

Iron Man Statue – 5th City History/Story by Jean E. Loomis
Email to Jean Long
Date: Fri, Feb 8, 2019 at 1:26 AM
Subject: 5th City 1.

Dear Jean

Terry sent me your email address. I gather you would like to know why and how the Ironman came into being. I want to answer this question by setting the context.

My background:

I am a New Zealander, after 4 years at Art School I decided I would teach Art in the Pacific. About this time President Kennedy had launched the idea of 'Volunteer Service Abroad' an idea which many young people around the world caught on to. I contacted the Catholic Missions in the Pacific offering my services and was accepted, I spent 2 years teaching Art at 4 schools in Apia Samoa.

On returning to NZ I taught Art part time and held Art exhibitions. I also got in touch with a group of women who lived in Evanston. They were highly educated and worked in teams in developing countries. I wrote to them and they invited me to visit and stay for a while. It so happened that their house was next door to a house that had been occupied by some members of the Institute a few years before. I arrived in Chicago in February 1967. While I was with them, they provided me with study material on Vatican two + sociology studies on the inner city.

One day I attended a workshop run by a Chicago Catholic Youth organization which was held in one of the seminar rooms at 3444 West Congress Parkway. During lunch one of the women from the Institute came and spoke to the group about 5th City. She talked about the Economic, Political and Cultural dimensions of society and then she said - 'symbols are the key to changing society'. Being an artist, I realized immediately that this was what I was about. When she finished talking and left the room I followed and stopped her in the corridor. I asked her to tell me more about symbols and she replied that I could get in touch with Terry Loomis.

The 1967 Summer program was being planned when I moved into the Institute in May and I became involved in the Arts. The Summer program was multi-faceted.

It involved many people from across the US who came and lived on campus for a month, participated in workshops and assisted in the large scale artworks that were created every week for a festival on the weekend. Another aspect was the Art, Drama, Music and Dance workshops for the local youth. The City of Chicago paid young people to participate in the program. The funding by the city was a way to keep the youth busy because they were afraid that there would be riots.

In June an old tavern in the community was being renovated, the building was renamed the Node. As part of this renovation the empty lot next door was cleared of rubbish and the outside three-story wall of the Node was prepared for painting. I drew up a design to scale using the theme ' Afro Latin Beat' - see attached photo. I drew the design on the wall with colored chalk. It was a series of black figures dancing, and a large sun symbol behind them representing the Latin influence. At that time in 5th City the community was mostly Black and to a lesser degree Latino. The method used was basically 'paint by numbers'.

In July there were 4 festivals which involved the whole campus. Each one was a celebration of the gifts and ethnicity of different cultures. These were: the Yellow Man, the Red Man, the White Man and the last festival was the Black Man. I designed the structures which were made out of cardboard refrigerator boxes from Sears. For example, the four-story dormitory block was turned into a Chinese pagoda for the Yellow festival. Terry's drama students acted in a production of 'The Royal Hunt of the Sun', a celebration of Aztec culture and the old gym building was turned into a vast sun symbol. The White Man festival was based on technology and we turned the chapel tower into a rocket space ship. By the last weekend I was worn out - I do remember a discussion about what the theme should be. Some of the local young men in the Art group wanted to create a black panther which I thought would be cool but that wasn't considered a good idea. It would have been fantastic if we had taken photos of these events because they were spectacular but I was too busy to take any and I never saw any photos that anybody else took. Artists like Dick Gregory appeared and I remember a stunning drumming group. The campus was crowded everyone came from 5th City.

Terry and I were married on September 17th, 1967. During the following months I remember a massive Picasso sculpture being erected in downtown Chicago made from Cor-ten steel. There was much discussion from the Chicago public printed in

the newspaper about what this work was all about. I reflected that here was a Spanish artist who had been paid a huge sum to create an artwork for the city. I doubt he even visited the place and he didn't actually make the work himself. It was constructed according to his plans.

I remember sitting in Room E listening to Matthews talk - I used to draw during these times. He was speaking about standing in the moment not as a victim but as a person of faith. The sculpture grew out of this talk and my experience of living in 5th City.

Deconstructing the work:

As you face the front of the sculpture the left panel is a wedgeblade - it represents the past. The figure in the form of an X represents the present moment, to stand in the midst of the ghetto not as a victim but as a free man. The right hand panel is again a sun symbol and represents the future is open. The rib cage shows the decision to give your life, to be a dead man.

As time has passed I find it interesting that the old Sears building across the expressway is now a police detention center where people disappear, and for me the sculpture took on a new meaning when I saw the 'don't shoot' movement rise up. I guess what I am saying is that an Artwork speaks to different people at different times, symbolic meaning and significance change.

Back to the creation of the sculpture. I guess I must have shown the drawing to someone I can't really remember the details - it may have been Joe Pierce. At first, I made a small Marquette to try out my ideas (see attached photos). I think that Pierce was involved in raising money for the Institute and perhaps he approached the steel company who provided the steel for the Picasso's work - I have no idea. I wasn't told who actually paid for the steel or the fabricators who cut out the big shapes.

In preparation I drew the figure and panels to the actual size on to paper for the steel company to cut out. The welding was done by myself and a 5th City man who I think Al Lingo got hold of, he was an excellent welder. We worked together in the jet hanger welding the pieces together and worked on the smaller shapes e.g., the ribcage. The bits that have broken off over the years were probably the welds I made.

In April 1968 the sculpture was unveiled in the area behind the Node. It was the afternoon before Martin Luther King's assassination. Later I heard that it had been relocated to the Junction of Homan and 5th Ave., an area it was designed for. In 1990 on a visit to the US I stopped by to see the sculpture as I had not seen it since I had finished it. There was a young guy nearby selling T shirts and he saw me taking photographs. He came up and asked if I would like to know about the sculpture and I replied yes. He said it was made by a man he knows and that its called the 'Ironman'. I said thank you for telling me. So, the myth is that the Ironman sculpture was made by an unknown black man from 5th City. I think that this story about the origin of the work is in one sense the truth because the inspiration grew out of the pain and need of the 5th City people. It really does belong to them and that's probably why it is still there.

Personally, I prefer to fly under the radar and I am not seeking any kudos, I prefer the urban myth.

You asked about paintings of the saints for the great hall. I have a vague memory of this but without seeing any images I can't make any comments.

Arohanui - lots of love

Jean E Loomis.