

Sculpture unlocks building
Artist says his goal was empowerment.

By Daniel Cailler
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Workers install Howard Meehan's "Keys to the City" sculpture Wednesday at the City Hall Addition at Broadway and Eighth Street. The 19-foot-tall, 16-foot-wide sculpture is made of structural steel and placed atop concrete bases containing color-changing LEDs.

New Mexico artist Howard Meehan watched excitedly as a crane lowered his "Keys to the City" sculpture on top of two concrete bases in the plaza outside the City Hall Addition yesterday morning.

"You dress it up on paper and you build models, but then you suddenly see it and it all begins to make sense," said Meehan, 63, wearing a hardhat as he watched two years of hard work come together. "It has the same power and dynamics that I thought when I conceived it."

The 19-foot-tall, 16-foot-wide sculpture, one of 11 Columbia Percent for Art projects, is made of structural steel and placed atop concrete bases holding color-changing LEDs. At night, those lights will illuminate semi-opaque glass panels surrounding the keyhole-shaped center.

The glass panels will contain a montage of images based on the sights Meehan experienced during his visits to Columbia. Depictions of the Eighth Street columns, the city's universities and colleges, businesses such as Sycamore Restaurant and Boone County National Bank, and prominent MU alumni and Missouri natives will be a part of the cultural collage highlighted every night.

"I wanted to do something that was fairly representational," Meehan said.



Meehan worked closely with architect Joe Frigerio of Chiodini Associates — the St. Louis-based firm that designed the City Hall Addition — as well as landscape architect Jeffrey L. Bruce of Kansas City-based Jeffrey L. Bruce & Co., which designed the plaza that is nearing completion outside.

Meehan "gave us the dimensions of the base, and I gave that to" Bruce "so he could incorporate that in the design of the plaza," Frigerio said.

"Keys to the City" sits on a tapered blue path of recycled glass that runs from the corner of Eighth and Broadway and leads people through the keyhole and toward the front door of the City Hall Addition. Meehan said this symbolic detail helps highlight the theme behind his sculpture.

"I wanted it to feel like when you walk up to it, you feel a sense of empowerment. This is your community," he said. "Since the beginning of time, keys have been used to unlock or to open. That kind of metaphor is what became the passion for this thing. I think this is really going to be the anchor of this city."

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