

# Chicago makes a public statement on art

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staff reporter

On any given day in Chicago you can see works by such artists as Alexander Calder, Henry Moore, Joan Miro and Pablo Picasso for free.

These artists' works are part of the city's public art program. There are more than 600 pieces of city-owned art displayed at libraries, schools, police stations, plazas and other public buildings.

"Chicago has one of the longest running public art dialogues. We have been buying art since 1893," said Michael Lash, director of public art for the City of Chicago.

The city definitely had some dialogue 35 years ago when, on Aug. 15, Picasso's monumental sculpture was unveiled.

"When they pulled the drapes on the sculpture it was not met with applause it was met with gasps of silence," said Lash.

"The Picasso sculpture is really the first piece of artwork that was art for art's sake in the public realm. It wasn't a memorial or monument to anyone or anything. It was also not naturalistic. It was one of the first pieces in the U.S. and the world that recognized art as art."

The sculpture that stands in Daley Plaza was radically different from the Buckingham Fountain or the lions at the Art Institute—the kind of public art to which people were accustomed.

Picasso's 50-foot high, 162-ton steel structure was erected in 1967. It was the first monumental sculpture placed in the Loop. Today there are more than 100 works adorning plazas and buildings throughout the downtown area.

"It is amazing to think that a sculpture that is 35 years still has such a freshness. A piece this old would usually look dated but Picasso's work transcends that," Lash said.

Public art is Chicago's great freebie because anyone at any economic level can enjoy it. Here is a look at some of the city's more recently installed pieces with comments from each artist.



**Joe Hindley**  
Painter

**"Chicago in Four Seasons"**

**Installed:** February and June 2002  
**Location:** Chicago Police Department Headquarters, 3510 S. Michigan.

"I wanted the piece to be uplifting and to convey the essence of Chicago."

**View on Public Art:** "I think it is money well spent."

**Frank Connet**  
Textile Artist  
**"Madder Gorget"**

**Installed:** May 2001

**Location:** Chicago Police Dept. Headquarters, 3510 S. Michigan

"I was limited to the architecture of the room in the police station and I was thinking about gorgets as a piece of armor and the idea of a shield and protection. I was trying to create abstract symbols of shields."

**View on Public Art:** "It is really great to get my work viewed by people who would never ordinarily see it. It gives people the opportunity to see art they might not see otherwise."

