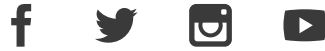


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Statue or Bust: A Look Behind the Human Sculptures of SFU

September 7th, 2015 by [Brad McLeod](#)



In March of 2001, sculptor Stephen Harman was driving down Boundary Road, when he suddenly got a phone call that would change his life. He immediately pulled over to the side of the road and answered with bated breath. It was Lorne Davies.

“Is it possible for you to make a statue of Terry Fox?”

The request from SFU’s founding athletic director was not one that required a lot of thought. Although Harman was quite busy, there wasn’t a moment of hesitation.

“Absolutely, I would be thrilled.”

Harman was working on another project in Calgary when Davies made the call and

therefore wouldn't be able to get started until May. With the unveiling already set for September 19th, it was going to be an extremely tight schedule, but there wasn't a chance in the world that he was going to pass up the opportunity.

Although neither of them would've realized it, Stephen had been in line to do the project since he was only two years old. Years before Davies had the idea and decades before Terry Fox even began his Marathon of Hope, it was destined that a Harman would create SFU's central iconic statue.

Stephen would sculpt the statue — or bust.

There are few who would disagree that SFU's Burnaby Mountain campus is anything but picturesque. From its famous architecture to its beautiful natural surroundings, it is truly one of Greater Vancouver's most stunning locations.

It is also home to some beautiful artwork. However, while murals and paintings line the walls of the Academic Quadrangle both inside and out, and the campus has plenty of interesting sculptures and works of contemporary and native art, there are very few statues. Despite the popularity of the Terry Fox statue in the middle of the AQ, he is only joined by two other human sculptures, a bust of Mahatma Gandhi tucked away in a Science courtyard off of the main concourse and another bust of Indian human rights champion Bheemrao Ramji Ambedkar in the lobby of the library.

The artistic landscape is a far cry from that of the University of British Columbia, which features a number of human sculptures around the school. None, however are as massive as one that almost ended up defining our campus in SFU's early days.

Early in 1967, SFU received a very generous donation of \$10,000 from the Lafarge cement company. While some may not have been a huge fan of SFU's brutalist design, the choice of material was a godsend for James Sinclair, then president of Lafarge.

As a thank you, Sinclair wanted to give back to the university. This generosity can only have been reinforced by the fact that his two daughters, Rosalind and Margaret, were both students at the young school. Rosalind was notable for being the inaugural winner of the "Miss Simon Fraser" beauty pageant while Margaret would become very famous a few years later when in 1971, at 22 years old, she married the then 52-year old Prime Minister of Canada, Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

There was only one caveat to Sinclair's gift. It was given with the express purpose of creating a statue of the explorer Simon Fraser. This would prove to be a difficult task for SFU to undertake, not only because it would require them to create a statue, but because it would require them to figure out how to accept a gift.

Although the donation to SFU was made prior to April 1967, it wouldn't be until fall that any real decisions began to be made. Why? Because no one had any idea who was supposed to be making decisions.

At the time, SFU had three separate committees who all legitimately could have taken on the project. The Works of Art Committee would've probably been the most obvious choice, but there was also the Aesthetics Committee, which was created following the fallout from a much reviled Shell gas station being built on campus in 1966, and the Design and Graphics Committee.

Each group had a legitimate stake in the decision making process of the Simon Fraser sculpture, however they were also still all advisory groups to the SFU Board of Governors with the final decision, ultimately, being in the hands of the president. Getting all of these committees to be involved in the process and have their fair say would be a lengthy and exhausting process.

To make matters worse, in early September, President McTaggart-Cowan bypassed them all and erroneously delegated the job to the school's architecture firm, Erickson-Massey.

At a meeting of the Aesthetics Committee held on September 7, 1967, Arthur Erickson presented photographs of a clay sketch submitted by artist George Norris that he recommended be installed. Norris, now known for his iconic Crab sculpture outside of the Museum of Vancouver, was Erickson's preferred artist for the Lafarge sculpture. His work was recommended to him by an old friend, Mrs. Doris Shadbolt, the Assistant Curator of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Apparently, Erickson-Massey had convinced President McTaggart-Cowan that "figurative sculpture was passé" and although they had certain understandings with Lafarge, James Sinclair was not aware of the changing nature of their gift.

For his part, McTaggart-Cowan spent that meeting making even less popular recommendations. He showed the committee several photographs of "Soviet realism

sculpture” as a possible alternative. His ideas were officially dismissed due to their unrealistic scale, but one must assume the almost fascist implications of their design also played into their preclusion.

Once the other committees became aware of these plans to go against the donor’s wishes, they were not pleased. It became clear that their three committee system was not working out.

In an October memo to McTaggart-Cowan, Wayne Elwood, the chairman of the Aesthetics Committee on behalf of his group, asked for the integration of the three committees. According to their letter, the case of the Lafarge gift “resulted in embarrassment for the donor, yourself and several local artists, as well as members of your advisory committee.”

In order to fix this, Elwood and co. recommended that the committees be integrated into one, the Works of Art Committee, and that it be completely autonomous. This was to not allow every decision to come down to the President, a fact which made it impossible for him and the entire school to not face criticism with every decision.

While these recommendations eventually did become a reality with the creation of the SFU Art Gallery in 1970, McTaggart-Cowan’s immediate decision in October 1967 was to task Iain Baxter and Joel Smith of the Works of Art Committee with finding him an artist as quickly as possible.





Once the project was back on track, selecting an artist was actually a relatively simple procedure. Smith presented the committees with photographs of the works of six local sculptors including Tony Bissig, Elek Imredy, George Norris and Jack Harman.

Harman, who was in the early years of establishing his prolific career in British Columbia, was the Works of Art Committee's unanimous choice to tackle the project. It was decided, however, by the Aesthetics committee that both Harman and another notable sculptor named David Marshall would be commissioned to send in models of their designs.

Marshall and Harman were asked to send in maquettes of their conceptions of Simon Fraser and locations for the sculpture. They were paid \$275 each, still leaving plenty of money to complete the final product.

Marshall sent in his design first and apparently did his homework for his cubist figure, which he envisioned being put up in the AQ. He based the four ton, eight-foot-high red granite piece on the last sentence of the explorer's journal — the line from July 2, 1808, which was written after he reached the mouth of the Fraser river, states: "The men being extremely tired, went to rest, but they were not long in bed before the tide rushed upon the beds and roused them up."

He also noted in his submission, the red granite would stand up to the wet climate and also harmonize with the red tile patio in front on the building.

By January of 1968, Harman had also completed his work and by March, it was decided by all committees that he should be tasked to create his sculpture. According to his son Stephen, who was only a toddler at this time, the design was quite unique.

"It [was] the bust of Simon Fraser and then a 20 foot tall concrete canyon. So it's kind of a 'V' with the Fraser Canyon behind it."

As if that weren't enough, the sculpture was also intended to be presented with two massive concrete columns and a base. While Harman was supposed to oversee the building of these accompanying elements, maquettes of the columns, one of which

depicts Simon Fraser's journey and the other the First Nations community, were given to SFU directly by Lafarge.

According to his own letters of correspondence with the Aesthetics Committee, Harman expected to be paid \$5,000 for his work, which was well within their budget. His letter also mentions that the sculpture would be 27 feet high and the bronze bust of Simon Fraser would be five feet high.

The issue of the monument's location seemed like the only obstacle which remained. Along with Marshall, McTaggart-Cowan originally envisioned it in the middle of the AQ. The Aesthetics committee had other ideas.

They wanted the statue to be the first site people saw as they travelled up the mountain. Their top preference for its location was at the east terminal of the then (and now) unconstructed 'Ceremonial Way'. At the time, these roadways were not expected to be completed for ten years, but were supposed to eventually be the main entrance to the University and would quite appropriately allow the statue to overlook the Fraser River.

Unfortunately, it was soon pointed out that having the monument in this location would be a traffic and pedestrian hazard. They therefore went with their second choice, the intersection of Gaglardi Way and Curtis-Ring Road overpass. It would overlook both roads, as well as the Fraser River and Valley, and was agreed to be a beautiful natural setting.

With everything in order, the SFU board of directors finally approved LaFarge Cement's Centennial Gift of a Sculpture of Simon Fraser. The exciting news was announced in the April issue of Takkali, SFU's monthly newsletter. The press release ended by stating that "the board expressed its thanks to the members of the Works of Art Committee and the Aesthetics Committee who had brought this project to such a successful conclusion."

And, that's the story behind how it came to be that every time we travel up Burnaby



A sketch of Jack Harman's proposed Simon Fraser sculpture.

Mountain to SFU we are greeted by the giant head of Simon Fraser. At least this would've been the case, if it hadn't been for another big head.

In a meeting with the Aesthetics committee sometime in May, President McTaggart-Cowan showed his frustration with the gift that just kept on giving. According to Wayne Elwood of the Aesthetics Committee, "McTaggart-Cowan held up Jack's maquette, turned it upside down, and made an unfortunate comment."

"I suspect at that point, he was so fed up with the whole issue that he couldn't take any more bickering. I don't have the date for that meeting, but it was the end of the project, as far as I know."

Even though McTaggart-Cowan had been very receptive to the idea of combining all the committees, at this point nothing was finalized and he still held all the power when it came to the gift, and he decided to cancel the project.

By 1969, the LaFarge sculpture fund was transferred away from the statue project towards general art purchases. McTaggart-Cowan was gone. The Aesthetics committee no longer existed. While most at SFU probably would've been happy to never have to deal with another statue gift again, a sculpture donation would rear its ugly head in no time, when a little famous Indian man decided to drop by the campus.

“Dear Mr. Pavri: The University Works of Art Committee has considered the generous offer of the East Indian Community of British Columbia regarding the proposed donation to Simon Fraser University of a one and one-half times life size bust of Mahatma Gandhi. I am pleased to write on behalf of the Committee, accepting this gift.”

On August 8, 1969 Jack Behrens of SFU's Works of Art Committee wrote to Mr. J.K. Pavri, of the India Club of Vancouver, to confirm that SFU's first bust would soon be installed. Although it would take a couple of months before it would actually see the light of day, the tale of the Mahatma Gandhi monument actually goes way back to 1965 and the correspondence between India and an American by the name of Martin Luther King Jr.

As a follower of Gandhi's non-violence movement in his efforts to bring civil rights for African Americans in the United States, Martin Luther King Jr. was repeatedly contacted with the purpose of being gifted a bronze bust of the Mahatma.

The offers were made by a group in Bombay, India called “Sarvajanik Kalyan Samati” (which translates in English to ‘a body devoted to the welfare of the peoples’). They repeatedly sent letters from 1965 to 1966 offering to pay and ship the monument to hopefully be installed at a Children’s park in the U.S.

While it seems as if Dr. King never answered these letters, following his death, his wife did accept a Gandhi bust which she unveiled at Howard University in Washington D.C. in spring of 1969. The monument at SFU is a direct replica of this sculpture.

SFU’s version of it was first dreamed up by a group called India Club who were formed by a number of Indo-Canadians in the Vancouver area on May 21, 1969. As this year was the 100th anniversary of the birth of national Indian hero Mahatma Gandhi, it was decided their first project be dedicated to his honour.

The club made it their mission to get a statue from India of Gandhi, and have it installed at a public place such as Stanley Park, the UBC endowment lands, or Queen Elizabeth Park. With support of the entire Indo-Canadian community of British Columbia, they purchased a bronze replica of the Howard bust created by the famous Wagh and Company of Bombay, India.

The members then approached various municipalities and their parks and recreation boards to find an appropriate site to install the bust. After receiving denials from all of the municipalities, colleges and schools that they contacted, they became quite concerned at the prospect of having no place available for the installation of the bust.

After several weeks, Natverlal Thakore, a member of the Indo-Canadian community who was a Master’s student at SFU, finally recommended his school as a location. J.K. Pavri of the India club sent a letter to Dr. George Stuart, the Vice President of Administration at Simon Fraser University on July 24, 1969.

Even though there were no longer three committees, permission to install the statue still had to pass through the Board of Governors and the Senate. Bureaucracy once again made it difficult to complete the project.

According to the India Club “the situation became more frustrating when someone raised the following question: Why should the statue of Mahatma Gandhi be installed at the University; why not the statue of the famous explorer Simon Fraser, after whom the university has been named?”

THE UNIVERSITY HAS BEEN HARMED.

Unlike the original Fraser statue however, the India Club had “the spirit of the great soul of Mahatma” on their side and the petty arguments and faculty politics ended up going in their favour. The monument was set to be unveiled in a special ceremony on January 25, 1970 in the east Science courtyard of the AQ.

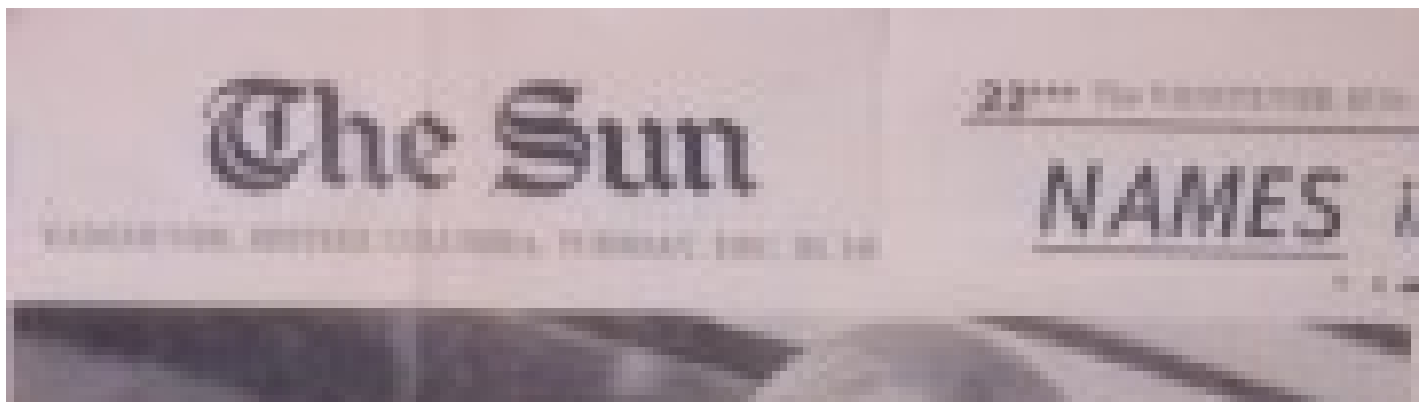
While one would probably not assume that a 3' sculpture of Gandhi located in a quiet courtyard away from the main concourse would attract too much of a negative reaction, the sculpture unveiling ceremony ended up giving a lot of legitimacy to the years of concern about having a statue on campus.

The statue installation was meant to be the climax to a large positive event featuring guest speakers, music and film screenings. The excitement started a little early however, when 50 protesters interrupted the event just before Mr. J.K. Pavri officially gave the bust over to SFU President Ken Strand.

While 12 of the protesters were from a group called the “Hindustani Ghadar Party”, a group of pro-Maoist radicals, the rest were simply typical SFU protesters looking to disrupt the school's administration any chance they could get.

The protest signs featured everything from “Gandhi was a lackey of British imperialism” to “The bust is a bust” to “Strand would have busted Gandhi” and the classic “Strand is a hypocrite”.

According to an article in the Vancouver Sun, the student group believed Strand had used force against students and therefore shouldn't be involved in the unveiling of a statue of a man of peace. They also clarified that their protest was against Strand, had nothing to do with the other group and that they were trying not to offend the Indo-Canadian people.





THE GANDHI BUST, a large sculpture of Mahatma Gandhi, was made from Canadian wood by the artist of the same name, located in the lobby of the building.

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The chants and obscenities from the crowd began quietly as Mr. Pavri was talking, but when Strand began his thank you, according to a letter from George Suart, “within ten seconds [he] was drowned out completely.”

Strand didn't fight back and simply took this opportunity to move the event into the theatre, leaving the protestors yelling a mishmash of “down with Gandhi” and “down with Strand” to an empty courtyard.

In the months following the incident, the statue was kept under constant guard from SFU Security and the glasses which were originally located on the sculpture's face, have since been kept with the Thakure family and only put on for special occasions.

Despite the early controversy, since its installation, the Gandhi statue has become the site of a yearly celebration with countless SFU presidents, vice-presidents, chancellors, faculty members, and students showing their support every year.

The Gandhi statue has demonstrated to SFU the power of a human sculpture to bring people together and make a lasting impact for a person's legacy. This would be a vitally important lesson for when the next member of SFU's small statue family joined the university more than thirty years later.

After many statueless decades at Simon Fraser University, in 2001 the idea was raised to honour the school's most famous student in a big way.

Disappointed by the way Terry Fox's legacy had not been honoured at the school, SFU's first football coach and athletic director, Lorne Davies formulated the idea of creating a statue of the young Canadian hero as part of a larger movement to have his connection to Simon Fraser be more known.

After contemplating the idea for a long time, Davies finally reached out to an artist to take on this tremendous project. He decided to seek out the creator of the first Terry Fox statue, located in Ottawa from 1982.

The name he found? Jack Harman.

While Harman was not actually the designer of the statue located across from Parliament Hill in our nation's capital — it was an associate of his, named John Hooper — the Harman Foundry did cast the bronze and sculpt it based on Hooper's

model.

That project was especially exciting for one worker at the foundry in particular: Jack's then 16-year old son Stephen. As a keen follower of Fox's Marathon of Hope, Stephen had donated \$25 dollars to the Marathon of Hope in 1980 — a big deal at the time — and couldn't believe he was getting to help sculpt his hero. With his father passing away in early 2001 and Stephen taking over the business, he was the one to pick up the phone when Davies called.

After getting a small wax model of a running Terry approved by Davies, as well as Fox's parents, from May to September, Stephen and his associates worked tirelessly to get the statue up. Normally, a project of this scale would have taken upwards of a year, but with tapes of Terry Fox's epic run as inspiration, Harman got it done.

Unlike the Simon Fraser debacle back in 1968, the Terry Fox project received tremendous support from the University and was a real community affair. The cost of the sculpture was \$90,000 dollars and was fully paid for less than a year after its installation.

Its cost was covered by a wide range of donors, and everyone from administration to the school's student society and alumni helped raise the money. The final \$18,000 was donated by Wayne Holm, president of Milestones Restaurants, who was also an early football star at SFU back in the late sixties.

Standing at 3 metres high and weighing over 1,000 pounds, the Terry Fox statue has become the defining symbol of the Burnaby campus. Not only has SFU held a Terry Fox Day every year since and helped raise millions of dollars for cancer research, but the Terry Fox statue has taken on a second life as a figure in its own right.

Every winter, students dress him up in a toque and jacket, and everyone who has convoked since 2001 has been led through the mall by his forward-looking optimistic vision.

While Jack Harman may have believed that he had missed out on creating the defining statue when his Simon Fraser sculpture never got to see the light of day, his son has kept his legacy alive with this iconic statue. In fact, due to a misunderstanding as to who created the model, until being contacted by The Tartan, the SFU Art Gallery had

Jack's name in their database as the artist of Stephen's sculpture.

Although Stephen may have studied at UBC, a campus which features several statues sculpted by his father and he may have gone on to also create the Terry Fox monument at BC Place which features four statues of the late hero — it is only at SFU where a Harman statue is beloved as if it were a friend.

“Terry is a very good representation,” Stephen believes to this day. “I would be honoured to have that as something representing me, as student or alumni.”

Thirty-four years after it first began, a Harman work became the symbol of our campus. It took lessons from bureaucracy, politics and even Gandhi to get there, but the long-promised monument to the greatness of Simon Fraser does exist, and it can be found in the Academic Quadrangle under the name Terry Fox.

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