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'Rusty container' art questioned



Brazilian artist Jose Resende's work would turn shipping containers into sculpture at Westminster Pier Park. Council is divided on whether to approve installation of the piece. — Image Credit:



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by [Grant Granger - New Westminister News Leader](#)
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One councillor's Picasso is another's eyesore.

New Westminister's participation in the 2014 Vancouver Biennale public art project almost got derailed last week.

Council decided to table its final decision last Monday a few hours after a vote that could have killed it.

The entire council liked two of the proposals for the bi-annual public art exhibition, but were divided over a third. It is the most expensive, and is the legacy piece the city would keep while the other two would disappear within two years.

The controversial piece would see four used shipping containers erected on angles alongside the Timber Wharf at Westminster Pier Park. It would cost \$65,000 and require a barge to install. It's the vision of Brazilian artist Jose Resende, who Coun. Bill Harper says is called the Picasso of South America.

Coun. Chuck Puchmayr hasn't liked the container concept from the start. It's a painful reminder of all the transport trucks that inundate the city, and of how containers spelled the death of the docks in New Westminster.

"I almost thought that was a bit of a twist of the knife to put containers down there," said Puchmayr. "This art is going to be controversial."

The Biennale is proposing the container art become a permanent piece for the city to keep. It would cost \$17,000 to get rid of it and \$75,000 to reinstall somewhere else.

"That's a lot of money for rusting containers," said Puchmayr.

The other two exhibits would be temporary. Blue Trees by Konstantin Dimopolous would see trees on Columbia Street painted with an organic pigment that would last two years at the most. If the city wanted to keep them they could repaint the trees themselves. Artwork from Hugo Franca as part of his Public Furniture/Urban Trees series, which transforms salvaged fallen trees into objects, sculptures and furniture, would be reclaimed by the Biennale after two years. However, New West would have the first opportunity to buy it if Biennale opts to sell it.

"I see how it works. 'It's time to go—whoops, do you want to buy it?' We should be buying it up front rather than renting it," said Puchmayr.

Harper said public art is meant to be controversial. He noted he received hundreds of emails about the Diver Inverse sculpture installed at the Quay a few years ago, but none for Resende's industrial art proposal.

"As a piece of public art it does provoke," said Harper. "You don't have to like it to approve it."

With two members absent, council approved the Blue Trees and Public Furniture exhibits, but rejected the containers in a 3-2 vote in its afternoon working session April 14.

That decision was to be affirmed in the regular council meeting that evening.

But with Coun. Jonathan Coté back in the chambers it appeared a stalemate was inevitable.

Before a final vote council decided to table its decision.

Harper said some councillors didn't realize if one of the projects was rejected all three would be off the table.

"That's something that wasn't clear. The Biennale always presented these things as packages, but never ever said you could take two instead of three," said Harper in an interview.

He recommended the city invite Biennale officials to explain it all to council. Harper views the container concept as appropriate because of the way it comments on the city's past and present.

"It was representative of a lot of things, particularly the history," said Harper.

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