



LEW STAMP/Akron Beacon Journal photos

Seen through the *Eagle Wheel* sculpture, a Frank Lucco Co. crew lifts the pink *Q* sculpture from Akron Art Museum courtyard.

Query: where's 'Q'?

*Sculpture quietly
quits quarters for
face-lift during
museum project*

By Dorothy Shinn

Beacon Journal art and architecture critic

It wasn't the first, and it won't be the last, but it was one of the Akron Art Museum's most impressive — moves, that is.

When the museum moved its pink *Inverted Q* sculpture Wednesday morning, it had to block off one lane of High Street so a giant crane from Frank Lucco Co. Inc. could lift the 5,000-pound painted cast concrete sculpture by pop art icon Claes Oldenburg.

The move was undertaken partly in preparation for closing the museum next spring so a new museum can be built.

But it was also needed to preserve the sculpture for the third time. Northeast Ohio weather has faded the *Inverted Q* from bright bubble gum pink paint to a pale, ABC (already been chewed) color.

For a brief moment, it was possible to see the difference between the original and the faded pinks when museum registrar Arnold Tunstall removed a plug in the top of the sculpture and screwed in a metal ring to lift *Inverted Q* so heavy canvas slings could be wrapped around it for the final moving. The artist-signed plug, like the rest of the sculpture, was a pale pink, while the metal ring was the robust original color.

"The Fiberglas skin that's on it is cracked, and I don't think it can handle another Akron winter," Tunstall



Todd Bowman of the Frank Lucco Co. positions supports under the *Q* before it is hauled away while the Akron Art Museum is expanded.

said.

"The coating that's on this concrete is like the coating on your car, and it's been sitting out since 1976. Just think of what a 1976 car would look like by now.

"This is being done primarily because of the wear and tear on the sculpture from the winter weather, but it's also because of the museum's imminent closing next spring."

Elizabeth Quirk Sheeler, museum communications officer, said the sculpture was last moved in 1997.

"We have Polaroids of the move," she said. "The same guy from Lucco Crane moved it then. Today when he got here, he said, 'OK, what do you want us to do?' and Arnie said, 'Here's a picture of you doing this in 1997. Do

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'Q'

Sculpture will return to sit inside new lobby

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what you did then.' ”

Wednesday's lifting wasn't the first move in anticipation of the museum's closing. About eight paintings were moved a year and a half ago because the museum ran out of storage space, Tunstall said.

“They also moved some things out last year,” he said. “They're now on temporary display at the Butler” Institute of American Art in Youngstown.

The sculpture, a gift of Mary S. and Louis S. Myers, was originally intended for a park adjoining the downtown Akron-Sum-

mit County Public Library.

But by the time it was finished, another sculpture had been found for the park. Oldenburg, who had been working with technicians at Firestone and Goodyear, was unwilling to abandon the project.

Finding the costs and technical difficulties of producing a 6-foot rubber version of the sculpture too great, Oldenburg had the first version of *Inverted Q* cast in concrete and covered with a clear, smooth coating. The Myerses bought the first work in the edition to donate to what was then the Akron Art Institute, which organized an exhibit about its creation.

In 1986, after years of exposure to the elements, *Q* needed refinishing.

At the artist's request, it was repainted the same shade of deep pink as the other three works in the edition, a color that evokes childhood memo-

ries of rubber balls and bubble gum, in addition to its belly-button-dimple reference to the human body.

“It's an edition of four,” Tunstall said of *Q*. “There's one in private hands, one in Germany, one at Stamford University and this one. This is the only concrete one. The others are made of a polymer material.”

Inverted Q has been taken to ICA (Intermuseum Conservation Association), where it will sit and dry out for a while, then the cracking will be repaired and it will be repainted.

“The last time we had it out of here, ICA had to do a lot of work on its bottom,” Tunstall said. “It's been up on nylon feet since we got it back.”

The museum has six other outdoor sculptures that will have to be disassembled, moved and stored in the spring.

“They will need to be worked on as they are taken apart, and

they will need to be repainted when they are reinstalled. They will be stored, but not necessarily at an art facility,” Tunstall said.

“The ICA has done the conservation work on most all objects in the museum's collection. They've also trained our guys on conservation and have been our conscience and guide. Before I do anything, I call and check with them first.”

When *Inverted Q* is returned, it will be to a new museum, where it will sit just inside the three-story tall “crystal” that will serve as the museum's lobby.

“Hopefully, it will be protected more there and we won't have to repaint it again,” Tunstall said.

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