

An '80s artwork now taken for granite

Not so long ago, Norm Hines' set of sculptures drew high praise in Texas. Now, it's headed for storage.

By Jesse Katz
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ARLINGTON, Texas — A decade ago, artist Norm Hines was the toast of this Dallas suburb.

His newly christened cluster of granite megaliths — likened by some to a Texas version of Stonehenge — was touted as one of the largest environmental sculptures in the Western Hemisphere. Civic leaders applauded it as a cultural prize. The mayor even exalted Hines, a professor at Pomona College in Claremont, Calif., to the status of honorary citizen.

Today, the entire creation is headed for cold storage, the victim of an odd clash between one man's aesthetic vision and one town's stew of economics, politics and religious fervor.

Developers say the five-acre site, known as Caelum Moor, is in the way of a new shopping and restaurant complex. Ministers say the massive slabs of stone, some of which tower 35 feet high, have become a magnet for witches, devil-worshippers and other pagan practitioners. Arlington officials, unsure of how to resolve the mess, are planning to dismantle the whole thing and stick it in a warehouse, at least temporarily.

"It all just seems very, very bizarre," Hines said recently.

Commissioned toward the end of Texas' oil boom — a time, folks like to say, when there were more dollars around here than sense — Caelum Moor was to be the centerpiece of a \$2 billion office and retail center alongside Interstate 20. Hines designed a multimillion-dollar park with rolling hills, a gurgling brook and about 500 tons of pink-hued granite.

The stones were assembled into five groups — some on land and some in water, some free-standing and some balanced atop each other — in a way that Hines hoped would evoke the ancient imagery of the British Isles. He insists the designs have no grand meaning, other than that they appealed to his eye.

Unveiled in 1986, the megaliths were an instant hit. But like much of Texas during that period, the business park was a bust. The property went into foreclosure and changed hands several times.

Still, Caelum Moor — Caelum meaning "the sculptor's tool" and Moor referring to Britain's swampy coastlands — remained a local landmark. Scottish clubs held their Highland Games there. Weddings and picnics and summer concerts were hosted at the site.

About a year ago, WindStar Properties bought the land and began drawing up plans for a shopping center, now that I-20 is back to being a bustling commercial corridor.

Although Caelum Moor may have made sense during Texas' gravy days, said WindStar executive Mike Bailey, "today that's just not reality."

He noted that his company would have been well within its right "to just bust up the stones and haul them off to the gravel pit." Instead, Bailey said, "we tried to show our civic responsibility," offering to donate the sculpture to a city park.

That's when Dena Smith, co-pastor of Redeeming Love Covenant Church, came into the picture, telling a stunned City Council last October that she had observed "people in occultic groups performing rituals" at Caelum Moor. A few weeks later, she was joined by ministers from 19 other Arlington churches, who spoke of white-robed Druids and animal sacrifices.

Their concerns were amplified when reporters found a few self-described pagans and witches, who ac-

quainted. A special subcommittee is to begin discussing potential sites for the sculpture. Greene said one option was to scatter the megaliths along Johnson Creek corridor, a rivulet that officials hope to develop into a civic attraction.

WindStar plans to begin construction by February. The company has agreed to spend up to \$40,000 for the one-time removal of the rocks. They are expected to be housed at a municipal water-treatment plant.

Hines, meanwhile, is concerned that any reconfiguration of the

megaliths will compromise his vision for Caelum Moor, a site-specific artwork that is not just about the stones, but their relationship to the surrounding environment.

Worse, he fears that the cost and hassle of moving around 500 tons of granite may ultimately condemn Caelum Moor to the trash heap.

"Maybe I'm being overly pessimistic, but I'm afraid that once they're taken down, they'll never come out of storage," Hines said. "Without sounding too egotistical ... it just seems very sad."

knowledged they used Caelum Moor to celebrate solstices and other religious ceremonies.

Mayor Richard Greene dismissed the brouhaha as a media-driven invention. In November, he pulled the plug on a public meeting about Caelum Moor after CNN indicated it would cover the event.

Since then, much of the furor has