

C O L I N M A T T H E S  
PO Box 510214, Milwaukee, WI 53203  
C o l i n M a t t h e s . c o m  
ColinCMatthes@gmail.com  
414 828 6321

January 14, 2014

RE: Creating the Standard – Part Two, Milwaukee Public Library, Eastside Branch – Exterior Public Art

Dear East Library Public Art Selection Committee,

I am proposing two visually and conceptually distinct projects, *Book Blimp* and *Surveillance Camera Bird Sanctuary*, for the Eastside Library exterior. They were designed to address the themes of community, literature, stories, and learning while creating the opportunity for numerous art experiences to occur along North Avenue and leading to the Cramer Street entrance.

*Book Blimp* will be a 2½'x2½'x6½' blimp that will traverse the 30' span between the two large columns near the main entrance. There will be a hand crank mounted to the north column that a child or adult can turn to move the blimp. It travels on an 11' 2" high stainless steel cable mounted between the columns. Although a manageably sized object, the project is designed to activate a 30' wide by 11' 2" high space with a narrow depth that compliments the architecture of the location.

*Book Blimp* will subvert the common contemporary use of blimps for advertising and instead will look like a patchwork quilt style array of book covers based on community input. At the finalist presentation the jury and audience will be invited to contribute a title of a favorite book. I will hand paint a selection of these book covers on the welded steel blimp (with seams delineating the covers) and protect it with an exterior clear coat.

I was initially concerned with including a kinetic element for an outdoor sculpture designed to last 30 years. I spoke with an engineer and feel assured this will be quite possible. It is important for the blimp to travel safely at a controlled speed so I will use a low-gear crank. The geared mechanism will be encased for safety and durability and the covered awning at this location will help protect the project from the elements. I was concerned about attaching cable to the columns, but after visiting the site and based on my previous experience suspending objects (both as an artist and electrician) it will be possible. I am in contact with and will be hiring a welder, a blacksmith, an engineer, and an exterior painter to primer and finish coat the blimp.

*Surveillance Camera Bird Sanctuary* will activate the sidewalk along the North Avenue side of the library. "Surveillance cameras" will be mounted to the library on the corner of North and Cramer in a fashion similar to many businesses. What makes these "cameras" distinct is they will be hand crafted wooden birdhouses that take the shape of surveillance cameras. An anomaly in the urban landscape these obviously wooden objects will command attention while speaking to the persistence of animals and birds to make do with whatever environment we create. Complicating the project further, hidden spy cameras inside the birdhouses will be recording. Not looking out, but looking in, they will record what happens in the birdhouses.

The birdhouse activity will be displayed on intimately scaled monitors mounted inside the library but facing out the windows on North Ave. This will initially be a live feed, but might become a recording as footage is edited. Monitors documenting the inside of birdhouses will draw pedestrians out of their normal routine and encourage contemplation outside the library. Repurposing surveillance technology to enter a bird's nest while building birdhouses that rely on the language of surveillance provides many potential interpretations.

The challenges for this project include designing a birdhouse for the proper species and troubleshooting potential AV concerns. I will hire an AV technician to assist with the project. I will consult an ornithologist to design a low maintenance birdhouse for the correct species. There is potential for the AV elements to need replacement as well as a need for minimal birdhouse maintenance.

In addition to inviting community participation, it is essential for these projects to be distinctive from but not compete with the architecture and flow of visitors to the library. By designing projects to be mounted above the viewer there will be an unobstructed path to the library entrance as well as an increased distance and number of locations the art can be viewed from. From a distance the height, color, and shape of *Book Blimp* will encourage people to come closer, it will have visual impact from inside the library, and outside the entrance of the library it will be easily viewed from close up, with the entrant having the option to turn the crank and move the blimp. *Surveillance Camera Bird Sanctuary* will read simply as surveillance cameras from a distance and as the viewer gets closer it will be clear something more is happening. These wooden surveillance cameras may take repeated viewing before they are revealed as birdhouses. The video will offer an intimate educational interaction with the project. Both projects are designed to be viewed over time and reveal new experiences upon each viewing.

If selected, I am planning to work with the MPL staff and the architects to make a final plan for the work and look forward to their input and feedback. These projects are designed to be exciting and accessible enough to engage a general audience while embedding content and questions that invite further thought and exploration. While both speak to general audiences as well as contemporary art audiences, the birdhouses will appeal to those interested in nature, ecology, and surveillance, while the blimp project is directed at the mechanically minded, literature aficionados, and children. In tandem these projects address the overall East Library themes, including community input by asking for participation in picking book covers and community participation to move the *Book Blimp*. Literature is addressed in the *Book Blimp*. When I think of stories, I think beyond literature, and imagine these projects as unique enough to be talked about over family dinners, etc. Both projects can serve as learning tools, for example *Surveillance Camera Bird Sanctuary* offers the opportunity to see inside a bird's nest.

I would prefer to complete both projects, but I am open to working with one of the two ideas, *Book Blimp* or *Surveillance Camera Bird Sanctuary*. Each idea was originally planned to activate both the Cramer entrance and North Avenue and was only scaled back when I decided there was an opportunity to employ two projects. This is an example where I look forward to working with the MPL staff, the architects, and the jury to make a final decision on what version of the project or projects are most applicable.

## Image List

1. In this image the *Book Blimp* is viewed from the vantage point of someone walking to the main entrance of the library. Notice on the left hand column the hand crank. By turning this crank the blimp will travel along the cables spanning the 30' distance between columns. This image also begins to communicate the visual presence of *Book Blimp* when viewed from the library interior.
2. This is a composite image of *Book Blimp*. The upper half is an approximation of how the project will look when being viewed from the Northwest corner of North and Cramer. A detail of the *Book Blimp* takes up the lower half of the image. These are example book covers. The actual book cover references will be curated from the input of the audience and jury attending the presentation on February 4<sup>th</sup>.
3. This image is of *Surveillance Camera Bird Sanctuary*. It is installed on the library exterior at the corner of North and Cramer. The surveillance camera birdhouses will be hand crafted from wood. Notice the hole at the front of the object where the bird enters. A silhouette of a bird leaving the house has been placed to draw attention to the entrance.
4. A second image of *Surveillance Camera Bird Sanctuary*. This image is looking north from North Avenue on the corner of North and Cramer. In addition to seeing the surveillance camera birdhouses you can now see the monitors playing back the video from inside the birdhouse. The placement of the monitors would be inside the library facing out. The exact location of the monitors is yet to be determined.











