

## **East Option**

### **A Plan for Sculpture on the Convention Center Plaza**

Submitted by  
**Pasadena Arts Council**

#### **Abstract**

The Pasadena Arts & Culture Commission will soon deliver to City Council its report on the exterior artworks chosen for the new Convention Center. The three-year process resulting in the selection of Dennis Oppenheim's "Thinking Caps" and Hans Peter Kuhn's "Lightfield" for installation on the Center's plaza was conducted in a professional, inclusive, and open manner, and we advocate that this process should be affirmed in its report to City Council as the Commission's number-one recommendation, or "Plan A."

Separately, in the event City Council will not endorse Plan A, we believe an alternative or Plan B should be submitted that represents constructive and effective compromise. The East Option described in this paper seeks to sidestep impasse and achieve the strongest possible solution for Pasadena, by both accommodating and asking for concessions from each of the project's stakeholders.

## **Background**

On Friday, April 10, representatives of several arts organizations met to discuss the ongoing Convention Center public art situation, and there was a unanimous expression of gratitude for the principled stand taken by the Arts & Culture Commission's Public Art Subcommittee, affirming its selection of the exterior artworks for the Convention Center plaza. We all share the view that it is critically important at this point for the Commission to unequivocally express its confidence in the selection process that was followed and that it continue to resist the pressures from special interests that would attempt to manipulate that process, which, heretofore, has been professional, inclusive, and open. This is seen as an important moment in the history of the arts in Pasadena, the outcome of which will influence local decisions regarding the arts for years to come.

## **Plan A and Plan B**

As the Commission knows, the preference of a majority of those from whom it has heard in the arts community is that the Commission return with its original recommendation and to offer no alternative. We strongly recommend this action.

However, if a majority of Arts & Culture Commission members feel they must report back to the City Council with what is essentially a Plan A and Plan B for moving forward, we would like to offer some thoughts and lay out a proposal we wish to advance.

Plan A, as we understand it, is to aggressively affirm the Commission's absolute confidence in its prior selection of works by Hans Peter Kuhn and Dennis Oppenheim, to clearly represent the history of the PCOC's access to and acceptance of the prescribed selection process, and to enumerate the reasons that the installation of the Kuhn and Oppenheim sculptures should proceed as was originally proposed.

Plan B, as understood, would be the recommended alternative if the City Council – in a public vote – first declines to implement Plan A.

We think that for Plan B to be fair and at the same time to be attractive to City Council it needs to represent a compromise that enables Council members to give each constituency something of what it desires, while at the same time completely disfavoring none.

## **April 7 Plan B**

At the recent April 7 Public Art Subcommittee meeting with PCOC, a Plan B was proposed that would move art inside the new buildings and off the plaza, and that would restrict selections of artworks to those by local artists. In what should be the quest for a workable and creative Plan B compromise that speaks to the concerns of

all the stakeholders, the April 7 Plan B is instead a complete capitulation to a minority view. It is, we feel, entirely antithetical to the principled stand the Commission proposes taking by re-recommending the original Plan A in its report back to Council, and it represents a total abandonment of the Art at Pasadena Center planning document that the Commission worked so hard to develop -- and to which the PCOC was obligated to adhere. We strongly oppose the April 7 Plan B as it was initially proposed.

### **East Option Plan B**

We propose the following compromise alternative, or Plan B, which we call the East Option:

- Move Oppenheim's "Thinking Caps" from its proposed siting on the west side of the plaza, to the east side of the plaza, where Hans Peter Kuhn's "Lightfield" is currently proposed.
- Move Kuhn's "Lightfield" onto the plaza at the south entrance of the east pavilion -- the smaller plaza with an entrance from Euclid that is between the tent (soon to be parking structure) and the east conference pavilion entrance. This option was recently the subject of an on-site conversation between Mike Ross, CEO of the PCOC, Terry LeMoncheck and Stephen Nowlin, in which Mr. Ross encouraged and endorsed the placement of artworks on that plaza. With construction planning for the small plaza and new parking structure underway, it is timely to move forward now with adjustments that will accommodate the Kuhn sculpture while meeting all City Codes. (See attached image.)

### **Impact of East Option on Stakeholders**

***This solution seeks to provide the Commission and City Council with a true compromise, through which they can communicate to each stakeholder that they have heard and acted with sensitivity to a full range of concerns. It would grant to each stakeholder something of what they desire, and in turn ask each for some level of sacrifice with respect to their ideal scenarios -- all for the greater good.***

***Specifically:***

#### **• Pasadena Heritage and its supporters:**

Sightlines have been cited as a major concern of Pasadena Heritage. While we do not think the argument its members and supporters have put forth is defensible, it does not mean it is any less important to them. We do acknowledge that in the original Plan A the first view of the Civic Auditorium by pedestrians and automobiles approaching the Convention Center from the west and traveling on one-way Green Street, would be momentarily blocked by the placement of

Oppenheim's "Thinking Caps" on the west side of the plaza. The East Option's relocation of "Thinking Caps" to the east removes this temporary blockage and provides a consistency of view, thus expressing sensitivity to the concerns of Pasadena Heritage and their supporters. Additionally, by reducing the number of sculptures on the plaza from two to one, any lingering concerns over alleged sightline disruptions from other vantage points are significantly obviated.

- **Pasadena Center Operating Company:**

The East Option addresses the PCOC's concern over preserving free-flow space for Convention Center activities, by reducing the overall square-footage dedicated to sculpture on the plaza by 50%, through removal and relocation of Kuhn's "Lightfield." Further, as the piece remaining on the plaza, Oppenheim's "Thinking Caps" is not a block-solid artwork, but has an open design that allows foot and event traffic to flow through its sculptural elements. The relocation of Kuhn's "Lightfield" also activates a corollary space on the Convention Center campus, a concept that has been embraced by PCOC.

- **Supporters of Kuhn-Oppenheim/the Arts Community/the Public:**

The proposed East Option preserves a single iconic work of art by an internationally respected artist on the central plaza for one of Pasadena's newest and most public of spaces. It sends the message that Pasadena is a progressive city that values its symbols of both the past and the future, and that it proactively embraces the presence of stimulating public art to enrich the lives of all its citizens.

- **Arts & Culture Commission/Cultural Affairs Division:**

The East Option embraces the thoughtful and arduous three-year process that resulted in the selection of works by Dennis Oppenheim and Hans Peter Kuhn and reaffirms the integrity, credibility and professionalism of the Arts & Culture Commission and Cultural Affairs Division. The expenditure of nearly \$150,000 in the initial process is salvaged, thus preserving the City's investment in high-quality artworks. It negates the potential legal problem for the City brought about by the advance made on Hans Peter Kuhn's commission prior to the approval of that commission by City Council.

### **A New Selection Process**

In the event that City Council –instead of choosing Plan A or an equitable Plan B that retains the Kuhn and Oppenheim artworks – decides that the PCOC is entitled to have an amended artist selection process, there are strong feelings in the arts community that a new selection process:

- should be of no less quality than the initial process;

- should be initiated by the distribution of a Request for Qualifications that embodies the priorities and goals of the Art at Pasadena Center planning document;
- should be fully financed by the PCOC from its own funds in order to preserve the 1% funds available for commissioning the highest quality artworks; and
- should provide for both the Hans Peter Kuhn and Dennis Oppenheim artworks to be reconsidered – as suggested by City Council – in the event that a new selection process does not result in the identification and selection of artworks of comparable aesthetic value.

We all thank you for your consideration of these proposals and for your hard and dedicated work as members of the Arts & Culture Commission. We look forward to the possibility of a future meeting of the Public Arts Subcommittee at which we might have the opportunity of discussing with you the merits of the East Option and our commitment to seeing this proposal offered to City Council in the near future.