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Police remove another piece of artist's work

By Ken Keuffel, JOURNAL REPORTER Oct 15, 2009



This piece by artist Mark Jenkins was removed from a tree at Reynolda House.

When Ryan Nieman was walking with his wife on the grounds of Reynolda House recently, he thought he saw a human wrapped in a bag hanging from a tree.

So he called the cops.

The thing in the tree was actually one of Mark Jenkins' contributions to "Inside Out: Artists in the Community II," a yearlong public-art program of the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art.

Police decided last Thursday to remove Jenkins' piece and return it to SECCA, the second time one of Jenkins' works had been taken down since the exhibit began.

In this case, the problem was that signs indicating the piece's connection to SECCA were hard to find, said Martha Wheelock, an assistant city manager involved in public-art projects.

The police, Wheelock said, "were concerned about additional emergency-response calls it would generate. We're going to talk about whether that was the appropriate response. But that is why it was done, from their perspective."

On Sept. 21, Jenkins and several assistants placed a life-size sculpture of a woman in a reclining position atop a billboard at the corner of Eighth and Trade streets. Minutes later, somebody became alarmed and called the police.

Mark Leach, the director of SECCA, said that the center is working "constructively with the city to create a more culturally vibrant community." Both he and Wheelock spoke of placing a Jenkins sculpture at the Clark Campbell Transportation Center on Fifth Street.

"We are looking to partner as much as we can, just making sure the issues get addressed up front," Wheelock said.

Those issues relate mainly to informing city authorities and to protecting the city from the legal risk of placing public art on city property, she said.

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