

Sustainable, Functional Art

Wednesday, December 4, 2013

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ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR BEN CARIENS DISCUSSES ONE OF THE BIKE RACK DESIGNS MADE BY STUDENTS IN HIS METAL FABRICATION CLASS.

There is an art to looking at a piece of metal and seeing green.

Ben Cariens has been helping students in his metal sculpture workshop hone that kind of vision all semester. The result: designs and the eventual fabrication of bike racks that will be used on campus next year—bike racks that at the same time they are furthering sustainability efforts at UNH, will become part of the university's growing public art displays.

The idea to blend the two concepts came from College of Liberal Arts Dean Ken Fuld who, during a visit to Chicago a few years ago, saw sculptural bike racks being used around the Windy City.

"They were very cool. I thought about UNH's dearth of public art and its emphasis on being a 'green' bike-friendly place, and imagined such bike racks, made by our own students, on our campus," Fuld said. "The idea was born. Jennifer Moses, chair of art and art history department, was receptive to my proposal and asked Ben Cariens to consider adopting the project in his course."

Cariens said yes. With the assistance of sculpture technician Adam Pearson, Cariens helped guide nine students as they developed the concepts for the bike racks, beginning with drawings and sculpture models. Scale models were presented to the university aesthetics sub-committee, leading to three models being select by the entire committee for full-scale development. Two of the three will be made from steel. The third design will use aluminum. Students will be doing all stages of fabrication: cutting, welding, bending, forging and grinding of the metals.

"This project makes very visible the university's ongoing commitment toward an ever increasingly sustainable and environmentally responsible university community," Cariens said. "In focusing on the bike culture of the university, this project both promotes and encourages a more robust effort to limit automotive traffic within the campus. And, in selecting such sculpturally ambitious designs, the university is expressing a greater commitment to the role of public art and its capacity to enrich both the physical campus as well as the broader arts culture of the community."

There are approximately 250 bike racks with a combined storage capacity of 2,500 bikes on campus (excludes bike racks locate at residence halls). In the coming year, UNH will be utilizing a USDOT Federal Transit Administration grant to add bike racks on core campus near Wildcat Transit bus stops. There are hopes of bringing the first covered bike parking to campus as part of that effort.

"We still have core campus areas where demand exceeds available proximate racks - and we work hard to discourage bikes from being attached to trees, buildings and railings," said Steve Pesci of Campus Planning. "The Ben Cariens art-rack project will help supplement the existing stock of standard racks on campus."

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

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