

CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, NH
Public Art Review Committee

January 11, 2024

Memorandum

To: Honorable Mayor and City Council

From: Public Art Review Committee (PARC)

Subject: Review of Proposed Donation of Art Work

PARC received the request to review a proposed donation from artist Carl Austin Hyatt. At its meeting on January 10, 2023, PARC applied its review criteria to the proposed donation, encompassing the criteria in City Council Policy 2022-02 for Public Art Referral and Acquisition.

PARC enthusiastically recommends that the City accept the donation.

Background. Portsmouth artist Carl Austin Hyatt has offered to donate a large format photograph from his series Portsmouth Harbor Salt Piles with the proviso that the work be displayed in a publicly accessible site. The work is titled “S 1”, archival ink pigment on watercolor paper, 50 by 60 inches, from an edition of six. The black/white image includes an innovative view of salt piles, a ship unloading salt, and the Sara Mildred Long bridge. The photograph is framed with plexiglass.

Review. PARC noted these particular items in its review:

- **The S1 artwork completely meets aesthetic considerations.** The work evokes the strong emotional connection that local people have with the salt piles and the river and offers an historically accurate but innovative view. The work is innovative in depicting an “ordinary aspect of work life” as a monumental landscape. S1 shows abstract forms that “talk to each other” in unusual ways, creating a cohesive composition.
- **The artwork is a unique contribution to the City’s current works of art.** S1 adds an artistic photograph to complement other photos that tend to be documentary in purpose, e.g., groups of individuals, events, and sites. Its scale and black and white format are also distinctive.
- **The artist has an exceptional background.** Carl Austin Hyatt’s photographs have been widely exhibited including in major national and regional museums, many of which include his work in their permanent collections. Those institutions include the Museum of Fine Arts, the Smithsonian, and the Currier, Addison, and

Ogunquit museums. He has been a NH State Council on the Arts fellowship winner, a MacDowell Colony fellow, and was awarded the Greater Piscataqua Arts Advancement Award.

- **There are limited costs involved in installing the work.** The work is framed already; a security hanging device may be necessary depending on the location. Little or no maintenance will be required.

Site Location and Display. PARC recommends City Hall entryway as the initial location for the art work, enabling viewers to see the work at a distance to best complement the power of the work in an area away from direct sunlight. As a work on paper, we recommend that the work might be displayed for periods of approximately 6 months before a “rest” period. We also believe that, depending on interest and availability, the work could be shown in rotation at other City facilities that attract different members of the public. An example of a relevant facility is the parking office of the Foundry Place garage and Department of Public Works.

We recognize that the City’s policy specifies that “the City reserves the right to relocate donated artwork from time to time; and to not display a donated piece of art” and would recommend that the provision be included in a letter of appreciation to the artist if the Council formally votes to accept the work.