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Controversial sculpture to be erected at UM

University of Montana--Missoula. Office of University Relations

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The controversial steel sculpture which will be erected temporarily in the University of Montana Oval, Missoula, next week will be far more aesthetic than its original inspiration, a teepee burner.

According to John Vichorek, UM graduate art student and designer and constructor of the 13-feet wide by 12-feet high sculpture, a sculpture is merely what the observer wants to see it as.

Last May the announcement that the free-form sculpture would be placed in the Oval, already inhabited by a bronze sculpture of a Grizzly bear, brought a burst of outrage from UM students who did not want the serenity of the Oval disturbed by a model of a teepee burner, a wood-waste incinerator commonly associated with air pollution.

Although he originally got the idea for the sculpture from a teepee burner, Vichorek said it is not meant to represent exactly that.

"I called it a teepee burner," he said,"because I didn't want to have to take the time to explain what the different shapes meant. Actually, it is simply all of the elements of design put together in a structure--shapes utilizing negative and positive space."

The giant shape consists of 10 pieces of polished steel which, to some observers, might resemble licks of flames or smoke, and eight pieces of rusted steel forming the circular base.

Vichorek submitted plans for the structure Winter Quarter to the UM Foundation art sculpture contest and won the first prize of $1,000. He received permission to place the sculpture in the Oval from an administrative committee consisting of George Mitchell, administrative vice president, J.A. Parker, Physical Plant supervisor, and Rudy Autio, professor of art.
CONTROVERSIAL SCULPTURE--2

Vichorek used the prize money to cover the cost of constructing the sculpture. He began building it in his basement in his Florence, Mont., home where he cut patterns out of large sheets of steel. He then welded the pieces together.

The final construction stages entailed sand blasting the entire structure and refinishing the top part to keep it from rusting. Vichorek said he will allow the bottom part, a circular base, to rust and weather while the top remains smooth.

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