

Street Life

*The Choreography of Arrival*

PUBLIC ART ENLIVENS THE NEW STAPLES CENTER

The scale of the new Staples Center in Los Angeles is gargantuan—a monument, perhaps, to the sports and entertainment egos, from basketball players to rock stars, that have been displayed there. But out on the pavement, human scale reigns in a work of public art that arcs around a portion of the center. Called *Garland*, this sequence of seven sculptural lanterns salutes strength and movement that is graceful and sophisticated, not heavy and muscular.

Just one of five works of public art on the Staples Center site, *Garland's* forms resemble teardrops (or perhaps beads of sweat) that tilt and rise in succession. They are made of stainless steel pipe and woven wire that, by day, cast shadows across the pavement like a sundial. By night, the forms are lit from within, illuminating the moiré patterns created by the woven wire. People often find it impossible not to touch the 13 x 5 x 3-foot forms.

The artist—Los Angeles-based Blue McRight—studied ancient arenas and sacred architecture to find inspiration for the sleek, modern forms. The work is named for the wreath given to athletic victors in ancient Greece, for example, and a bronze benchmark near the entrance to the center bears a triskelion, a Greek symbol of competition.

“By researching sacred architecture in terms of large spaces, it became clear to me that it

Evoking beads of sweat or a team of windsurfers, public art at the Staples Center salutes movement.



was all about a journey through architectural or philosophical layers,” McRight says. “*Garland* is that first layer between the street and the stage. My site is important from an urban design standpoint, in that people come from all directions to my entrance. It addresses the choreography of arrival.”

*Garland* also responds to the geometry of the center but does not mimic it. For instance, the Staples Center “leans” out ten degrees; thus, the seven forms lean by ten degrees from vertical as well, looking like an italicized phrase. The forms also tilt upwards in succession—from the first nearly horizontal to the last nearly vertical—in converse response to a dip in the center’s roof. “I wanted to design something organic be-

cause there is so much rigid geometry around it,” McRight says. It was also important to create forms that were abstract, that portrayed movement but not in such a literal way as, say, a ballplayer in midair.

Landscape architecture for the Staples Center was designed by Melendrez Babalas Associates, and McRight says that the firm was amenable to tweaking its design to accommodate *Garland*. McRight also applauds the Los Angeles Arena Company for promoting public art. “It was an opportunity for a huge audience to see artwork who may or may not seek it out in their normal lives,” McRight says, “and for me to create that special experience for people.”