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## Jonathan Borofsky celebrates human connection at the Vancouver Biennale

by JANET SMITH on JUL 14, 2014 at 2:52 PM



STORY PHOTOS



Jonathan Borofsky's Human Structures (64 Figures Connected).

**NO SOONER HAD** Jonathan Borofsky's new public artwork arisen on the False Creek seawall than kids were taking pictures of it with their parents' cellphones and cyclists were stopping to shout out "I love your piece!"

PHOTOS



The veteran artist's 24-foot-tall vision of interlocking, multicoloured figures linking and lifting each other is easy to like and hard to miss. The new work for the Vancouver Biennale is a bright, positive statement about people supporting each other.

The artist famous for erecting everything from the unifying *Molecule Man* on the border between the old East and West Berlin to the celebration of the worker that are the giant *Hammering Man* sculptures in Seattle and Seoul, has held on to his idealism even as—and perhaps because—world events seem to be becoming more calamitous.

"If you see the news every night it's hard to stay totally optimistic—but that doesn't mean that I shouldn't do my best efforts in the public arena toward positivity. When you put out negative energy it just attracts other negative energy," the down-to-earth, Maine-based artist says, surveying his work after three days of installation under the blazing sun.

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“For public art, it’s not up to me to put up my most depressing moments out there. I think a museum is a good place for that because people go there more open to that. In public art, people need something that reflects their own optimism—even if it’s been beaten down.”

The sculpture here, called *Human Structures (64 Figures Connected)*, is part of a series that includes similar pieces in Beijing and San Francisco. And even though its uplifting message seems simple enough, there is more to the work than first meets the eye.

All the figures are human-scale, and though they’re constructed of painted steel, the entire piece has a lightness and openness to it, with enough play of positive and negative space that you can still see the nearby water vista right through it. Borofsky says the forms allude to the pixel, the base unit of all computer imagery, and so it’s also a comment on the structural connections in our digital world.

In addition, the sculpture is highly mathematical—digitally created so it can be enjoyed from every angle, not only from the ground but also from high above. The detail-oriented artist has always drawn from the mathematical as much as the creative parts of his brain—playing with counting to infinity early in his career, but also recording his dreams. He just prefers not to refer to it as a duality in his work these days.

“I like to think they’re amalgamated,” he says of his left and right brain. “I like to think this work brings two opposites into one.”

Biennale founder and director Barrie Mowatt, knowing Borofsky’s work would fit perfectly into this year’s curatorial theme, *Open Borders/Crossroads Vancouver*, invited the artist for a bike tour here back in December. That’s when Borofsky chose his sculpture’s two-year spot in Hinge Park, next to the Olympic Village. (The biennale’s open-air museum runs till 2016, with works installed here in the city and as far away as Squamish, complete with artist residencies and film programs.)

“It’s not a cityscape like some of my pieces, but it’s a beautiful one,” he says of the site. “It’s idealistic and the piece is a bit idealistic.” He adds of the location: “I liked that it was wide open, and don’t you love being in cities where you can breathe? It’s on the water, with boats, and I’ve always been attracted to that.”

Still, Borofsky, who made the sculpture specifically for Vancouver, stresses that its whole point is that it’s not specific to Vancouver. “It’s what’s in common with everybody else in the world,” he says, stopping to greet a child who’s playing in and around the structure. “It’s about connecting, whether you’re in Beijing or Vancouver or San Francisco. It’s about humanity.”

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