



Cultural Arts Programs

Cultural Arts & Marketing Division

TO: Public Art Advisory Committee

ATTN: Judy Moran and Andrew Woodd, Co-chairs

FROM: Steven Huss, Cultural Arts Manager / Public Art Coordinator

DATE: June 4, 2012

RE: Informational Report: "Meknes" Sculpture by Benbow Bullock

SUMMARY

This report presents the results of research into the history and ownership of "Meknes", a sculpture currently installed in the street median between 20th and Harrison streets and Lakeside Drive by Lake Merritt, for the consideration of the Public Art Advisory Committee (PAAC).

BACKGROUND

The City of Oakland is developing the Lakeside Green Streets (Snow Park) improvement project beside Lake Merritt. The project will include a new artwork commission managed by the Public Art Program. The scope of improvements will include the area that is now the median at 20th Street, Harrison Street and Lakeside Drive. The existing sculpture "Meknes" at this location must be moved to accommodate the new construction.

FINDINGS

"Meknes" is a three-part sculpture by the late Benbow Bullock. Fabricated in 1985, the work is based on a geometric tile pattern used in Moroccan architecture. It measures 8' high by 15' long by 6' deep, and weighs 1,200 pounds.

Through research, including contact with the artist's daughter Carol Bullock, Public Art staff has determined that "Meknes" is the property of the Oakland Museum of California Foundation, and has apparently been on a long-term loan to the City of Oakland. The work had been the property of Shorenstein Realty Investors Three, L.P., which donated it in 1998 to the Museum Foundation. Arrangements were then made to install the sculpture at a prominent public location. Jim Ryugo, Zone Manager with Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services in 1998, coordinated the installation of the sculpture at its current site, by the shore of Lake Merritt and in front of the Kaiser Building at 20th and Harrison streets.

During development of the plans for the Lakeside Green Streets project improvements, Public Art staff tentatively proposed relocating "Meknes" to another location near Lake Merritt, and volunteered to identify potential locations and to assist the Oakland Museum of California with resiting the work in a public place, or bringing it onto Museum grounds, if the Museum chose.

With the information on the sculpture's history and noting its ownership by the Museum Foundation, the Museum's Acquisitions Committee met in May 2012 to review "Meknes" and consider options. Ultimately, the Acquisitions Committee decided not to bring "Meknes" into the Museum's collection, citing 'the limitations of adding large-scale work in terms of care and location',



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and to seek another alternative. Museum staff stated that, unless the sculpture is part of the collection, the Museum cannot insure it. Therefore, the Museum is unlikely to be interested in re-siting “Meknes” at a public location on a continuing temporary-loan basis, and would prefer to transfer ownership to the City of Oakland. If the City does not wish to accept the sculpture, the Museum may exercise the option to return it to the artist’s heir(s) or to sell or otherwise dispose of the work.

Public Art staff notes that accepting this sculpture as a gift would have cost implications for the City for reinstallation and ongoing maintenance. Consideration of the work for potential inclusion in the City’s public art collection should also include the context of the existing collection and of the program’s and the PAAC’s goals for development of public art in Oakland.

REQUEST

Staff requests that the PAAC review the option of acquiring “Meknes” work for the City of Oakland collection. If the Committee elects to consider this gift, staff advises that a Gifts Panel must be convened to review the gift and to make a recommendation to the PAAC and the City Council.

Respectfully submitted,

Steven Huss, Public Art Coordinator