

NEWS RELEASE

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Harnessing the power of art to energize and engage a community

August 1, 2008, Colorado Springs, CO... What began 10 years ago as a modest annual public art exhibit in a downtown revitalization effort has become a signature conversation piece, arts catalyst and economic engine for this midsize western city.

Colorado Springs's **Art on the Streets** (AOTS) has captured the fancy of major financial sponsors, interest from national and international artists, attracted prominent jurors of regional and national renown, and established an unprecedented \$30,000 cash prize pool for winning submissions. The yearlong, changing exhibit of 12 to 15 works of art throughout downtown Colorado Springs was the front player in an evolving revitalization of the community's arts scene — including formation of a first-ever cultural office (COPPeR), a major expansion of the city's John Gaw Meem-designed Fine Arts Center, and new construction of Colorado College's copper-lidded, mesmerizingly asymmetrical 70,000 square-foot Cornerstone Arts Center, designed by Antoine Predock, FAIA.

AOTS has also influenced purchase and permanent installation of many of the nearly 50 works of public art in downtown Colorado Springs — everything from life-size portrayals of city founders to giant metal sunflowers in arterial medians and contemporary, interactive, non-representational works tucked into the urban landscape. More than 150 works of art have adorned downtown Colorado Springs since AOTS began in 1999. Valued between a few thousand and several hundred thousand dollars, all of the works exhibited each year are for sale.

Nicholas Ordahl, whose fantastical, interactive solar-powered bench, "Day Break," won the \$15,000 first prize this year, said, "I saw the potential with Art on the Streets for a big, very public project, a tremendous venue for attention." The 10' x 8' inventive work, made of steel, solar panels, recycled car windshield, LED lights and more causes an almost comical double take by unsuspecting pedestrians.

Major sponsors see both an economic and cultural value. Chris Jenkins, vice president of major AOTS sponsor Nor'wood Development Group, sees his company's financial support of AOTS as a sound investment. "If we want to be a city of excellence, we've got to have a healthy arts and culture component. Art on the Streets is a foundational piece of that puzzle."

Tom Naughton of US Bank, the program’s founding underwriter, said, “Art on the Streets is a vital part of our community’s renaissance.”

Most important, said AOTS backers, the exhibits pique pedestrian interest and conversation — and some unexpected emotional attachments. In a city where the Wild West meets modern day commerce, a place sometimes portrayed as polarized, the public art fosters an inclusive sense of community pride and engagement.

“Art by its nature transforms the individual if he or she steps into its space. To have an incident along the sidewalk that’s not about panhandling or commerce but is about aspirations, values, dreams, color, form — that takes us out of the mundane rhythm of our lives, for a minute, a second,” said Bruce Gunther, Chief Curator and Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at Portland Art Museum and AOTS’s first Distinguished Juror. “To dance under Bret Price’s XO... it’s not just love and kisses! It’s like a lyrical line in space, framing the sky, framing the building, changing your perspective on the world you’re in.”

When the 30-foot interpretive “XO” (as in hugs and kisses) steel sculpture by California artist Bret Price was removed from the Plaza of the Rockies office tower entry in downtown Colorado Springs earlier this summer, it garnered evening news coverage and a photo splash in the morning paper — and Denise Schall was besieged by public outcry. Time and again, the AOTS program coordinator had to explain that the massive structure had only been on loan for a year — unless someone was interested in ponying up its \$300,000 purchase price. Schall repeatedly reassured XO’s fans they’d find a new favorite in the crop of 13 public art pieces being installed for the coming year.

“We couldn’t have imagined it a decade ago, people’s attachment to the art,” said Judy Noyes, AOTS founder and president of its non-profit parent, Community Ventures, Inc. “It’s great affirmation. People are stimulated, conversations ensue, and downtown is energized.”

No doubt a year from now downtown patrons will lament the disappearance of, among others, Ordahl’s whimsical bench — unless, of course, some philanthropic soul whips out a check for \$120,000.

Art on the Streets is a project of Community Ventures, Inc., an affiliate program of the Downtown Partnership of Colorado Springs. See www.downtown80903.com for more information on Downtown Colorado Springs and all Partnership initiatives. For more AOTS information, photo and interview resources, please contact program coordinator Denise Schall at 719-886-0088 or email her at deniseschall@downtowncs.com. You can also learn more about AOTS at www.downtown80903.com/Doc/AOTSWalkingTour08.pdf.