Art Commission Application Form

You must submit the following along with this form as a single PDF.

• Individual or organizational statement (250 word max)
• Letter of intent that includes history of project and its impact on the community (500 word max)
• Visual materials (See Art Commission Guidelines for requirement)
• Budget describing cost of materials, artist fees, maintenance, installation, etc.
• Two letters of support from project partners or neighborhood organizations
• One letter of support from the Department of Public Works or Department of Mobility & Infrastructure

Notes:

• You may be required to hold a Development Activities Meeting with the applicable Registered Community Organization prior to Hearing. For more information, visit pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/rco.
• After receiving Art Commission approval, any necessary permits, certificates of occupancy, legal agreements, or other city approvals are still required. These must be applied for separately at the appropriate City departments and are the responsibility of the applicant.
• Application format is a digital copy of full application form, required documents, and the presentation to be projected at the Hearing as one single PDF. Send all documents to pacd@pittsburghpa.gov.

Project Information

Type of Project:  
[X] Conceptual Review  
☐ Conceptual/Final Review  
☐ Final Review  
☐ Courtesy Review

Has this project been before Art Commission before?

[X] No  
☐ Yes, when:_____________

Duration of project: From ____/____/____ to ____/____/____

Permanent?  
☐ No  
[X] Yes
Conceptual Review for Art in Parks
Ali Ruffner & Gwen Sadler

Project Location

Address: Emerald View Park – exact location to be determined

Neighborhood: Emerald View Park

Applicant Information

Name: Sarah Minnaert, Public Art & Civic Design Division, Department of City Planning

Mailing Address: 200 Ross St, 4th Floor, Pittsburgh PA 15219

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Relationship or Role in Project: Public Art & Civic Design Manager
**Artist Statements**

Artist **Ali Ruffner** is a queer Pittsburgh native and Pennsylvania-based artist and cultural worker whose projects are dedicated to a culture of revolution. They have a BFA from the University of Delaware with a concentration in sculpture, a BS from the University of Delaware in Gender Studies, and are currently a Masters of Art Education and Community Arts candidate at Tyler School of Art + Architecture. They work across sculpture, installation, performance, video, photography, movement, street art, and fashion. Ali loves everything about Pennsylvania and about people -- everything they make is for this place. Their art focuses on radically imagining worlds where we can really, really care about each other. Behind the scenes of their extensive catalog of work is the work of endlessly gathering collaborators and bringing people into the magical world that is community arts. Ali believes in the hyper-local and highlights their continued care and commitment to the culture and people of Pittsburgh by dedicated lots of pre-planning time to working with local Pittsburgh teenage artists (students at Brashear Public High School) in order to champion their ideas, decisions, and permanently represent their existence in the hillside of Pittsburgh. Ali believes that in order to fully know a place, you have to have built connections across a place - by living there, working there, spending time sitting in the parks you wish to put art in, and most importantly - creating a space for other people (especially young people) to get their voices heard. Ali’s work’s intention is to uphold, expose, and respond with joy to a certain culture of a place -- in this case the neighborhoods surrounding Emerald View Park. Connection and community are aspects of survival right now more than ever. Parks are a space where neighbors can meet, talk, kickback, explore, share, and love. We must build things that are not just “art for arts sake”, but art that keeps neighbors connected. Art that includes people. Art that makes people who sometimes sit on the margins feel seen and heard.

Artist **Gwen Sadler** in alumna of Alloy Pittsburgh and a regular contributor to Rivers of Steel’s Metal Arts program, Gwen’s creative drive and dedication to her craft shines a bright light on the community of Munhall, Pennsylvania. You can check out her artwork in the School House Studios on Ravine Street, or watch her cast molten iron with Rivers of Steel during the Festival of Combustion and other events throughout the Mon Valley Creative Corridor. For the last few years, post BFA from Carnegie Mellon University, Gwen has primarily been making cast metal sculpture that deals with the post-industrial landscape and the body. At the heart of her practice lies a scavenger impulse, interest in the cycles of materials through social meaning, and a love for molten metal. When she poured iron for the first time at the Carrie Furnaces, little did she know how profoundly it would impact my life and artistic pursuits. I fell in love with the casting process, the region’s industrial history, the transmutation of objects and ideas through changing states of matter, and fire. Metal work is laborious, dangerous, hard, hot work, that is not for the timid of heart. The community that flocks to the flame are some of the most loving and talented people she has known in life. Finding the friends and mentors that challenge and inspire you to keep creating is part of the artistic path. The alchemical process is both material and spiritual. She has been a part of the Rivers of Steel Metal Arts program since its infancy, about 6 years now—casting sculpture, performing,
building tools of the trade, traveling the region, teaching, and learning while sharing this amazing process with people from all walks of life.

**Project Narrative**

This project is a sculptural installation co-created between Ali, Gwen and local students. The process for this sculpture design involved a dynamic, exciting, and joyful series of 5(+) day-long ‘playshops’ with students that looked like this:

**Day 1. Public Art That Doesn’t Suck: Place-Making Intro Exercise**

drawing introduction about ourselves, getting to know one another, describing the AiP process / project, answering questions, discussing the current monument crisis as it relates to representation (specifically for students who have been racially marginalized), discussing the three public art pieces that are already in Emerald View Park, building a sense of place as the park relates to the students.

**Day 2. Field Trip Through the Park:** virtual ‘walk’ through the Emerald View Park section (by the school) and follow this Field Trip Guide: [https://data.monumentlab.com/monument-lab/assets/koc89365r1w80044](https://data.monumentlab.com/monument-lab/assets/koc89365r1w80044), building trust & community, continuing previous conversations and discussions around: “How can art make you feel more connected to their environment physically, socially, and spiritually? What do we mean when we say monument ‘crisis’? What is iconoclasm? “What kind of monuments do we need right now?, What is meaningful? What is dead? How will your own creation change over time?”

**Day 3. Art Making Day: I am a Monument:** building with colorful wire and 3D for the first time ever (!), sketching for sculptures, discussion for ideas of representation. On this day the students decided that hands are a metaphor to represent each one of them while also community and that they thought making their own hands to put in the park would be a way to best interact with the space. We discussed the idea of what it means for each student to be monumental -- or that each of them themselves are a monument to Pittsburgh.

**Day 4. Art Making Day - Hands!:** made molds of students' hands, students voted on row home sculpture to house the hands, more discussions were had around possibly titling the piece *We The (Actual) People.*

**Day 5. Art Making Day - Voting on Final Designs:** we finished molds of students hands, wrap-up discussion was had, sculpture drawings were presented to the students for ideas and feedback and was incorporated into the materials you will see here.
Our thematic focus is that the goal of the project is to be almost entirely community-based and youth-designed. It is to empower people and enrich communities through engagement, art & direct building. There will obviously be technical, aesthetic, fabrication choices made by artists (Ali & Gwen). However, the goal is to have the soul idea of the piece to be determined by students because so many young people are left out of conversations around decisions about public spaces - especially the role of art in public spaces. Not only including, but centering, valuing, and championing their voices when it comes to designing what is going to be built is my goal as an artist on this project. The hope here is to better underscore what it means for art to be locally youth-made. Additionally, the thematic focus is on the idea that every person (+ their hand) that was included is monumental. By disrupting the status quo of how public art is made, and interpreted -- we are focused on making this project joyful and honest.

Concepts:
- What is a meaningful monument to both the makers and the community together?
- Individuals making up a community
- Highlighting the home piece of a public space and the role that people play in the public space
- Historical context of working class steel mill housing and coal hill
- What does it mean to build something by hand?
- Environmental awareness in construction (materials chosen based on their sustainability, maintaining a pervious surface, not adding a concrete footprint to something that is already a concrete footprint)

The location is incredibly important because we want the location to be well-trafficked, visible, and easily accessible. We want our students, their families / loved ones to be able to visit the site easily with varying abilities. This site is accessible both from an ADA standpoint, but also incredibly accessible via public transportation in the city. We also picked this site because there are multiple overlooks and each of them are empty. When we were there, we spoke to a group of teenagers dancing on one of the concrete overlooks and they loved the idea of art being present on one of them. It wouldn’t impede any activities (since there are multiple). Most importantly, it gives art made by many students, students of color, and underrepresented youth in a public school setting the opportunity to have their work elevated in an area that is very well-maintained and trafficked. It is important that this exists specifically here rather than another space in the park because it grounds the row home narrative. The row home element to the sculpture specifically came from the idea that when someone looks at the skyline, they might notice all of the fancy commercial buildings first, or the colorful bridges, the steep hill, or the river. But what might go unnoticed are the small row homes tucked away, filled with all of the people -- both currently and intergenerationally -- who make this space so special. Conceptually, it is important that this aspect is highlighted to visitors by walking through the space before entering the skyline, with hopes that they will pay attention to the people and the hidden corners of this city as well.
Artist Justin Emmanuel Dumas in conversation with Harrison Kinnane Smith said "The goal of making something that is just visually pleasing, I think, can actually derail the process of trying to make something that has an actual narrative embedded into it, or has this legibility on the surface, if you will." Following that, since our focus is on design inclusion, it is essential that there are intentionally loose elements (specifically -- the design of the inside of the row home and other additive elements (cast iron, glass, paint). We want to continue doing the collaborative work that is including young Pittsburgh artists in the process of the design. This means that our **anticipated next steps** will be:

1. Casting the wax hands in aluminum and decorating them with colorful epoxy
2. Build the steel rowhome structure in pieces so it can be affixed on site
3. Build base to be bolted to the concrete
4. Decide on exact additive elements (cast iron, glass, paint) to both the inside and the outside of the house that fit the underlying theme(s) of “I am a monument”+ “We the Actual People”
5. Build row home sculpture roof and affix hands to be bolted together on-site
6. Continue in conversation with the students

**Visual Materials List:**

1. *Ali Ruffner’s Previous Work: Voices of The Neighborhood I & II. Voices of the Neighborhood* was originally an idea built for the Site + Sound: Revealing the Rail Park festival in 2019 and it highlighted the stories and experiences of long-term residents of the community. Sound stories and photos were captured and a sound art installation was built at the Rail Park so that visitors to the park could understand first hand stories of the communities that they are spending time in. In response to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions and social distancing guidelines, the digital follow up (this site) *Voices of the Neighborhood: Mapping Messages and Memory* was born.

2. *Ali Ruffner’s Previous Work: Dear Noris: Norris Homes Project, Philadelphia, PA, 2015-2021 (ongoing).* Collaborators Dewey Denby, Jamaaladeen Tacuma, Donna & Nakia, Danita Denby, Ron Armour, Miss Jo, Mr. Webb, Norris Kids, Billy Yallowitz, Jennie Shanker, 100+ community members, 6 local artists. Top left represents an exact replica made by Ali Ruffner for the Housing Projects that the city razed. This sculpture ‘recreates’ a neighborhood that was destroyed by gentrification. This artwork was asked to be housed and archived in the Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection. Top right was a collection of housing auto-ethnographies and multi-generational stories told from community residents in the Norris Homes Project neighborhood in North Philadelphia. The bottom is Norris Homes Historical Marker led by Jennie Shanker, collaboratively made by Norris community members & local artists. Ali Ruffner spearheaded a team that planned, organized, curated artwork, and saw through a “town hall” style art event that brought together 50+ residents of Norris Homes that involved a documentary screening, arts events, and sharing stories and space.

4. Conceptual Sketch 1
5. Conceptual Sketch 2
6. Conceptual Sketch 3
7. Image of Proposed Site 1 - Overlook, Grandview Avenue, Emerald View Park
8. Image of Proposed Site 2 - Overlook, Grandview Avenue, Emerald View Park
9. **Images of Proposed Site 3** - Overlook, Grandview Avenue, Emerald View Park
10. Paul F. Jones Overlook, Grandview Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA // 316 Grandview Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15211 (map image of proposed potential location)
11. Second map image of proposed site, overlook

**Additional Images:**
12. Row home Inspiration - (view if you turn around from overlook behind the incline hill)
13. Brashear students casting
14. Brashear students casting
15. Brashear students casting
16. Brashear students casting
17. Brashear students casting
18. Brashear students casting
19. Brashear students casting
20. Wax hand castings
21. Wax hand castings
22. Wax hand castings
23. Wax hand castings
24. Wax hand castings
25. Historical Image Reference: Row House on Coal Hill
Voices of the Neighborhood with Ali Ruffner & Ben Emmanuel

Experience the Rail Park through the voices of five long-term neighbors who have lived through the space's evolution, captured through interviews and broadcast as a sound art installation along the Park. Full-length interviews will be transcribed and available for download at chesnukhburg.com.

A light sculpture by Nina Valera will also be on display.

Revealing the Rail Park / Oct. 5–19, 2019

Voices of the Neighborhood

WANT TO ADD A STORY TO THE MAP?

Share a thought with us: It can be a story, message, favorite memory, idea, or any sentiment to the map. Anything and everything you have to offer is important. Every new message adds another voice to the site.

Submit

voicesoftheneighborhood.com

THE STORY

Voices of the Neighborhood is a collaborative effort to bring the history of the Rail Park to the forefront. It's a platform to hear the voices of long-term neighbors, share memories, and foster dialogue around the park's transformation.

Voices of the Neighborhood was started by Em Haskin in 2016 as a way to share the stories of the Rail Park's neighbors. The project continues to evolve, with contributions from a diverse group of people who feel a strong connection to the Rail Park.

LAND-ACTION MOVEMENT

The Rail Park is a symbol of the power of community action. It's a place where people come together to create change and make a difference. The Rail Park's transformation is an example of what can be achieved when people come together with a shared vision.

The Rail Park is a place of beauty, a place of healing, and a place of possibility. It's a place where we can come together to create a better future for our community. The Rail Park is a symbol of hope, and it's a testament to the power of community action.

We encourage you to share your story with us. Your voice is important, and your experiences are valuable. We would love to hear your story and learn about your experiences with the Rail Park.

Submit your story today and be a part of the Rail Park's legacy.
Frame of house is built out of steel flat bar. Frame to reference steel city + leave open bars for skyline visibility.

Floor is concrete base of the overlook.

Base of house (steel) bolted into overlook concrete.

Aluminum hand castings affixed to roof with iron brackets.

One floor inside, people able to enter + exit through open 'doors'. Windows are open cut outs where you can see different vantage points of the skyline. No glass will be involved with the windows so that nothing can get smashed.
PAUL F. JONES OVERLOOK

NAMED IN HONOR OF PAUL F. JONES
WHO SERVED THE CITY OF PITTSBURGH AS A MEMBER OF ITS COUNCIL
FROM 1954 TO 1960