

# Los Angeles Times

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## Whimsy, all in a row

SCARLET CHENG

Inside an expansive East L.A. studio, a collection of creatures is undergoing a transformation. One is a giant unbaked loaf of white plaster, sanded into smooth curves; another has taken on a yellowish-brown coating, a sealant; a third is covered by thick sheets of red wax. All are headless and rotund yet seem — with their crouched, perched, lolling torsos — to be quite playful. Soon, they will be trucked to a foundry to be cast in bronze.

This summer, Peter Shelton's sculptural installation called "animaline" will be filing down Spring Street in downtown L.A., on pedestals placed along a sitting area adjoining the new Los Angeles Police Department headquarters. Six ballooning forms will be held up by two elongated, vaguely quadrupedal creatures on either end. "As is common in my work," says Shelton, an affable man with frizzy gray hair and round glasses, "I want to develop a contrast in the physicality of the forms from the corporeal and ponderous to the attenuated and light."

Two years ago, when a selection committee of the Department of Cultural Affairs asked Shelton to submit a proposal, he was a bit dubious — government arbiters of art usually want work that tells a local story or evokes a civic-minded theme. "I don't tend to work from obvious narrative or rhetoric," says Shelton, 58. "I'd say my work is somewhere between abstract and recognizable. The main thing is to convey a sense of something animated."

Explaining the process in his studio, he pulls out some early drawings of the pieces. Later, he made small models to help visualize the forms and mounted photos on a board to give the committee an idea of what the project might evoke: outdoor animal sculptures in India and China and a circus parade from mid-America.

In some cases they might represent power and authority or are guardians," he says. "In other cases, they could be our animal alter egos, our most basic selves."



**TAKING SHAPE:** Peter Shelton amid the elements of "animaline," a public art project for the grounds of L.A.'s new police headquarters.

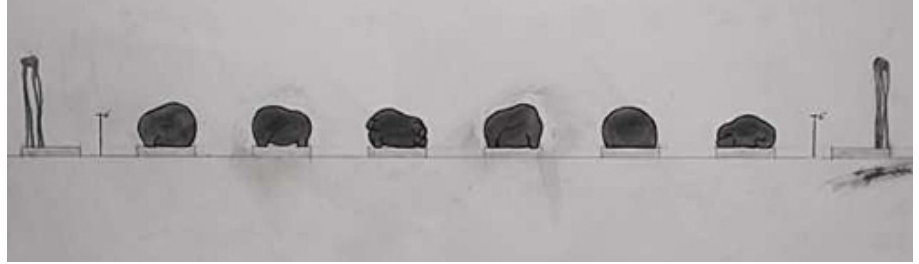
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And though he cautions against reading his work too literally, he admits there are personal references: “When I was a kid in Arizona, my dad would get us up early, and we’d see the elephants unload from the train and parade down the street,” he says. “I loved that.” He also fondly recalls the dancing hippos in the 1940 Disney film “Fantasia.”

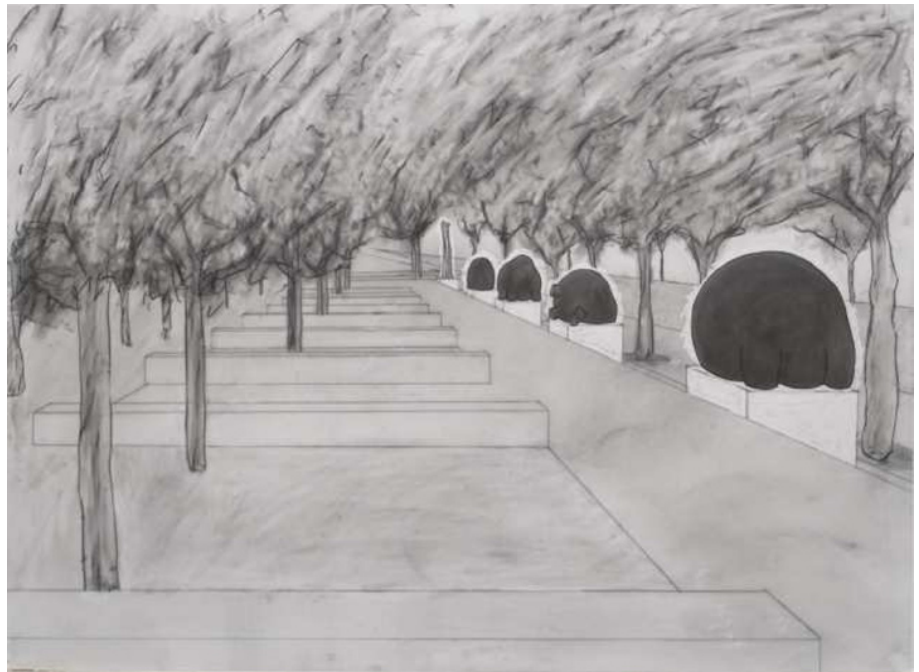
The public art budget for the new building was \$1 million, split between Shelton’s work and that of Catherine Wagner of San Francisco. (Wagner’s “Ghost Grove” conjures the spirit of orange trees in etched aluminum panels and sandblasted limestone in and around an auditorium on the site.)

An alumnus of UCLA’s master of fine arts program, Shelton has had a three-decade career, with works in the permanent collections of three dozen museums, including the Getty, LACMA and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Yet he has completed only a handful of public art projects.

As for his first in L.A., Shelton says, “I’m really excited to have a public work in my hometown.”



**AVENUES OF INTERPRETATION:** “They might represent power and authority,” Shelton says of his sketched sculptures, or “they could be our animal alter egos, our most basic selves.”



**ENVISIONING ITS PLACE:** The artists depicts the first public work he’s created for his hometown in its downtown space. It is seen in a view looking south along Spring Street.