

City veto of sculpture angers artists

By **PATRICIA C. JOHNSON**
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The city's veto of a controversial sculpture project has upset art jurors and artists, some of whom are charging political censorship.

Citing concern for safety, Houston Parks and Recreation Department director Dan Olson on Friday vetoed a sculpture project by the Aart Guys. The proposal is critical of the city's plan to tear down old houses in the Fourth Ward when people are homeless.

The decision has upset art jurors who selected the project and the artists themselves, who say they had carefully addressed safety questions in their presentation.

The Aart Guys, consisting of Michael Galbreth and Jack Massing, had proposed to move three condemned houses from the Fourth Ward and install them upside-down on the banks of Buffalo Bayou.

The proposal was one of seven selected for installation along Buffalo Bayou as part of the Houston International Festival. The projects were chosen in a competition sponsored by the non-profit art and performance group DiverseWorks. Partial funding came from the city's arts granting agency, Cultural Arts

Council of Houston.

"We met with the parks department to discuss technical and safety issues," said Michael Peranteau, co-director of DiverseWorks. "Initially, they approved four projects and had reservations about the other three. We worked out problems for two of them, but the questions about the Aart Guys' couldn't be resolved."

On Monday, Peranteau presented the proposals to the Municipal Art Commission, which must review all works of art proposed for city property. Although the commission approved the proposals on artistic grounds, final approval hinged on whether another proposal from Aart Guys would meet the safety standards. That proposal would involve placing concrete stairs from destroyed homes on slopes on both sides of the bayou, symbolizing the death of a neighborhood.

In the DiverseWorks-sponsored competition, three jurors — Jim Edwards, director of the San Antonio Museum of Art; Rachel Hecker, deputy director of the Glassell School; and sculptor James Surls — made their choices from more than 48 entries.

Hecker said the city's veto amounts to censorship. She said the jury looked carefully at the ques-

tions of the project's structural safety and viability.

"I'm very upset that we were second-guessed," she said. "Their (the artists') budget evidenced real research, working knowledge that it could be done safely."

For their part, the artists could not understand why, if the questions concerned the safety and maintenance of the structures, they were not consulted. Their plans called for rebuilding the structural supports of the house.

"It's basically very simple," Galbreth said. "We consulted with engineers and architects, and specifically with a contractor. It's house-construction techniques. . . ."

"But no one asked us, and that's what is most insulting. If they'd asked us, we might have come up with some solutions.

"And no one told us why (the proposal) was rejected."

Attempts to reach parks director Olson Wednesday were unsuccessful.

The other participants, who will begin to create and install their work this weekend, are Sharon Kopriva, Wendy Smith, Mark Munro, Dean Ruck, John Atlas and Rose Finnkelcey, an English artist who does site-specific work.