

Carl Billingsley's colorful public art talks to the masses. We asked the masses to talk back



'PORT CITY SUNRISE' (downtown Post Office)

A translation of our town as a single pole capped with an aged, red smokestack hat. An electric orange disc stands above the tall city of small industry that from a side view takes on a little-engine-that-could kind of determination. Though the position of the sunrise is permanent, one can imagine the thin black arm holding the sun swinging like a windmill to trade places with what appears to be a latent blue moon. "I'm not real sure about the red and the blue," confesses Courtney Kibbler, whose 'in-a-word' description of this piece was, "Question." Jahmilla Galves praised it as 'updated for this historic town and district. It's a good conversation piece. We're happy to have it.'

light IDEAS

Large orange steel pieces slice a waterfront sunset. Over-size, bright blue and red pipes pop out of a modest dog park.

Pedestrian Art, a program run by local nonprofit arts organization Creative Wilmington in partnership with the city of Wilmington, has painted the town in public sculpture. The recently installed five-piece solo show from Carl Billingsley, internationally known sculptor and East Carolina University professor, makes a modern statement in a historic downtown. And while the industrial impact and Billingsley's materials may be heavy, his subject is light – literal light.

Each seemingly abstract monolith is his interpretation of a prism, a flower or a sunrise – entities that capture, manipulate or recycle light. No stranger to juxtaposing shapes for reactions within his work, Billingsley decided to use color last summer, prompted by a taunting colleague who asked, "What are you afraid of?"

Billingsley created four new pieces specifically for this show with color on the brain. "The push and pull of the primaries reacting is a good analogy of the way the forms are reacting," Billingsley said in a phone interview. He quotes a basic color theory that "the way we interpret it depends on the context we see it in," which could double as a public art theory.

Shape. Color. History. To add another reactive element to *The Carl Billingsley Exhibition in PedArt*, he is simultaneously having another show across town: *Sculpture: From Concept to Creation* in UNCW's Cultural Arts Building Gallery. (Billingsley will be in Wilmington starting Tuesday for a week's worth of walking tours, lectures, workshops and receptions.)

The juxtapositions are endless, but how do they come across to the public, whom the exhibition is really for? Because this is pedestrian art, we talked to local pedestrians about their interpretations of the work.

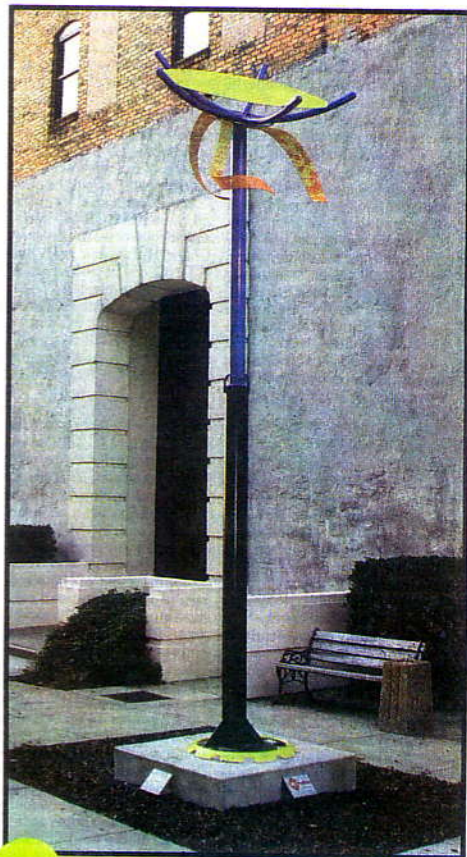
– By Isabel Hebllich, *Star-News Correspondent*

INSIDE

Want to check out the art? Get the details. 9D.

ONLINE

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'HELIOTROPE' (in Bijou Park on North Front Street)

Best reflecting the show's meld of industrial and organic, Billingsley creates in one sculpture both meanings of the word 'heliotrope.' It can mean a flowering plant that turns toward the sun or an instrument used to reflect the sun's rays over long distances. The flower's center and curling petals made of painted-steel grate catch and sift the sunlight, creating different patterns in the shadows throughout the day. Some passerby called it a 'satellite dish,' but William Hutchins, who works nearby, said, without knowing the title, 'I'd call it, maybe, a sun filter.'



'BARBARA ALLEN' (Water Street between Dock and Orange Streets)

Along with the likes of Johnny Cash and Joni Mitchell, Billingsley rewrote his own version of 'The Ballad of Barbara Allen,' a love song more than 200 years old whose original source remains unknown. Unrequited love kills the song's young man, and grief slays Barbara Allen. A rose from his grave and a briar from hers eventually grow together. This blue and red steel sculpture updates the old tune: twisting pipe flowers try to find each other and grow toward the sun. Each angle of this sculpture creates beautiful round shapes of negative space, holes in the relationship of the jaggedly blooming vines. Mike Hamilton, who was having his lunch by this piece, likened it to 'two giant snakes wrapped around each other; a real love piece.'



'PRISM ARC I' (Riverfront Park)

A powerful fusion of sharp steel polygons leans south onto a curved arm. Sunlight shades the electric orange planes of this waterfront sculpture into muted tones like the gradient of a bruise. The placement of bright yellow sections on the polygons

suggests the light is passing through them from one angle, while the yellow side panels of the arc suggest a different angle. This dichotomy locks the sculpture in place. To Harriet Meineke, the bold colors and shapes embody 'the strength of the current of the river and of the city – the rebuilding and the refurbishing.' Michelle Morgan saw 'a cup of coffee with steam coming off the top.'



'PRISM ARC II' (Front and Market streets)

In this alternate prism, a kind of steel origami vessel, the cool blue and gray panels direct yellow sections vertically in the way a rain collector catches water and guides it downward. Joseph Lewis said 'it looked like a water funnel.' Located in the most well-traveled area of any Pedestrian Art site, this sculpture has an in-transit energy. 'It kind of looks like a pedestrian just standing right here checking out the scene,' said William Day.