of \$230,000. That’s a little less than 1 percent, but the figure was generated as a percentage of construction cost, which didn’t include the full scope of the library’s cost.

Cocksedge has already made his site visit and is getting to work on the massive sculpture. He has some time and won’t have to do the fabrication, however. Unlike the Statue of Liberty, which was built in Paris and deconstructed for its transatlantic journey, Norman’s new artistic centerpiece will be built right here in Oklahoma.

“The fabrication of the sheets is kind of simple ... but the design itself of how they’re going to be laid out in the sculpture is what [Cocksedge is] working on right now. He’s got a few months to complete that design and then he’ll send that to the fabricator, which is here in Midwest City.”

Gavaghan said the most interesting part will be how it gets installed. The sculpture will have two connection points with the building, another that goes down through the center of the pages with the pages swirling up around it. And then there’s a fourth support that goes out to a freestanding mast.

It was designed with more than aesthetics in mind. The design is rated for 105 mph winds and will be insured by the artist and then by the city.

“That’s the standard for buildings for Oklahoma,” Gavaghan said. “[Cocksedge] used the standard building code for that. To put that in perspective, the tornado that came through Norman last week had maximum wind speeds of 95 miles per hour.”

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