

International Outdoor Museum of Sculpture

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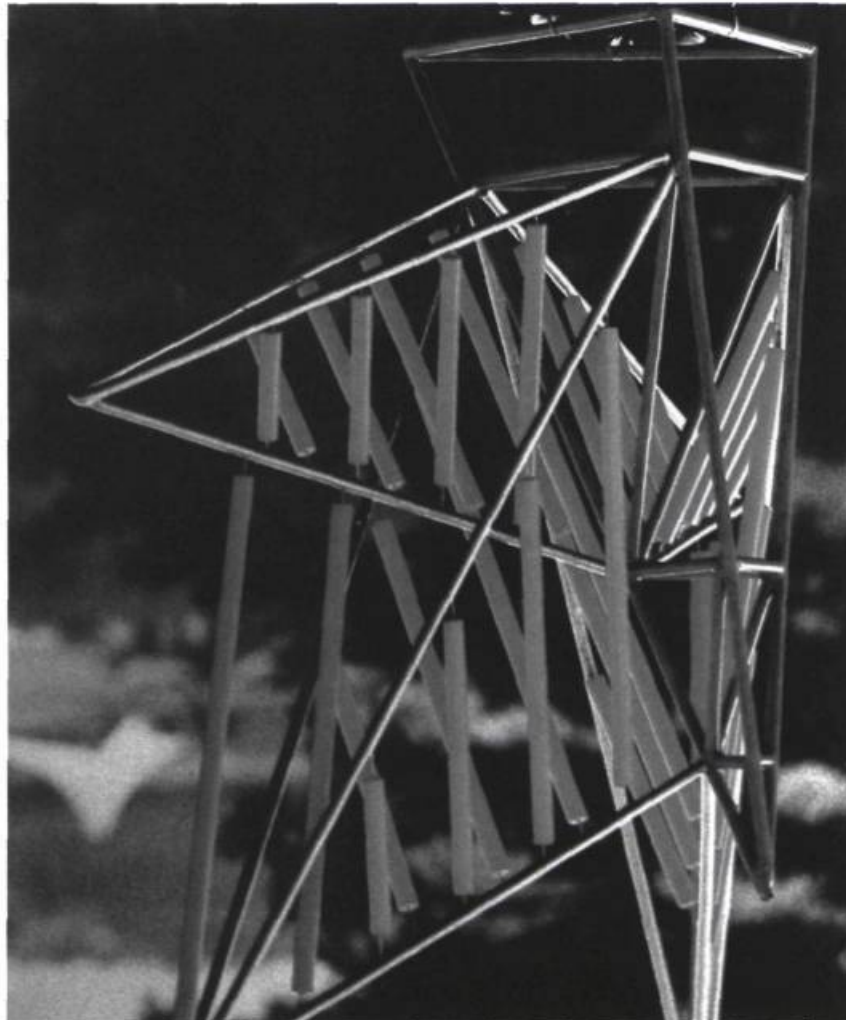
LEE MONTGOMERY

International Outdoor Museum of Sculpture

Art, particularly large public sculpture, is little known and less understood in Canada. In contrast to the traditions of Europe, with public monuments to national heroes in the central plazas, North America has been largely bereft of tributes using this art form. Throughout this century, sculpture has moved from the central plaza into parks. Among others, in Japan are the Sapporo and Hakone Open-Air Museums, in Sweden, the Rottneros Park, and in the United States, the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, Laumeier Sculpture Park. In Western Canada however, although individual sculptures and festivals can be found, there is a distinct lack of parks dedicated to the exhibition of public sculpture. In order to cultivate understanding and appreciation of sculpture, these venues are needed.

In 1986, sculptor Rafael (Falo) Moreno proposed to the town of Pincher Creek, Alberta, the establishment of the Pincher Creek International Outdoor Museum of Sculpture (O.M.S.). The Museum was to give provincial, national and international sculptors the opportunity to experiment with alternate sources of energy and high technology to develop sculptures. In the Pincher Creek area, with winds up to 150km, one which boasts the most hours of sunshine in Canada, and with water resources flowing from the nearby Rocky Mountains, sculptors would be encouraged to submit kinetic entries utilizing those natural resources.

To establish a base for the O.M.S., Mr. Moreno designed three sculptures, Cottonwood



Falo, (Rafael F. Moreno), *Butterfly*.

Tree, Pine Tree, and the Butterfly which use wind energy to move and produce electricity for their own lighting. These sculptures were to be the initial sculptures of the outdoor park, in and around the Town of Pincher Creek.

The O.M.S. is a holistic concept, combining art and technology, education, the environment and the economic base of tourism. For art and sculpture, the O.M.S. would serve as a promotion vehicle to a national and international audience. It would also provide the impetus for art-related spin-off industries through the production of models, souvenirs and publications. Technologically, the O.M.S. would stimulate developments in the alternate energy and high technology fields through the requirements for sculpture designs. Activities in both these fields give an incredibly rich background for public and specialized seminars and conferences.

In concurrence with the growing concern over the environment, the O.M.S. gives artistic acclamation to our natural resources. It can therefore assist in the development of studies on the harmonious interaction of technology and the environment through art.

A strong economic base is vital to the vibrant continuation of any arts initiative. Tourism, fast becoming the number one growth industry, can provide the O.M.S. with support. The tourism market is drawn towards art and culture, the outdoors, educational

opportunities and participatory activities. Unique and distinctive attractions are also on the leading edge of successful tourism destinations. The O.M.S. is a major innovative tourism generator with a limitless potential for growth. It would not close in the off-season. Instead, the kinetic sculptures would lure tourists with a constantly changing array, responding to the different conditions of winter, spring, summer and fall.

The viability of the O.M.S. was supported in product and marketing research conducted by the O.M.S. Society during the summer of 1988. A survey conducted found that a majority of respondents were enthused about the idea of large sculptures in an outdoor setting; most of those people would travel to see sculptures done by international artists. Alternate energy was also of great interest to a very high percentage of those surveyed.

Despite the seeming infallibility of Mr. Moreno's O.M.S. concept, the state of art and sculpture in Western Canada has not been conducive to development. In such an undertaking, the support of the local residents and government agencies is essential for the initial stages. Unfortunately, convincing both locals and the government of a new innovative arts project is not as easy as selling a widgit. Sculpture is not seen as an important economic asset, nor is its value appreciated. Further, as in any field, ignorance leads to misunderstanding, and people are not aware of what is involved in building a sculpture, and even less of the needs of a sculpture park.

Mr. Moreno has undergone a number of trials of determination towards the goal of educating the public and creating a market that would appreciate sculpture. Following the preparation of the O.M.S. proposal and numerous presentations to local citizens and politicians, Mr. Moreno was granted seed money from the town. This demonstration of local public support was to give the project credibility for funding applications to granting agencies. These grants were to be used to build the three sculptures, Cottonwood Tree, Pine Tree, and the Butterfly, as working models, nine to fifteen feet high.

Moreno built the Cottonwood Tree out of poly-chromatic steel and it was erected in 1987. Public response was notably inspired. Approximately

twenty protest sculptures sprang up on the lawns of residents, constituting the first popular art exhibition ever in Pincher Creek and probably in Alberta. Some residents pursued the provincial government, insisting that support for the project be withheld. These protests, along with a reluctance on the part of government bodies to become involved in anything new or slightly controversial had a devastating consequence on Mr. Moreno's attempts to find matching funds to the town's seed money for the building of the other two sculptures. He visited dozens of government agencies in search of funding and submitted numerous proposals and applications. Financial assistance for the sculptures was unavailable for any number of reasons: it would fall under the mandate of another department; no funding was available for such projects, retroactive equity was ineligible for matching funds, the project combined too many aspects (and too many mandates of government departments).

Finally, an employment grant was approved, although the first payment of operating monies was not received until the project was half over. Nonetheless, mailing lists, information packages, surveys, archives, investigation and research were complied in the four months granted. The response and enthusiasm was astounding and information and encouragement was received from all over the world. By the time the project ended, the O.M.S. was gaining prominence and was listed as the only Canadian sculpture park in the U.N.E.S.C.O. library of reference. Government granting structures made it impossible to receive further on-going employment funding, although the Society finally received \$1,250. in promotional monies through the Alberta Arts Foundation. Without staff or a source of the three - to - one equity required under the grant, the O.M.S. still intends to undertake a promotional campaign.

In Pincher Creek, Mr. Moreno has been the target of letters to the Editor and slanderous remarks from individual Town Council members. For two years, the sculpture controversy has raged with the effect of greatly increasing the awareness of public sculpture in rural Alberta.

The silent majority, and sometimes the more vocal one, has expressed its appreciation of the Cottonwood Tree and has come to welcome the O.M.S. concept. Unfortunately, local politicians prefer to publicly slander and undermine Mr. Moreno personally, and the O.M.S. as an extension.

Although the process of first creating a market for sculpture and then developing a sculpture park is extremely frustrating in Western Canada, Mr. Moreno has had a few glimmers of hope for the future. Children are instinctively drawn to the sculpture models; they are fascinated by their kinetic properties and bright colors. Their dawning appreciation and awareness of sculpture was demonstrated by a seven-year old Pincher Creek boy who, after working alone a long time, emerged to present his mother with the fruits of his labor: "Look mom, I built a sculpture". His mother commented that the child would never even have known what sculpture was, were it not for Faló.

Faló, (Rafael F. Moreno), *Cottonwood Tree*.

