

TV INFORMATION "Atlanta '96 Olympic Special" The torch route will be announced at 3:30 p.m. today on WXIA/Channel 11 (4061). Fabrication near for Olympic caldron

Howard Pousner STAFF WRITER. **The Atlanta Constitution** Atlanta, Ga 23 July 1995: L/9.

With today's announcement of the 1996 Olympic Torch Relay route, what better time to check progress with Siah Armajani, who was commissioned by the Cultural Olympiad in early 1994 to create the caldron.

Armajani's work, tentatively scheduled to begin fabrication in September, will be no simple flame holder. He has designed a monumental permanent sculpture comprising three interlinked sculptural elements.

The 16-foot-high spiraling caldron will be constructed of stainless steel and rimmed with terra cotta made of Georgia red clay. It will rise atop a 116-foot steel tower outside Olympic Stadium across Ralph David Abernathy Boulevard near Capitol Avenue. The tower will be connected to the stadium by a 190-foot steel bridge.

Born in Tehran, Iran, and a U.S. citizen since 1967, the St. Paul, Minn.-based artist is noted for creating accessible works that encourage people of different backgrounds to interact with each other and with art.

The caldron's flame-burning part will be fabricated first this fall at American Structural Metal Inc. in Hugo, Minn., taking about two months.

About the same time the flame mechanism is being subjected to extensive testing, fabrication will begin on the bridge and tower. Early next year, the entire work will be erected at the foundry before being disassembled and shipped to Atlanta by train. The date of delivery and installation has not been set.

On a recent visit to Atlanta, the ebullient 56-year-old artist talked about the work.

Q: What are some of the ideas you hope the caldron evokes for viewers?

A: First and foremost, in public art there's no room for self-expression. And this public art {work} does not concern itself with self, with the angst that emanates from self. It has the public interest at heart, and tries to bring joy and happiness. Joy and happiness are two words not often used in relationship to contemporary art. I'm very interested in providing that, to bring a little comfort to the working people.

Q: Most people think of an Olympic caldron as being merely a container for the flame. What prompted you to make the flame container but a part of an elaborate piece?

A: My intention was to build something located outside the stadium, in the heart of the community. I was trying to give something to the community for this occasion, to make it more public, rather than private.

Q: Has the design changed since it was unveiled in March 1994?

A: It's the same. Maybe just a few details we've cleaned up and made better.

Q: Is it difficult to work with a fabricator and structural engineer, among others, to create something from what's essentially a singular vision?

A: I'm used to that. What we want to do as public artists is to harness our individual egos. {My collaborators} are very good and trustworthy. . . . If the engineer says, 'It needs nine bolts around the edge,' and it doesn't look right, that's when I say, 'It doesn't look right. How can you do it for me so it's structurally sound, but it looks like this instead?'

Q: What's your role once fabrication begins?

A: I'll be going there most probably two or three times a week to check on it. I can not do anything myself, but I like to watch people.

Q: Is it possible you'd see something that the fabricators might miss?

A: I try to have a complete image of it {in my mind, after studying models and drawings piece by piece}, so that when I go to the yard - it's a huge place with a lot of people working - I can recognize it, and say, "What about this, what about that?" Sometimes I come up with some questions before I even see it, just to prove to them I know what's going on {laughs}.

Q: Are the fabricators excited about getting to work on the Olympic caldron?

A: They're very, very excited. As a matter of fact, I have to go buy 35 {Olympic} caps for them.

Q: How about your own excitement level?

A: That was dissipated very fast, when I looked at the contract {laughs}. I mean the pages - volumes - that's numbing. But I still have the enthusiasm.

Q: Do you think about the Opening Ceremonies, the fact that billions of sets of eyes will be watching when the caldron is lit?

A: You know, fundamentally I'm more interested in what happens to its immediate neighborhood, and the other part {the hoopla} is fine. I have not thought about that. Conceptually, I understand it, but emotionally I can not respond to that. I can respond to the {Summerhill} community - to the pride of the community and to the need it has.

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Illustration

Notes: Color photo and teaser box: (Appeared on L/01 with reference to L/09 story) Siah Armajani Photo: mug of Siah Armajani
Photo: The Olympic caldron, with it's spirals, bridge and tower, will be no ordinary flame holder.