

FRONT END: ART-NAPPED

AN OUTDOOR SCULPTURE GETS SNATCHED AND POSSIBLY RECYCLED.



CLAIRE ZITZOW

VCU sculpture student Claire Zitzow's piece, "Urban Strata 2" disappeared mysteriously from its home on the train tracks off Hull Street.

Public art is free. Right? Free to view, free to enjoy. Free to do with what you will, in some people's minds.

Last Sunday, VCU sculpture student Claire Zitzow was packing to go out of town when she received a phone call from Vaughn Garland, co-founder and curator of The Richmond Outdoor Sculpture Exhibition. Local sculptor Ben Jones had just reported to Garland that he had seen someone pushing a grocery cart across the Manchester Bridge, with Zitzow's 7'x3' sculpture "Urban Strata" inside.

"Ben made the guy turn around and take it back to the site," said Vaughn. When Vaughn got to the site, the sculpture was on its side with portions of it damaged. When Zitzow arrived, they returned the piece to its installation site on the south end of the bridge. This time, Zitzow sank the piece into railroad ties using six-inch screws.

The sleek structure of steel wheels, aluminum frame and 225 feet of clear packing tape took Zitzow more than 90 hours to complete. It lasted three weeks in the outdoor exhibit, which unfortunately sits between two public recycling centers where tin miners with shopping carts nuzzle in between trucks loaded with scrap copper wiring, aluminum siding, and other precious recyclables. Since the outdoor sculpture project is not for profit, there is no insurance or income to compensate Zitzow for her work. Apparently, though, an enthusiastic recycler thought her work, made predominantly from unpainted aluminum, was worth a few cents.

It wasn't the first time the outdoor project, now in its second year, was plundered. Last year, Charles Ponticello's winning sculpture of three cement men was the victim of a car crash. (Notice we didn't say accident.) For reasons known only to her, an unnamed woman repeatedly drove a pickup truck into Ponticello's first-place piece.

Zitzow isn't bitter; just disappointed. It isn't a reflection of the public at large, she said, somewhat pleased to have expanded her appeal. Whoever took it, she said, "it is definitely a different audience."