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By DANIEL STURM

The recent dismantlement of "This Equals That," the monumental sculpture by renowned artist Michael Heizer, which the State installed west of the Capitol in 1980, is creating a rumble in Michigan's art community.

Mary Ann Keeler, vice chairwoman of the Special Arts Commission appointed in 1975 by former Gov. William Milliken that selected Heizer, said she was "furious" about Gov. John Engler's approval of the action.

Balthazar Korab, an internationally known architectural photographer who also served on the 14-member commission, said in a phone interview from his home in Troy: "How would they dismantle the sculpture without coming to the artist, who w

as greatly offended. 'This Equals That' is the artwork of a major environmental sculptor -- it's a real scandal the government treats this so lightly. Heizer's work deserves a total restoration."

Added Korab: "Grand Rapids seems to be the only city in Michigan that treasures its art."

At the outset of his administration, Engler was vilified by the arts community, which branded him as culturally unenlightened. Thousands stood at the Capitol on May 1, 1991 to protest the newly-elected governor's plan to eliminate the Michigan Council for the Arts and to cut public funding for the state's cultural institutions. Barbara Kratchman, executive director of the Michigan Council for the Arts before Engler eliminated it, said it took her breath away when she heard what was happening to the Heizer

sculpture. Kratchman, who now heads the arts advocacy lobby group ArtServe Michigan in Southfield and Lansing, said the Arts Council was independently run and "could take stances on issues whenever we wanted, without asking for permission from anyone."

Members of Michigan's art community such as Roy Saper, owner of Saper Galleries in East Lansing, say that Engler has in recent years signaled a higher priority for arts and culture than he did in the early '90s. Last year, ArtServe awarded him with a "Special Recognition" bowl for supporting the arts. George Orban, an Artserve staff member, said the governor has worked hard to distribute more money for arts and culture in rural areas.

After Engler took office, the Arts Council was reorganized as part of the Department of Consumer and Industry Services and renamed the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs. In 2001 it was moved to the newly-founded Department of History, Arts and Library. This reorganization may explain why state officials now occupying the office have kept relatively silent as "This Equals That" was removed in front of them. "They're not independent anymore, because they now work for the state," said Keeler. She said she still couldn't understand how so many advocates for the fine arts didn't fight this decision. "Their windows look right out onto that plaza. Where are our art loyalists?" Keeler asked. The department's director, William Anderson, said that when he was informed four weeks ago of the decision to dismantle the sculpture, he was convinced something needed to be done. But, he said, "We weren't asked, and we don't have any jurisdiction."

Keeler added from her Grand Rapids residence: "Not a single former commission member and not one donor was called. This was a gift to the citizens of Michigan. It's an anathema that they tore it down. In the process of disassembling it, they are spoiling and wantonly destroying this profound and beautiful sculpture.

"There's money to take it down, but none to put it back up," criticized Keeler. "Thousands of people all over the country, professors and college students, art curators, art museum directors, and art advocates, now have to see this beautiful work destroyed forever. The piece is in hundreds of books, and kids learn about it when they take art classes in college. I cannot believe they'd destroy a \$600,000 piece, one with \$250,000 paid from our taxes. It's unconscionable."

Keeler said she called the governor's office and a dozen other bureaus connected with arts and cultural affairs. She said she was shocked to learn that no state official had even contacted the artist. Being unable to reach Engler, Keeler said she spoke with an assistant to Lt. Governor Dick Posthumus, who assured Keeler that there were no plans to abandon the sculpture in storage. The intention was to return it to its original location on the plaza west of the Capitol or otherwise to find an alternate location for it. The Department of Management and Budget spokesperson, Penny Davis, said the sculpture's location hadn't yet been determined. "Right now it's a public safety and a budget issue," she said. The sculpture was dismantled to repair the leaky roof of the garage below the plaza.

John Bracey, program director for the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, said he had been asked to find restoration experts. Joseph Becherer, the curator of the Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park in Grand Rapids, confirmed that he'd been contacted by the state. "I was told that there was a commitment to perhaps place 'This Equals That' somewhere else in Michigan," he said. Becherer said although there was space for Heizer's piece in Meijer Gardens, he would prefer to have it rebuilt at the State Capitol plaza, because it was built for an "urban Midwest context." "The most unfortunate thing is that there hasn't been a very complete communication about what should happen with the sculpture."

Heizer does not support the plan of moving his sculpture, Keeler said he told her over the telephone last weekend. She said Heizer told her to relay the message to the public that his work was "site-specific," and designed as a ceremonial work for the State Capitol. "Heizer is also waiting to hear from the state," said Keeler. "He hasn't heard one word from them and has not received one letter. He believes there's no excuse for that."

The artist, who lives and works in Hiko, Nev., is also insisting that the plaza be restored to its original state, which was concrete. Grass was planted on most of the plaza in the 1990s.

The artist reportedly said that the state had a responsibility to an artwork for which they paid over \$500,000, and which had partly been given to the state as a gift. He told Keeler "This Equals That" had not been properly cared for by the state. Had they used sealer every two years, the gunite surface wouldn't have streaked, and there wouldn't have been leaks. He would have used a gunite firm that's very professional, to restore it. Gunite is a type of cement.

According to the Special Arts Commission's reports, available through the Michigan State University Archives, the gunite had been a problem from the onset of the construction. In 1979, Heizer and Detroit architect William Kessler (also an appointed to the Arts Commission) contacted Hanna, Zabriskie & Daron of Detroit, a nationally known gunite contractor, for suggestions on the construction. But the firm withdrew from the project when the state announced it would have to go out for bids. Michigan received only one bid, and that was too high. The coordinators then convinced Clark Construction in Lansing to take on the job. Clark subcontracted the work on the sculpture to William Kelly Co. in Lansing, But William Kelly Co. had never created a sculpture before. When the job was finished the concrete was mottled and blotchy, and the color didn't look intrinsic.

Commission reports document that the supervising architect Bill Kessler, who died recently, believed the state could maintain the structure, even with the bad repair, through continued application of sealer. In 1981, Heizer said he wouldn't care if nature "beat on it," but that he'd like people to do their best before giving his piece up to the elements.

In 1996 the colored concrete deck was removed for work underneath the plaza and grass was put in to replace the plaza deck. A walkway was laid down through the center of the plaza, dividing the artwork in half. "What occurred here is virtually unthinkable in the art world, for no one truly has the right to alter or destroy a work of public art," wrote Kessler in a protest letter to Engler. Heizer also protested the plaza's renovation in a letter to Engler: "Not only was the color-related plaza which defined the sculpture from all its visual competition removed, but a very thoughtless mix of grass, concrete and rock put in its place, altering totally the clarity and simplicity of the sculpture." Heizer and Kessler asked Engler to authorize a second reconstruction of the plaza as soon as possible.

In his 1998 reply letter to Kessler, former Attorney General Frank Kelly argued Heizer's consent for the changes had not been necessary, since there were "no provisions in his contract with the State giving him any right to exercise control over the sculpture's representation." Kelly added that in a letter eight years ago, to E. Ray Scott of the Commission on Art in Public Places, Heizer had consented to changes. The artist wrote that if the state would restore the sculpture "I am willing to have removed and replaced [the concrete] entirely with grass." Heizer argues that Michigan violated his work by not replacing the concrete deck entirely with grass. "The State has cited my letter to Scott as some kind of sign-off or go-ahead to do whatever they pleased, without any control or criteria," he wrote in a letter to The Detroit News, indicating that he planned to remove his name. "Should the state restore 'This Equals That' completely to its original

specifications, I would rescind my decision to remove my name from this work."

Keeler said the government leaders will realize that they have an obligation to bring Heizer to the State of Michigan and recreate the sculpture with material that will not need much maintenance. "Engler has till January," says Keeler. "It was disassembled under his order. We're hoping he will not allow this major sculpture to fall into oblivion."

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