

The Arts

John Henry's big sculptures go for the 'wow' factor

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'Chevron Blue' is a 51-foot sculpture by John Henry, on display now at the Orlando Museum of Art. (Roberto Gonzalez, Orlando Sentinel / December 2, 2008)

Unknown painters Paul Cezanne and [Claude Monet](#) had to pay for their own exhibitions in Paris in the 1870s.

In 21st-century America, not so much has changed. When John Henry's colossal metal sculptures turned up at the [Orlando Museum of Art](#) and six other Florida museums this fall, it's because Henry himself arranged to have them installed and shown.

"It's the only way to do it," says Henry, an artist whose massive works have been displayed across the United States and Europe. "No one else knows how to do it. Museums couldn't do it; galleries certainly

couldn't."

Henry's 51-foot Chevron Blue and his 21-foot Traveler were installed in early November in Loch Haven Park -- Chevron Blue just south of the museum building along Mills Avenue and Traveler on the plaza near the museum's front doors. An indoor exhibition, "Five Decades of Sculpture: A Retrospective," opens Saturday at the museum and will run through Feb. 15.

At the same time, six other Florida cities, from Miami to Tallahassee to Naples, are opening Henry shows of their own. They're all part of "Drawing in Space: The Peninsula Project," an exhibition that brings new meaning to the idea of giving large outdoor sculptures a lot of space.

And they all came about because Henry, like such other contemporary artists as sculptor Mark di Suvero and the environmental-installation artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude, raised the money to install his pieces and handled all the logistics, from finding the participating museums to hiring the cranes and the flat-bed trucks.

That's good news for art museums trying to show large-scale works and, at the same time, contain their costs, says Hansen Mulford, curator at the Orlando Museum of Art. The museum has wanted to install sculpture in Loch Haven Park, he says, mentioning the traveling exhibit of sculpture in [Winter Park's Central Park](#) two years ago.

"We have this great park setting," he says. "But it's very expensive. Projects like those [in Winter Park] cost hundreds of thousands of dollars."

Raising funds to raise art

Henry and his collaborators raised a reported \$1.4 million to mount his show across the state. Much of the money came from private collectors and sources such as Miami's Arison Arts Foundation, and some from corporations such as Chattanooga, Tenn.'s See Rock City, Inc., which wanted to support the Chattanooga-based artist.

The idea for a statewide exhibition came about, Henry says, after he had installed three large works at the Laumeier Sculpture Park in St. Louis and had been invited to do an installation on a plaza overlooking the historic city of Florence, Italy. But the space in Florence seemed too constricted for sculpture so large.

"So we began to talk about, 'How do you exhibit large-scale sculpture?' Why not use a whole state?' "

After what he calls "a mass of logistics," the exhibition came together -- first planned for four cities, then stretching to 10, then pulling back to seven. The sculptor's funding went toward gathering all of the sculpture, shipping it to a holding area in Winter Haven, then taking it by truck to the various cities. In Orlando, five of his workers staked out the foundation for Chevron Blue, poured the concrete foundation, erected the piece, bolted it down, sanded it by hand and then recoated it.

The result? Sculpture that's likely to stop you in your tracks.

"All art has to have an emotional punch," says Mulford. "With all of his work, there's a strong emphasis on gesture, with upright forms and bars that jut out, that sweep upward into space. Add monumental size, and you get this soaring feeling."

"If you're not someone who's spent a lot of time looking at abstract sculpture, you're going to get a kind of 'wow' feeling."

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