

Artist Benito Huerta on Responding to Site for *Urban Still Life* along South Main Street

Benito Huerta is an artist who lives and works in Arlington, Texas. He received a B.F.A. degree from the University of Houston, and his M.A. from New Mexico State University. He was Co-founder, Executive Director and Emeritus Board Director of *Art Lies*, a Texas Art Journal. He is a Professor at the University of Texas at Arlington where he has been Director/Curator of The Gallery at UTA since 1997. Huerta was the recipient of the Dallas Center for Contemporary Art's 2002 *Legend of the Year Award and Exhibition* and was the first *Maestros Tejanos Exhibition* in 2008 at the Latino Cultural Center, Dallas. Completed public art projects include the Marine Creek Park Corridor Master Plan in 2014, Fort Worth; *SnakePath (Mexican Milk Snake)*, Mexican American Cultural Center, Austin, Texas (2007); *Wings*, DFW International Terminal D Skylink terrazzo floor designs (2005); and *Axis*, Henry Gonzales Convention Center, San Antonio.



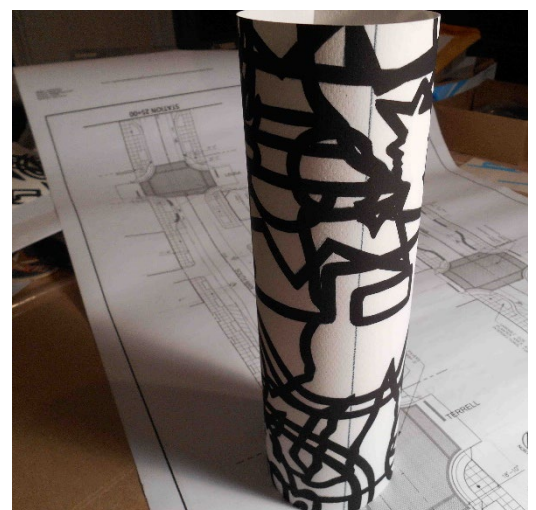
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Public spaces, especially older or historic ones, can have substantial context to offer. How did you research the site of your public art project?

One of the inherent modes of working in public art are the community meetings. These can be very helpful, educational, and give insight into the sensibilities of the community. However, the artist should always conduct additional research on their own. This project was done through visits to the site of where the work was to be installed which included taking photographs of the neighborhood and making notes about what was and is there. To get an idea of the history of that area and what South Main was like in the early years, I relied on imagery and information available on the internet.

What considerations were unique to your site?

The site – streets, sidewalks, and utilities - was going to be partly demolished and renovated. On paper this was not as easy to visualize, and I could not identify what was going to happen on the construction plans. I thought it was good to have a record of what was and/or still is there. In fact, some photographic imagery that I was using became historical due to demolition. What I could not do was predict what would come to the site after the work was completed which was beyond anyone's projections.



How did your project address the complexities of placing contemporary art at a site with history?

I incorporated images that existed at the time before the street was torn up. I photographed things that intrigued me: a combination of signs and shapes, new and old. The material used was brushed stainless steel, which has a contemporary look but also a bit transparent so that one could see thru parts of the shapes within the cone design. This helped in integrating the design with the surrounding environment. The interior lighting in the work also transformed the piece into a beacon along the South Main. I think contemporary and historical components can be intertwined to great effect.



Were there logistical concerns at your site, and, if so, how did you tackle those?

The city's construction timeline was in flux for various reasons; however, rain would bring construction to a halt resulting in delays. Upon installing the six artworks, we were notified that without an electrical junction box the work would not pass city inspection. My electrical team quickly adapted to come up with a solution. What no one saw coming were the bus signs, street signs, and streetlights being placed in very close proximity to the work which ultimately alters their view.

How do you feel your site-specific work contributes to the story of the space it occupies?

Any work done successfully becomes part of the fabric of the site and illuminates what is unique in that community and reflective of the city overall. I think this work identifies the community with imagery that is from the area that makes it unique; the work becomes a visual ribbon that binds the neighborhood together.

What's the biggest challenge/reward working in a public space?

I have always liked the idea of public art in which the art comes to the community. Getting started was the biggest challenge. The reward was the area residents and businesses were very supportive throughout the process and excited to have these works placed along South Main Street. I still receive positive comments on the work from time to time.

