



**Design Review Board (DRB)  
Staff Report**

*Art Installation*

Case # 19-42: Cossitt Library Public Art  
33 S. Front St  
Memphis, TN 38103

Applicant/Owner: Urban Art Commission  
422 N. Cleveland St  
Memphis, TN 38104

Background: The proposed art installation is a sculpture commissioned by the Urban Art Commission to complement the Cossitt Library, which is currently undergoing major renovations as a part of the national Reimagining the Civic Commons initiative. The firm selected to create the piece, rhiza A+D, is an art, architecture, and fabrication firm based in Portland, Oregon. Although this is the firm's first piece in Memphis, rhiza A+D has created numerous public art installations throughout the Pacific Northwest.

The piece, "Memphis Muse," is a steel sculpture that resembles a mockingbird emerging from a pop-up book. According to the artists, they found inspiration for the piece from W.C. Handy's statement that his music was influenced by "the music of every song bird and all the symphonies of their unpremeditated art." Additionally, the motif of the pop-up book is meant to evoke the pop-up book's role as a child's gateway into the world of reading.

Project Description: The art piece is comprised of two primary components. The cover of the "book," and the mockingbird that emerges from it. All the primary components are constructed of sheets of powder-coated steel.

Each half of the book cover is 5'9" in width, and measures 7'9" in height. The halves are opened at a 125 degree angle, and feature a cutout bark pattern that allow you to see through the sculpture. Within the cover, "pages" shaped like leaves are screwed to an internal frame. These leaf pages feature cutout stencil text, with words inspired by Memphis music (the full text is attached to the application).

The mockingbird is made up of three welded assemblies: the left wing, the right wing, and the body. Each of these assemblies is made up of four vertical steel sheets welded to series of horizontal steel sheets. These three assemblies are bolted together, and also bolted into a concrete footing at the base of sculpture. At its highest point, the mockingbird reaches a height of 13'6".

The sculpture is positioned to the south of the Cossitt's primary entrance, facing northwest (toward the library door). Lighting for the sculpture will be provided by five in-ground light fixtures, which will light the mockingbird element from beneath.

**Staff Report:**

The proposed installation is consistent with the Downtown Memphis Design Guidelines. Among the primary principles set forward in the Design Guidelines are that public projects should achieve excellence in design, promote creativity, and enhance the public realm. Public art is one specific strategy recommended in the guidelines to create a successful public realm.

The proposed piece will be an undeniably unique and creative addition to Downtown's roster of public art. It will help to enhance the public space outside of the Cossitt Library, and draw pedestrians toward this renewed public asset.

**Staff Recommendation:**

**Staff recommends approval of the art installation as proposed.**