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# WEEKLY

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in the arts  
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# Gateway to the arts

Build something organic, not cheesy, please

By Maria Phelan



lease forgive Jack Solomon if his zeal seems a little much for a sculpture project that has yet to get underway.

Solomon, the chairman of S2 Art Group, is also a board member of the Las Vegas Sculpture Park Foundation, the organization charged with bringing to life the Boulder Plaza Sculpture Park. For the park's first foray into public art, Solomon has commissioned a major installation—he's charged the Israeli sculptor and painter Yaacov Agam with capturing the light and energy of Las Vegas.

Jack Solomon, of S2 Art Group, makes for a nice portrait.

The sculpture park is one of two major sculptural installations currently planned for the arts district—the other is a set of “gateways” to the arts district at locations just west of Charleston Boulevard and Las Vegas Boulevard, and near Commerce or Main Streets. The city has released an international request for design submissions, and both the gateway and the Agam installation are expected to be complete within the next two years. And while one aims to let visitors know they've entered the arts district, the other carries a far loftier goal—bringing visitors to the valley for the sole purpose of seeing art.

Cindy Funkhouser, owner of the Downtown antique shop the Funk House and founder of First Friday, says the addition of a series of gateways to the arts district will be good for the area.

“It lets people know when they're entering the arts district, and that's important,” she says.

Beyond her desire to see gateways established at the entrances to the arts district, Funkhouser also hopes the selection committee will choose a “really cool” design.

She's not the only one hoping. Other gallery owners have expressed doubts about the city's gateway plan—they don't want to see an organic, urban feel eschewed in favor of a theme-driven or superficial design.

“I think they're trying to do the right thing, but a lot of times the city does these things, and they just end up



...looking cheesy," one Downtown gallery owner says.

Michael Ogilvie, the gateway project coordinator, says the design won't be based on a predetermined aesthetic, unlike the nearby Fremont East Entertainment district, which is also experiencing renovation and redevelopment efforts (think oodles of vintage neon) at the behest of the city.

"The art should manifest the idea of a gateway, and be of a welcoming nature," Ogilvie says. "It should symbolize the area. And it should really be something memorable."

After the May 18 proposal deadline, the committee will narrow the field to 10 to 20 finalists whose proposals will be publicly displayed at open meetings. Ultimately, the field will be narrowed to three to five finalists, and those individuals or teams will be invited to Las Vegas to present a series of lectures.

Though the project aims to boost the local art scene, Ogilvie says the call for artists won't be limited to locals, and preference won't be shown to local artists.

"It's an international call," he says. "Preference will only be shown to the artist who is most qualified."

The total amount to be awarded for the gateway design and construction is somewhat negotiable, but Ogilvie expects it won't exceed \$450,000.

Local sculptor and painter Nicholas Price has created public art pieces displayed across the Valley, including a sculpture in front of the Bank of America building Downtown. He says he has considered submitting a design proposal, though he has doubts that his work is what the city is looking for.

He also has doubts about the project's budget. While half a million dollars might seem like a decent chunk of change for a public art project of this scale, Price says it can amount to mere pennies for the artist(s) involved.

"Sometimes when you hear about projects like this, and they're paying \$100,000 or \$200,000 or \$450,000, it sounds like a lot of money, but when you cut all the costs out and you actually

look at what the artist gets, a lot of the time they get a very small portion of that," Price says. "A lot of times a large portion of the money goes to the contractors who help build or install the work, people other than the artist."

The as-yet-unnamed Agam installation is meant to anchor the Las Vegas Sculpture Park, and as part of Solomon's vision will be the first of three "gardens" to eventually fill the park, with the remaining two gardens also featuring the work of internationally known artists. Like Agam's many other kinetic works—his projects grace Dizengoff Square in Tel Aviv, Israel, the Las Defense district in Paris, France, and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.—this one will be designed to give each visitor a different view depending on their location within the installation, which will consist of 36 colorful glass pillars, each 18 feet high and lit from within by laser light. The installation is meant to be walked through, and Solomon estimates that between 250 and 300 people will be able to walk inside the work at one time.

"It will be an art experience that is truly unique," he says.

The sculpture park will run the length of Boulder Street, from Main Street to Charleston Boulevard. Solomon says the Agam installation will cost about \$4.5 million, and in order to finance the project, he plans to bring public and private funding together. He says the Las Vegas Sculpture Park Foundation will receive about \$1.5 million from the city of Las Vegas, and the foundation plans to privately raise another \$3 million to pay for the work.

And Solomon believes the installation will have enough cachet to bring tourists to Las Vegas primarily to look at art.

"I think people from all over the world will want to be a part of it. It will be a work of art unlike anything else in the world. ... This will be a huge attraction for visitors and tourists who want to see art." **LVAD**

**'The art should manifest the idea of a gateway, and be welcoming.'**