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by Michael Bishop, Assistant Editor

## Supporting the arts ... with steel

*Brenco Industries finds art projects have become a 'specialty'*

**A**s project manager of Brenco Industries, Delta, B.C., Canada, Mike Lanteigne is used to working with artists on metal fabricating jobs—the shop, which bends, rolls, and cuts metal for various applications, gets one or two big art projects every year, on average. Sometimes the company doesn't even know how high-profile a job is until after it finishes the work.

This recently was the case when Brenco worked with artist Tony DeLap on a steel sculpture for a pair of condominium towers in Santa Ana, Calif. Lanteigne found out after finishing the project that DeLap's work is known internationally and displayed in galleries such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York City and the Smithsonian Institution.

DeLap's most well-known work is a 50-ft.-high, linear steel structure that hovers over Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles.

"It's like a vine in steel that arcs over Wilshire Boulevard, and it was done in the late 1980s," DeLap said. "Wilshire runs from downtown Los Angeles to the ocean."

The Santa Ana sculpture, "Mysticana," which marks the entrance to the towers, was commissioned by a California developer as an Art in Public Places project for the city. Art in Public Places is funded through a levy on most capital improvement projects that cost more than a certain amount of money. The location suits the structure, according to Lanteigne, because the buildings that surround it all have straight columns and square windows—the sculpture is the only curved piece around.

DeLap designed the sculpture, made a small model of it, then sought a fabricator to produce the full-sized piece. He



▲ Brenco fabricated this mild steel sculpture, designed by artist Tony DeLap, for the entrance to condominium towers in Santa Ana, Calif.

had a good idea of how the finished sculpture would look, and knowing the site and the size of the buildings, he scaled the piece to be neither dominant nor miniscule. A previous collaboration with Brenco convinced him to choose the company to do the fabrication.

"A few years ago, one of our neighbors wanted me to do an outdoor sculpture for Vancouver residents," DeLap said. "I did a sculpture, about 8 or 9 feet high in metal, and we went to a number of fabricators. The company we ended up using to make this piece of sculpture for him was Brenco."

Sometimes Brenco fabricates entire sculptures; other times it makes just parts that artists use in their designs.

"Public art projects have become a Brenco specialty," Lanteigne said.





▲ The mild steel sculpture was plasma-cut, formed, rolled, and welded.

When working on his sculptures, DeLap does all the designing and then works with a fabricator to have them built. He said building the model is one of the most important parts of taking the work from an idea to a 3-D sculpture.

"I think there's a huge difference between two-dimensional and three-dimensional," DeLap said. "You have to put a sculpture into real space, even if it's a model."

The fabricated mild steel sculpture was high-definition plasma-cut, formed, rolled, and welded. The base of the structure is 3 in. thick, and the rest  $\frac{3}{8}$  in. thick. The sculpture was sent out for sandblasting and then heavily undercoated, put on a flatbed, and sent to Santa Ana. Painters then sanded, cleaned, undercoated again, put on the topcoat, and finished it. The project took four weeks from the time Brenco received DeLap's model to the day it shipped the structure.

The main challenge was figuring out how and in which

order the parts would be constructed, said Lanteigne.

"A part like this does not come with fabricating instructions; the welder/fitter has to come up with a plan of attack that makes the most sense," Lanteigne said. "Even though making something like this is very rewarding and always fun because it's a change from the standard industrial welding we do, we are still running a company, and time is money, so constant communication is required and so is frequent feedback from the artist. This project did not have any setbacks—we were *always* moving forward, which is not always the case."

Dealing with artists is common for Brenco. But the results are far different

from what the company experiences with its conventional projects. Initially most artists give the company only a small sketch or a model that is only a few inches high from which to work. So the artists are amazed when they get their first look at a finished piece, Lanteigne said.

"They will run their hands along the edges as if to physically feel what [they pictured] at the time of conception," he said. "It's totally different from any other type of work we do here."

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