

Biggest sculpture done in by audacity

The official statement from the San Francisco Arts Commission is terse. "Due to unanticipated challenges related to the complex engineering of the sculpture, the construction schedule and the project budget," it says, "the project was unable to proceed as originally planned."

That is how San Francisco lost what had promised to be the most significant of five major works of public art originally commissioned for the Salesforce Transit Center, which opens to the public Saturday, Aug. 11. Conceived by Los Angeles artist Tim Hawkinson, who worked on the project for more than six years, the work was killed off last year by the Transbay Joint Powers Authority before it

ever had a name.

Creating a friendly golem out of the ruins of the old Transbay Terminal was never expected to be easy. At 41 feet tall, an 80-ton stack of concrete debris looming over pedestrians was a daunting engineering challenge, and the \$1.67 million budget, planners decided, was inadequate by more than half.

Still, I can't shake the suspicion that the very thing that excited people about the art in the first place is what led to its demise. In a design that elevates decoration over concept, decorousness over provocation, it was the work's audacity that did it in.

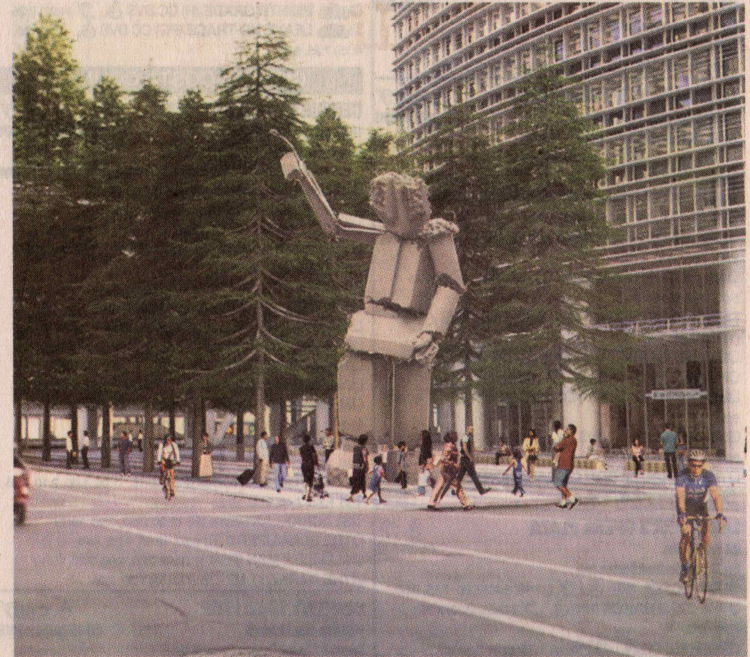
In an overall budget of \$2.26 billion (up from an original \$1.6 billion), the sculpture's

increased cost would have amounted to less than one-tenth of 1 percent. But the rough giant it represented, a concrete-and-rusted-rebar embodiment of all that the Transit Center's new neighborhood aims to erase, could not be allowed to command so prominent a corner.

Salesforce built the city's tallest building on that block, and topped it with an anodyne, pixilated crown. It demanded that a planned grove of redwoods next door be replaced by a sterile plaza. It bought the transit center naming rights for \$110 million.

What chance was there ever for a work of art that would speak of failure, of impermanence, of fate?

— Charles Desmarais



Transbay Joint Powers Authority 2011

A 2011 rendering shows a sculpture by Tim Hawkinson, which was to have been made from debris of the old terminal.