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Janet Zweig's *Pedestrian Drama*: New Public Art on East Wisconsin Avenue

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By Curtis L. Carter (by-author-146-1.html)



Public art poses a unique challenge to artists because it must satisfy widely diverse interests across an entire community. Many public art efforts fail because they represent a personal vision of an artist developed independently of community involvement. Public art is most successful when based on shared meanings between the artist and the community.

Janet Zweig's *Pedestrian Drama*, located near the east end of Wisconsin Avenue, strives admirably to address these concerns. Five animated narratives featuring work, play and daily life struggles are mounted on separate interactive kiosks attached to five existing light poles. These intimately scaled animations invite passers-by to engage "one on one" with the images.

Each kiosk enacts a cyclical narrative in color using old-style mechanical flip-board technology formerly used in train station signage. The images are generated by contemporary digital technology triggered by motion detectors as visitors approach. Each kiosk has three movable "flap units" with 60 images per unit, for a total of 900 images spread across the five kiosks.

The animations are based on ideas submitted by Milwaukeeans at the invitation of the artist, and from conversations among the participating artistic groups. Apart from its emphasis on pedestrian life and incorporation of seasonal changes, the work has no overriding theme. Rather, the artist's intent is to provide an open textured format that allows for future changes in its image content as the piece evolves over time.

Community participation began with the selection of an advisory committee of local citizens, including representatives of the arts and business, as well as city and state officials. The committee was unanimous in selecting Zweig's proposal. In all, some 200 community members—performers, idea contributors, film crew, engineers, fabricators and others—were involved in the project.

Judging from the responses of passers-by who stopped to view the piece on its second day after completion, the project may well turn out to achieve its aim of enlivening pedestrian activity on East Wisconsin. One family of six paused to examine the piece in some detail. When asked for their opinion, the response was, "It's fantastic!" Others, including some of the artists who had worked with Zweig, were seen excitedly texting their fellow artists and friends to come see the piece.