



## In new library, books to become artwork

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When artist Christian Moeller thought about a public art piece for the new library planned for downtown Walnut Creek, he instantly thought of the most public and accessible pieces of public art -- books.

"Books are works of art -- public works of art," Moeller said. "There is something so beautiful about a book."

The German-born artist will take this idea and combine the past and the future of library technologies to create a commissioned piece for the library called "Portrait in 12 Volumes of Gray."

At a Walnut Creek Arts Commission meeting Monday night, commissioners and the public got the first peek at the city-commissioned artist's idea for the library, which is slated to be built by 2010. The piece is a steel 26-foot-tall bookcase to be filled with 4,400 books that he will make, in different shades of gray. The case will be visible from both levels, in an entryway to the library. At night, lights will shine on it, making it visible from the street.

Up close, the books will look like books, but stand back and the spines of the books create an image of a woman holding a finger to her mouth and saying "shhh."

The "shhh" image is as universal for a library as books are, Moeller said. Moeller looked at libraries of the past and present, how technology has changed libraries, and he created a piece that uses books as pixels and the bookshelf as a display. It celebrates the new possibilities of digital information while honoring the tradition of a book, Moeller said.

The city paid Moeller \$200,000 for the piece. The city's public art ordinance requires that 1 percent of funds for a capital improvement project or building be set aside for acquisition of artwork.

The Arts Commission unanimously approved Moeller's design. Moeller, a professor at UCLA, will have until the library is built to complete the project. Before he could begin, he had to get approval from the commission.

"I was expecting color, but I am convinced by the elegance and the simplicity of it. ... It is beautiful," commissioner Lonna Coleman said.

This is one of the largest city-commissioned pieces ever. Moeller was selected before officials saw his suggestion. It was the first time in Walnut Creek's history that an artist was selected rather than a work.

On hand Monday to see what Moeller would present were four city council members, city staff and residents, all eager to see the unveiling.

"This is a brilliant idea," said artist Ann Weber. "It's absolutely exciting that little Walnut Creek would get something so brilliant."

The books that will create the image will be blank inside, and Moeller said architects suggested making extra books for public purchase. Residents could then take notes or sketch in those books, then put them on the bookshelf, making them part of the art. Moeller is unsure whether that will happen, but he likes the idea.

"There is a beauty in that, that one day it would be full of books from Walnut Creek. It would be very beautiful," he said.

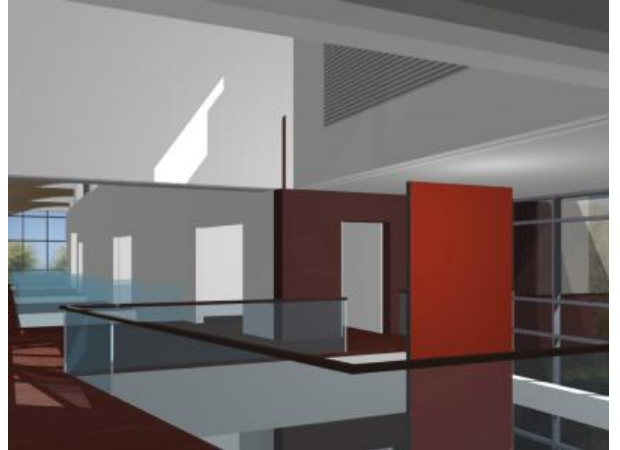
Moeller also said he would leave instructions on how to rearrange the books to create different images. But he said he would not tell what the image would become, only the way to arrange the books.

"Whoever takes it on could be surprised," he said.

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Portrait in 12 Volumes of Grey," by artist Christian Moeller, proposed for the new Walnut Creek Public Library. (Courtesy City of Walnut Creek/Christian Moeller)



View of the art from the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor lobby