

Explanatory Document for August 21, 2024 Visual Arts Committee Meeting

Submitted by Jill Manton

Delay in Installation of Shahzia Sikander Sculpture "Witness" in Civic Center due to Radical Vandalism

While on display at the University of Houston, the Shahzia Sikander sculpture was violently beheaded by anti-abortion activists. The group believes that the female figure represented or championed abortion rights and they also construed her appearance, particularly the configuration of her hair style, to be "Satanic" in nature.

The artist does not wish to repair the sculpture and as such, it would not be appropriate to display it in its current condition in Civic Center Plaza. The Sean Kelly Gallery which represents the artist, has committed to raise funds to fabricate a new edition of the sculpture. If they can raise the necessary funds, they would like to follow through on their commitment to loan the work to the Arts Commission for display in Civic Center Plaza. The anticipated completion date of the sculpture is July, 2025.

This motion acknowledges the date change and the provisional exhibition of the sculpture pending the ability of the Sean Kelly Gallery to procure all necessary funding.

Former resolution:

Motion to amend Resolution #0701-24-298 to approve an allocation of up to \$100,000 from the Public Art Trust's Undesignated Funds for costs associated with the display of the Shahzia Sikander sculpture titled "Witness", which will be displayed in Civic Center Plaza for a period of up to seven months starting in late October 2024.

Revised to read:

Motion to amend Resolution #0805-24-321 to approve an allocation of up to \$100,000 from the Public Art Trust's Undesignated Funds for costs associated with the display of the Shahzia Sikander sculpture titled "Witness", which will be displayed in Civic Center Plaza for a period of up to 11 months in Summer, 2025 pending the ability of the Sean Kelly Gallery to raise all funds necessary to commission a new work in light of the original being defaced and vandalized.

['Show the violated work': Artist requests vandalized sculpture remains on view | CNN](#)

[Shahzia Sikander says she will not fix statue that was beheaded in Houston \(theartnewspaper.com\)](#)