

## Public Art in Storage: When Now Becomes Then

At today's meeting, staff will seek a motion to deaccession the artwork, *When Now Becomes Then* by J. Seward Johnson, that has been in storage since its donation to the City in 2006.

**Motion:** A motion to deaccession the artwork, *When Now Becomes Then* from Bellevue's municipal public art collection.

**Code and bylaw support:** This item is presented to the Commission/ supported by Bellevue City Code 3.56.070 item F: "Develop recommendations for acquiring public artwork consistent with guidelines and priorities approved by city council;" and item H: "Review and make recommendations on the suitability of any work of art intended as a gift to the city."

### When Now Becomes Then Donation

The artwork was originally donated to the city by the Medina-based art collectors, Jon and Mary Shirley (Mary passed away in 2013). The Shirleys have amassed a massive art collection, were the main benefactors of the Olympic Sculpture Park (and named the park), have donated to the Bellevue Arts Museum and have promised their art collection to the Seattle Art Museum. *When Now Becomes Then* was donated to the City by the Shirleys in 2006. It's been in paid storage ever since. While City records from 2006 don't provide a clear picture of where the estimated value of the piece came from, at the time it was estimated to have a value of \$115,000. Today, most comparable works by the artist are valued around \$10,000. The current cost of storage is \$1,392 per year.

### The Artist – John Seward Johnson II

John Seward Johnson (born 1930, died 2020), was a prolific artist that originally was a painter before moving onto life-sized painted bronze sculptures. His art often depicted everyday people engaged in activities such as walking or reclining on a park bench. His forms were created with casting living people and provide incredible detail.

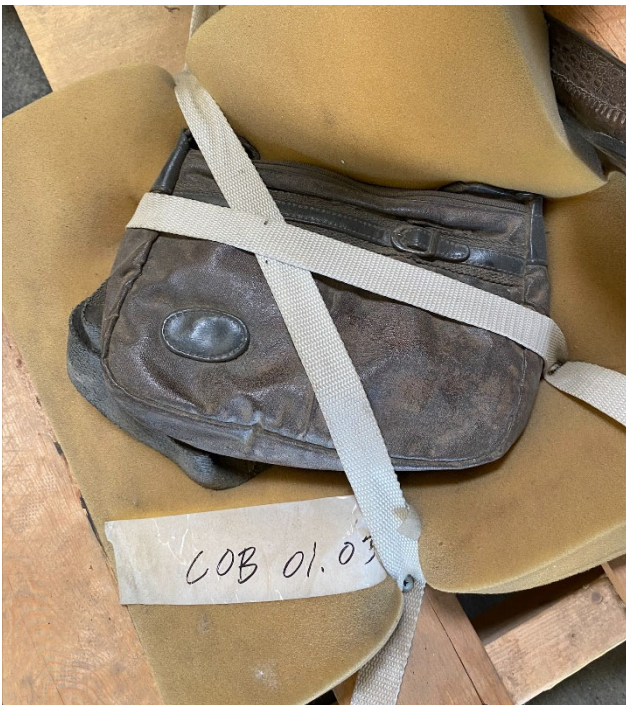
### The Artwork – *When Now Becomes Then*

*When Now Becomes Then* is a bronze cast artwork of a young person engaged in painting, presumably sitting in a park on the ground. The sculpture's outfit is painted, along with other select elements in the artwork. The artwork's title is appropriate as the color of the clothing recalls back to earlier fashion styles. The bronze casting is incredibly detailed and clearly shows that these artworks were made from casting living people.

Past efforts to site the work in parks or along streets have been unsuccessful.







### Issues For Consideration

Staff encourages the commission to have a robust discussion on the following issues for consideration:

- This artwork illustrates the challenges of accepting donated artworks. While this work was accepted as a donation by the Bellevue Arts Commission, so it did go through a community process, it still lacks the specificity to a particular community or place that is inherent in most public artworks. Because of this, there is no sense of ownership or known desire for the work within the community nor was it selected for a specific site.
- Because of the artwork's painted clothing that dates it to a specific time and uncanny lifelike features in the work, some community members may respond negatively to the work.
- The artwork demonstrates a high level of skill in bronze casting and fabrication.

- The connection to the Shirleys and their profound impact on the arts community here is an important story of art in the Seattle and Bellevue region.
- Because the bronze is already partially painted, it may attract additional graffiti, particularly on the figure and drawing pad.
- Value of the work versus cost to install and other factors: The City has most likely spent more than what the artwork is worth (comparable works are approximately \$10,000) on storage. Additional costs to deliver and install the artwork are expected to be around \$15,000 to \$20,000.

### **Staff Recommendation**

Staff recommends the deaccession of the artwork from the Bellevue Arts Collection. Staff makes this recommendation off the following factors:

- The work is a drain on resources. The apparent value of the work is less than the cost to store, and/or install.
- No constituency - it has no connection to a specific site or community.
- Staff anticipates negative feedback from the community no matter where it's installed.
- Maintenance concerns.

### **Options**

Option 1: The Commission votes to approve a motion to deaccession the artwork from Bellevue's municipal public art collection.

Option 2: The Commission votes to approve a motion to retain the artwork in Bellevue's municipal public art collection and directs staff to install the work on city property.

### **Next Steps**

Following today's meeting, staff will return to the commission with an update at a future meeting.

### **Staff Contact**

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