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**Downtown chisels a niche for sculpture \*In a couple of months, the work of about a dozen sculptors will begin popping up in such sites as Fleet Center, One Citizens Plaza, the Providence River and Kennedy Plaza.**

[METRO Edition]

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Author: JOHN CASTELLUCCI Journal-Bulletin Staff Writer

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#### Document Text

A fountain created by Fire Department pumper trucks. A chain-link canopy offering a wry comment on the Rhode Island Training School. A chair made of barbed wire.

To all the other downtown attractions, add sculpture.

In a couple of months, the work of about a dozen contemporary sculptors will begin popping up in such locations as Fleet Center, the lobby of One Citizens Plaza, the Providence River and the northeast corner of Kennedy Plaza.

It will be the largest exhibition of public sculpture in the history of the city - part of a plan to enliven downtown by transplanting many of the art works normally seen during the summer in Roger Williams Park.

The idea, according to Parks Department program coordinator Bob Rizzo, is to have the park's annual Convergence art festival overlap with the 16th International Sculpture Conference, which is scheduled to take place at the Rhode Island Convention Center June 6 to June 9.

About 40 sculptures - more than twice the number last year - are being assembled for Convergence IX.

Most of the art works will be installed in the park, but some 12 to 15 will be placed within walking distance of the sculpture conference, which is being held in Providence for the first time. Rizzo said he and others - in particular Roger Mandle, president of the Rhode Island School of Design - worked hard to persuade the International Sculpture Center to book the convention center. Mandle offered the use of RISD classrooms and studios while the 1,000 or so art lovers and artists expected to attend the conference are in town.

Placing pieces of sculpture near the convention center is intended to make them more accessible to the sculpture conference. But the temporary exhibition of artworks in places like Old Stone Plaza - where Neptune's Horn, a galvanized steel construction by Jonathan M. Kirk of Utica, N.Y., will be on display - is bound to have the effect of

making sculpture visible to all Rhode Islanders, not just art-lovers and aesthetes.

Isn't it likely, Rizzo was asked, that people will see a lot of art work they dislike?

"Absolutely," Rizzo said. "They'll see a mix, and that's what I intend to put out there. Everything from real figurative (representational) stuff to conceptual work. I'm trying to present as wide a spectrum as possible."

The Convergence IX art festival is being financed by \$20,000 from the city and \$10,000 from private donors. Some of the money will be spent on musicians and sound equipment for three concerts in Waterplace Park - June 1, June 6 and June 8.

Up to \$2,000 per piece is being spent to commission works for the art festival. Up to \$500 per piece is being spent to move some of the larger art works downtown or to the park.

None of the works will be permanent. A few will be downright ephemeral.

For instance, First Fire, an environmental art work created for the 1995 First Night celebration by Providence artist Barnaby Evans, will be recreated and retitled Second Fire in the Providence River on the abutments of the old Crawford Street Bridge. Duration: a few days.

The Fireman's Fountain, a temporary water sculpture that Hardu Keck, provost of the Rhode Island School of Design, first created more than 20 years ago using a pair of pumper trucks, will be reprised over the river near the RISD Auditorium, where it was last staged. Duration: 20 minutes.

Convergence IX is expected to be over by Labor Day. But most of the art works in the festival will bear around long enough for the man in the street to start liking them. Or so Rizzo hopes.

"The idea of the public being able to instantly accept public art is a bit of a stretch. People need time to get used to it," he said.

CAPTION: ARTFUL PURPOSE: Chris D. Grossert, 14, of Providence tries out Chair by Shaun Cassidy at Roger Williams Park.

Journal-Bulletin / CRAWFORD SAMUELSON

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