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A Roy Lichtenstein sculpture now adorns a plaza on 17th Street.

Another brush with pop art in the city

By Edward J. Sozanski

INQUIRER ART CRITIC

Philadelphians who *LOVE* their *Clothespin* have a new pop-art icon to admire today — Roy Lichtenstein's *Brushstroke Group*.

The four-part sculpture was installed yesterday morning in front of the United Plaza building on 17th Street between Ludlow and Ranstead Streets, directly across from One Liberty Place.

The semiabstract cluster, 29 feet high by about 30 wide, consists of abstracted brush strokes and a cantilevered "drip" painted in vivid red, orange, green, blue and white.

The sculpture is on loan from the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation of New York to Duane Morris L.L.P., one of the city's largest law firms, which just moved into United Plaza.

Brushstroke Group is more colorful and far livelier than either Robert Indiana's *LOVE* logo or Claes Oldenburg's 45-foot-tall *Clothespin*, the city's other major pop-art outdoor sculptures, which are several blocks away.

Lichtenstein, who became famous during the pop-art era of the 1960s for his comic-book paintings, composed the sculpture as a small model in 1996, a year before he died at age 73.

Sheldon Bonovitz, Duane Morris' chairman, said the term of the loan was "indefinite, but we anticipate it being for at least five years."

Duane Morris paid to have the sculpture transported from Seekonk, Mass., where it was fabricated, and to have it installed. The firm is also paying to insure the sculpture while it is on loan.

Jack Cowart, the Lichtenstein Foundation's executive director, described *Brushstroke Group* as "the most complex of Roy's large-scale sculptures."

The tallest element is a column com-

posed of two gestures — one baby blue and the other cherry red — woven one into the other. A "flying drip," striped in white and green, angles down to the ground, where it meets a stubby orange-and-white "brush stroke." A smaller blue element at the base of the column displays the artist's signature benday dot pattern.

While much shorter than *Clothespin*, *Brushstroke Group* is equally witty, more complex visually, and, because of its intense colors, far more animated. This gives it equivalent prominence, especially from the windows of surrounding buildings.

The first outdoor Lichtenstein in the city, *Brushstroke Group* exists in only two copies; the other is scheduled to be lent to the University of Massachusetts in Boston.

The sculpture came to Philadelphia because Duane Morris' desire to place a prominent sculpture in front of its new offices coincided with the foundation's interest in placing a major Lichtenstein work in the city.

Bonovitz, whose firm displays an extensive art collection throughout its seven floors, initiated the process when he contacted the Philadelphia Museum of Art for advice on developing United Plaza into a sculpture garden. A prominent art collector, he is also a trustee of the Art Museum and the Barnes Foundation.

The museum had heard that the Lichtenstein Foundation was interested in placing a sculpture here. Cowart said the foundation originally thought of a "partnership" with the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Fairmount Park Art Association, both of which worked to make the loan happen. "As it worked out, there were sitting complications," he said.

At that point, Alice O. Beamesderfer, the museum's assistant director for collections and project support, brought Bonovitz and Cowart together.



DAVID SWANSON / Inquirer Staff Photographer

"Brushstroke Group" is unwrapped in United Plaza, across from One Liberty Place. The 29-foot-high sculpture, installed yesterday, is on indefinite loan from the Lichtenstein Foundation to the Duane Morris law firm. The public can view the work from several vantage points.

"The foundation prefers to work with institutions, not private clients," Cowart said. "But we became convinced this was a civic thing. We know it [the sculpture] is going to have some kind of supervision."

Everyone at the foundation is "fascinated to see what this piece will look like in this vest-pocket park in Philadelphia," he said. "There's a lot of action on that street."

Brushstroke Group is one of three sculptures that Lichtenstein conceived in 1996. About four years ago, the foundation decided to have them fabricated. "Originally, we said we wouldn't fabricate this piece until we knew where it was going. We didn't want to do it on spec," Cowart said.



Jay Merrick begins to unwrap part of Roy Lichtenstein's "Brushstroke Group" sculpture. The installation took place yesterday morning.

"Coincidentally, the Philadelphia situation bubbled up, and we began to think this would be a great piece to have on the Duane Morris plaza," Cowart said.

Amaral Custom Fabrications constructed the sculpture of half-inch aluminum plate designed for marine environments. The wear-resistant special paint, used on commercial airliners (and the B-1 bomber), is designed to hold up under extreme temperatures.

The sculpture sits on a part of the plaza that is now fenced off and restricted to Duane Morris employees, clients and guests. It is entered from a new ground-floor restaurant that the law firm owns and operates. But the public can view the sculpture from several vantage points, despite a four-foot-high wall along 17th Street.

While not intended as a corporate logo, *Brushstroke Group* announces rather grandly that Duane Morris is passionate about serious art.

The passion is due primarily to



DAVID SWANSON / Inquirer Staff Photographer

The last of four pieces is lowered to form "Brushstroke Group" on 17th Street across from One Liberty Place. The Roy Lichtenstein Foundation prefers to work with institutions, its director said, but saw the loan to Duane Morris L.L.P. as "a civic thing."

Bonovitz, who displays part of the extensive collection of "outsider" art that he and his artist wife, Jill, have assembled over the last several decades. *Outsider* refers to artists who are not formally trained, who often live on the margins of society, and who frequently work outside established art traditions.

The Bonovitz collection, on loan to the law firm, includes works by most of the major names in this genre, such as Bill Traylor, Martin Ramirez, Elijah Pierce, William Hawkins and Howard Finster. It also includes some magnificent, large-scale folk embroideries from India called *phulkari*, seven of which now hang in the lobby of the United Plaza building.

Duane Morris' corporate collection, hung in conference rooms and corridors throughout the firm's seven floors, includes paintings and works on paper by many prominent regional artists, such as Warren Rohrer, Edna Andrade, Thomas Chimes, Diane Burko, Elizabeth Osborne, Bruce Pollock and Mary Nomecos.

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Peter Mariano unwraps part of the sculpture. The only other copy of the work is to be lent to the University of Massachusetts.