

Venice Beach May Lose a Landmark: A Mark di Suvero Sculpture

By Jori Finkel

April 29, 2019



The sculpture "Declaration" on Venice Beach in 2014.
via L.A. Louver, Venice, Calif.

LOS ANGELES — The most visible and recognizable artwork on Venice Beach, a 60-foot-tall steel sculpture by Mark di Suvero that has been a popular meeting point for nearly two decades, will be dismantled and trucked to Northern California by the end of this year, according to the artist and his gallery L.A. Louver.

The sculpture, called “Declaration,” was originally installed in 2001 in honor of the nonprofit Venice Family Clinic, which runs a popular “art walk” benefit. Now, after failed attempts to persuade the City of Los Angeles to help acquire the work, the gallery’s plan is to move it to the artist’s Petaluma, Calif., studio and find another public site for it.

Normally based in New York, Mr. di Suvero, 85, was reached by phone this week while traveling in Michigan. “The piece seemed to me very natural there on Venice Beach,” he said, sounding a bit wistful. “I think about how you go down one highway after another watching the rear ends of cars, and the handling of steel in cars. But here I tried to give people a feeling of open space — a sense of spirit and capacity.”

Peter Goulds, the founder of L.A. Louver, described the work as a symbol of the bustling artistic community in Los Angeles, where Mr. di Suvero had a studio for a few years in the 1960s.

“I see it as one of the main cultural icons representing creative life in L.A.,” Mr. Goulds said, noting that its steel arms, made of I-beams, do not extend toward the ocean but “embrace” the city.

Mr. Goulds said the gallery paid for the original installation of the work and had since covered insurance to indemnify the city as well as maintenance like repainting after graffiti tagging. He added that Mr. di Suvero “had loaned this work for almost 20 years with no fee to the city — he has not received a penny for this.”

The sculpture is worth about \$6 million today, according to Mr. Goulds, but he said the gallery had offered it to the city “on favorable terms” and volunteered to help line up private donors “within the framework of the tax code.”

“We reached out to philanthropists who could be involved, but it requires the city to step up and that is not happening,” he said, citing “numerous discussions” with the local Los Angeles City Council member, Mike Bonin.

Mr. Bonin countered in an email that the meetings had “always boiled down to ‘find us two to four million dollars,’” which he noted was not realistic.

“It is a beautiful and iconic piece of art,” Mr. Bonin said, “but even art lovers in Venice would be furious if the city spent several million dollars on the sculpture when we have so many other pressing demands and urgent needs that are underfunded: homelessness, public safety, and keeping our streets, beaches and parks clean.”

Mr. di Suvero said he did not know the details of those meetings, but he said he had not entirely given up hope of an acquisition. Another large steel sculpture of his, “Orion,” which had been on long-term loan to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, was just acquired by the university after being removed for several months for repainting.

“After ‘Orion’ was taken down, I think people realized what they were missing,” Mr. di Suvero said. “The university pulled everything together with donors and decided to keep it.”