

i see what you mean:

LOCAL ARTIST LAWRENCE ARGENT GIVES DENVER A NEW MASCOT

A request for qualifications from a panel of judges placed artist Lawrence Argent among the finalists chosen to propose a design for a new sculpture located outside of the Colorado Convention Center. Among the requirements was that the piece convey to the viewer the experience of greater Colorado.

"What would that be?" Argent challenges. He is juggling family, teaching, business, and work on at least three other public pieces, but manages to fit me in for a chat about "I See What You Mean," the forty-foot blue bear that has since taken its position peering into the Colorado Convention Center.

"Usually (the area is expressed by) silhouettes of mountains or something corny and kitsch like that. How do we get people to think of Colorado, what are some other possi-

bilities?" he muses. "Wild broncos running up the stadium steps? Is there one Remington sculpture? The traditional West portrayed in a painterly fashion?"

To Argent, as to many, the Convention Center was mysterious. Passing it on Speer he often thought, "What's going on in there?" That curiosity, what Argent describes as "that inquisitive component," planted the seed for multifarious questions. Argent found the purpose of the Convention Center intriguing, remarking on the people for whom it exists: "Why they come here, what they're seeing - some entity has brought these people here from all over the country and parts of the globe!" Argent wanted to capture the idea of the varied experience represented in such a place.

To portray greater Colorado Argent extended his view more deeply than the icon of the silhouetted Rockies: he reflected on what was

contained within them. The fauna of Colorado, the creatures displaced by those of us who have convened in the city and suburbs, drew Argent's unrelenting focus. "They became participants in this exploration of what Colorado is and people's experience of what it is," Argent says of the area's wildlife.

Compelled to explore this avenue, he found himself drawn to the fauna of the area and their likenesses sold throughout the mountains and outside the city: large wooden renderings of the area's fauna, bought to add to a person's home décor. "These chainsawed animals wouldn't exist unless people purchased them." Argent bought toys for his kids to play with, shaped like bears, deer, elk. He examined and contemplated the animals until he decided on the bear, the most powerful of them all.

But he didn't stop there. Art, which is commonly viewed by an audience, offered Argent




another assumption to challenge. He created a piece that was integrated with the surrounding architecture, interacting with its environment, and which was, actually, the viewer itself. He wanted it to convey a conversation between the art and someone or something else, the other of which has already had the piece's experience. "Putting them together, displacement, fauna, inquisitiveness, came together in a package that needed to be site-specific," Argent explains.

"I came up with the idea of this bear," Argent tells me, with the hint of a laugh in his voice, "That would be sticking its butt out, peering into the window forty feet high." Despite the serious consideration that went into the concept of "I See What You Mean," like all his pieces there is "a flavor of humor that exists" around it.

The construction of such a work is, as one might suspect, not an easy thing. The bear was built in California by Kreysler, a company of specialized fabricators who have served other artists who work in such large scale, such as Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen. Five years ago, Argent divulges, such a thing couldn't have been achieved,

and if it were it would have cost at least twice as much. A documentary film of the process is being made by Just Media, which Argent feels is an important component, as the piece "crosses the boundaries between art and architecture, (and) in a way that doesn't fit normal circumstance."

Argent has lived in Denver since 1993 and has produced a great array of paintings, drawings, installations, sculpture, and public work projects. His large blades of perpetually-green grass mark the boundaries of Englewood, his whispering benches offer a place for weary students to repose (and become inspired by the lectures that play over speakers when a person comes into contact with a bench) on the University of Denver's campus outside the Ritchie Wellness Center, and his deceptively solid marble pillows are stacked outside an apartment building at 1985 Pennsylvania Street. These works are all familiar sights to area residents. With "I See What You Mean," however, Argent has created a piece that will reach not only locals, but the world. 

By L. Corwin Christie

↓ **CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT -**

1st and 2nd photo: Multi-artist show "Three Dimensions," seen at the William Havu Gallery in Denver in February and March of this year.

"Pillow Talk," completed in 2001, which can be seen at 1985 Pennsylvania St.

"Viere," completed in 2003, a four-part public work that was part of the City of Englewood's Monumentation Project and can be seen in four sites in the city.

"Whispers," completed in 2001, at the south end of the Ritchie Wellness Center on the campus of the University of Denver.

Computer generated model of "I See What You Mean," completed in 2005 and installed at the Colorado Convention Center.

