



Artist Julie Lazarus on Working with a City Department for *Membrane Technology* at the Westside Water Treatment Plant

Julie Lazarus has an extensive educational background, studying at Hofstra University, New York University, the Galveston Arts Center, Philbrook Museum School, and lastly University of Tulsa, where she achieved her Masters in Painting/Printmaking. She has held solo exhibitions across the US and in Italy. Her work is in public and private collections including Exxon Corporation (Houston), Microsoft (Seattle), Art Museum of South Texas (Corpus Christi), Neiman Marcus (Dallas), Texas Christian University (Fort Worth), and the City of Fort Worth. Lazarus is currently represented by William Campbell Contemporary Art in Fort Worth.

Public artists often work with a “client” department such as Park and Recreation Department, the Fire Department, and the Library Department, among others. What makes working with a city department unique compared to other organizations or businesses?

When you work with a City Department, there comes a responsibility to the entire surrounding community. You are generally aware of what the department does for the community and what the department represents to the public. You feel a need to visually represent the department in the best light possible as you are putting a face on the entire department.

While every project involves community representatives, city staff are also involved on public projects to ensure work designed can be properly integrated into a site and meet department needs. How did you navigate working with a city department and staff at various levels?

My project manager connected me with the appropriate City of Fort Worth personnel to make decisions on the artwork. For my project, this included dimensions of the



painting, how to build a frame for the large painting that was considerate of specific building needs, and the coordinating the delivery and installation of the work. I worked with not only my project manager and Water Department staff but also the project engineer, architects, interior designers, lighting designers, contractors, and electrical engineers for the building. Everyone, without exception, made themselves available for collaboration early to ensure a smooth final design, fabrication, and installation.

How would you advise an emerging artist to weigh community and department staff input before starting design work? And, if applicable how did you weigh differing feedback throughout the design process?

I would suggest making a detailed list of community and staff desires for the design of the work. These people will be most impacted by the visual artwork, and they deserve to have their thoughts about the artwork taken into consideration. That said, for my project, I embarked on my design remembering that I was selected to design and fabricate this project based on my previous work and in consideration of my artistic voice. Artists must remain true to themselves. Try to navigate a course that does not compromise what you see as your best effort, all the while checking off as many of the community and staff desires as possible.

How do you see the role of public artist as a form of civil service?

The role of the artist is to educate the viewing public as to the reason that the building or site exists or to put a face on it. The design of the artwork should be influenced by what happens at this location, who works there and what services these employees perform for the greater good of the community.

What's the biggest challenge/reward working with a city department?

The biggest challenge was the same as the reward working with a city department. You hope to come up with a visual interpretation of the work done by the city department that strikes a chord with all of the employees, represents the department and is interesting and visually appealing. I feel *Membrane Technology* met that challenge, which was ultimately rewarding.

