



Idea for new sculpture outside Planetarium was set in Stonehenge

By William Mullen
TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

The mammoth sculpture's 60 stone pieces are placed in a spiral pattern to resemble a galaxy like our own Milky Way. And cutting through the stones are four open avenues precisely positioned to mark points on the horizon where the sun will rise and set each year on the days of the summer and winter solstices.

The summer solstice on Monday will be the first such celestial event since the sculpture at the Adler Planetarium was dedicated last Friday, a primeval stone structure exuding mystery much like England's Stonehenge, stretching 60 feet across the south lawn.

As a piece of public sculpture, it might not quite capture the immediate attention 300 whimsically painted fiberglass cows commanded last week as they were distributed along downtown streets and plazas.

But the cows are here only

through October. The planetarium sculpture, created by Brazilian artists Ary Perez and Denise Milan, a husband and wife team, presumably will be around to be admired for generations.

Milan and Perez designed the sculpture to be viewed in many different ways. At first glance, it most resembles a meditative Zen rock garden, but the solstice should reveal its more cosmic references. It was installed next to the planetarium during the winter solstice Dec. 23 under the direction of Adler archeoastronomer Phyllis Pitluga.

The solstices are the longest (summer) and shortest (winter) days of the year.

"I saw a picture of the sculpture last year," said Pitluga, who specializes in studying how prehistoric people and people from non-western cultures look at the sky, "and all I could think of was Stonehenge."

"The artists created the piece

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Tribune photo by Charles Osgood

Ary Perez (left) and Denise Milan sit amid their sculpture, configured to resemble a spiral galaxy, at the planetarium. "There are many ways to put this together," Milan said.

New Adler sculpture a tribute to stars

Stonehenge was the inspiration for keeping "America's Courtyard," the work of Brazilian artists, in Chicago.

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Some are far larger and more elaborate, like the Mayan observatory Chichen Itza in Mexico and the Nazca lines, animal figures and plazas inscribed in a desert in southern Peru, used to line up and observe solar and lunar stages.

"I like that we can use this to suggest something as big as the cosmos and at the same time inject the human scale and element into it," said Pitluga. "Those old observatories show us that people throughout time have always looked up at the sky and asked the same questions we are asking today: Where did we come from? Are we alone in the universe?"

The sculpture is spread across a lawn planted atop new lakeside landfill created to support the planetarium's recently completed addition. Though the sculpture was installed in December, city and Adler officials wanted to give the big stones a chance to settle before dedicating it.

It is the second installation of the sculpture. In May 1998, it was placed on exhibit north of the Art Institute in Grant Park on a lawn now removed for construction of Millennium Park.

At the Grant Park site, the sculpture was arranged in a different configuration of three concentric circles around the white marble core, reaching just 30 feet across. After hearing Pitluga's vision of the sculpture representing an ancient observatory and a spiral galaxy, the city, which owns the sculpture through the Department of Cultural Affairs,

put it on permanent loan to the Adler. The artists, flown from their home in São Paulo for the dedication, said they could not have been more pleased.

"There are many ways to put this together," Milan said. Besides the four-piece marble core, 55 pieces are marble of varying hues of red, white, black, yellow and brown. She named the sculpture "America's Courtyard."

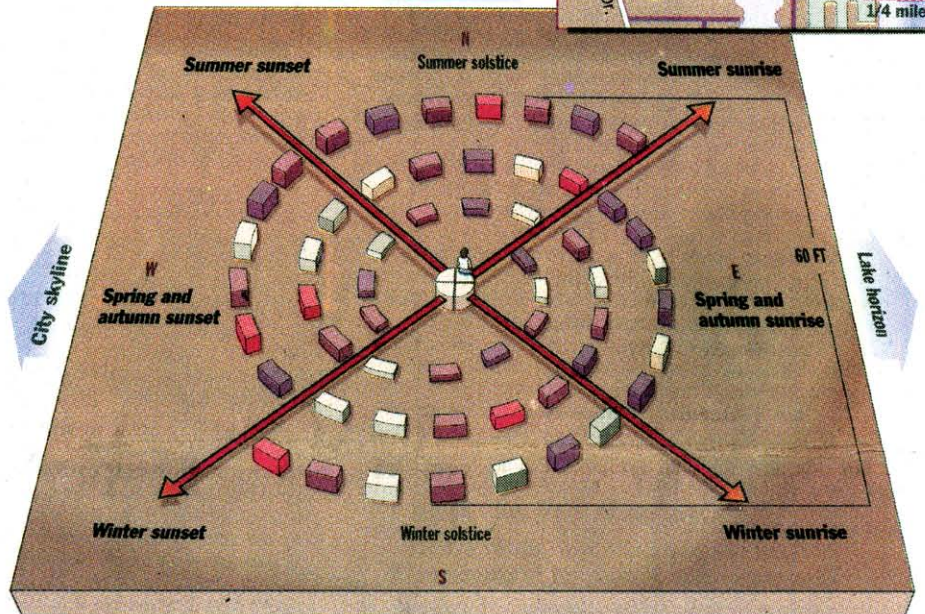
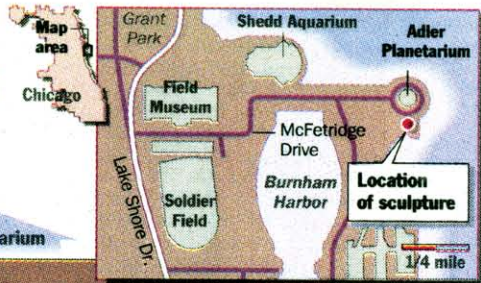
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When the city commissioned the sculpture, it paid Milan and Perez \$30,000 to have the stone shipped to Chicago and another \$5,000 to have it installed. The stone came from quarries throughout Brazil and was shaped and polished there.

New sculpture shows what's on horizon

"America's Courtyard," created by Brazilian artists Ary Perez and Denise Milan and dedicated to the city at the Adler Planetarium on Friday, is a large outdoor sculpture consisting of 60 stones positioned in the shape of a galaxy. Cutting through the stones are four paths that mark the points on the horizon where the sun will rise and set each year on the days of the summer and winter solstices. The solstices are the longest and shortest days of the year.



Source: Adler Planetarium

Chicago Tribune/David Constantine, Phil Geib

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Milan and Perez brought the sculpture as a temporary exhibit, but when it was disassembled to make way for Millennium Park, they offered it—at no extra charge—as a permanent gift to the city's public art program.

"Denise and Ary really did this as a labor of love," said Michael Lash, the city's director of public art. "As public art linked to an institution like the Adler, it is fantastic, because it folds in human history, geography, geology and the cosmos, and it can even be used physically as an outdoor classroom."