

# Deja vu: Building planners reject sculptor's project

By Rivers Janssen  
Emerald Reporter

What if Michelangelo was told he wouldn't be needed for the Sistine Chapel after all?

"What?" he would exclaim. "But I've cleared my schedule for the next year. I've turned down countless other projects in anticipation. You can't do this to me. This is how I make my living."

"Sorry Mike," the Chapel commission would say. "We just don't have the money right now. We liked it. But we just can't do it."

But everyone knows the Sistine Chapel was completed, and fortunately, nobody had to deal with an irate Michelangelo.

But a local sculptor wasn't so lucky with his piece.

Bill Harsey, a University graduate, is feeling very hurt and confused right now. He certainly wouldn't be so bold as to compare himself to Michelangelo, but he is a hard-working metal sculptor ready to work on his most important project to date. But unlike Michelangelo, he was denied his Sistine Chapel.

Harsey was to put up an elaborate metal gate outside the

new Bowerman building next to Hayward Field. The Bowerman Foundation indicated \$20,000 would be spent on the sculpture, which is the legal limit for Oregon's 1 percent for art law.

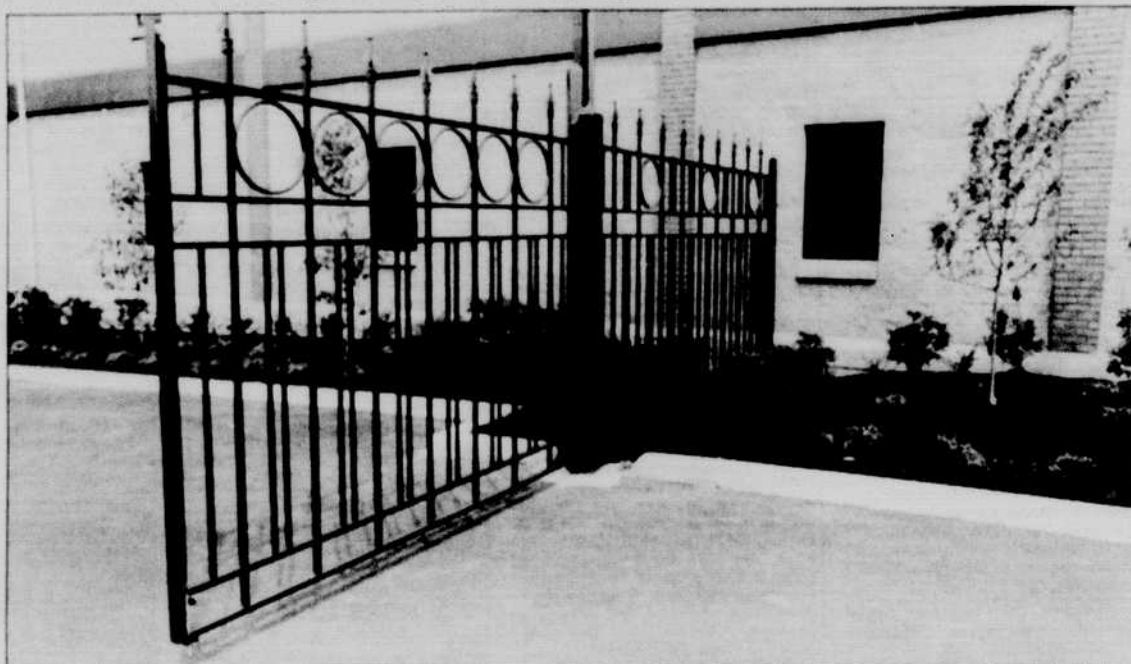
Harsey's plans crumbled in March, however, when he was notified the project would not go through because of cost overruns. An angry Harsey, who said he never believed the project to be stipulative, was left hanging.

"It's an extraordinary situation," he said. "I was just trying to give great dignity to Mr. Bowerman and his building."

The controversy comprises two separate issues. First, the Bowerman Foundation rejected his work after apparently committing the project to him. And second, the Bowerman Foundation circumvented the Oregon arts law, which is why the commission ordered \$20,000 for art in the first place.

The Oregon law reads as follows: "The appropriations for the construction of any state building in the amount of \$100,000 or more shall include 1 percent of direct construction costs of the project for acquisition of works of art."

The Bowerman building cost



A \$3,700 gate was put up at the recently completed Bowerman building. It was a 'cheap replacement' for the project originally planned for \$20,000, under the Oregon 1 percent for art law.

around \$2.1 million to complete, so \$20,000 was about the right amount for the project. But because Bill Bowerman wanted to build the building on his own terms, using his choice of contractors, he had the University Foundation, a private, non-profit agency, lease the land from the State Board of Higher Education.

That means the Bowerman building is not a state building. It is privately funded and is not on public lands.

Nobody disputes that. The Bowerman Foundation found a way to circumvent the law. But soon the building will be turned over to the University, and will be taxpayer supported and taxpayer operated. It will, in effect, be a public building.

Apparently, the Bowerman

foundation wanted the sculpture despite its ability to get around the arts law. Bowerman had asked the Lane Arts Council to conduct an artists' competition, from which Harsey was selected. But it didn't work that way.

The Lane Arts Council has done its best in Harsey's support. John Rose, a council board member, said the University has no excuse not to follow the law.

"We want the University to show the kind of integrity that other businesses around town have done," Rose said, citing Eugene Water and Electric Board as having been respectful of the arts law. "The University just kind of failed," he said.

Rose believes University President Myles Brand should

step in. The council did indeed send a letter to Brand asking him to intervene, but his response indicated support for the Bowerman Foundation.

Harsey believes he was grievously wronged. He said the Bowerman Foundation spent \$2,500 alone on the search for an artist, that he was selected, and that a prospectus was drawn up for the work, which he said acts as a contract in the art world.

Harsey had to take up work as a welder for a hydraulics manufacturer. Once he was told the project was his, Harsey stopped pursuing projects. He turned down several, thinking he wouldn't have the time. Now he has more than enough time.

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