

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-1
August 25, 2020
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Jorge Fors, Jr.
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Michael Mena

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
Assistant City Manager, Ed Santamaria
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Interim Preservation Officer, Kara Kautz
Arts and Culture Specialist, Catherine Cathers

Public Speaker(s)

David Austin

Agenda Item G-1 [12:00 p.m.]

A Resolution approving the concept for a work of public art titled “Floral Sky” by Michael Kalish in conjunction with the Sunrise Senior Living development project at 1000 Ponce de Leon Boulevard in fulfillment of the Art in Public Places requirement for public art in private development (unanimously recommended by the Arts Advisory Panel approval/denial vote: 5 to 0, and the Cultural Development Board approval/denial vote: 7 to 0).

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And I'd like to take up Item G-1 now and point out that this is probably the first time in history that we take up a time certain item at the time that it was scheduled for. This is a 12 o'clock and it is now 12 o'clock, so G-1. Miriam.

City Attorney Ramos: Sorry, sir. A resolution approving the concept of artwork for the public art titled "Floral Sky" by Michael Kalish in conjunction with the Senior -- Sunrise Senior Living development.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Interim Preservation Officer Kautz: Hi. Good morning.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Is there a presentation?

Interim Preservation Officer Kautz: Hi. Good morning. Catherine Cathers, from our department, will be directing this item, who I believe is on.

Arts and Culture Specialist Cathers: Good afternoon, Mayor, Vice Mayor and Commissioners.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Good afternoon.

Arts and Culture Specialist Cathers: Catherine Cathers, Arts and Culture Specialist for the City of Coral Gables. The Sunrise Senior Living, as the developer is constructing an assisted living and memory care center at 1000 Ponce de Leon Boulevard. Developer has chosen the option of petitioning for a waiver of the Art in Public Places fee requirement by commissioning and installing artwork within the project as specified in the Zoning Code Article 3 Division 21. Sunrise Senior Living development team selected art consultant, David Austin, who's been working closely with the developer's goals and aesthetic interests. Mr. Austin researched multiple artists, including those on the City's preapproved artists list. The shortlist of artists and their work were presented

to the developer, who selected Michael Kalish and invited Mr. Kalish to develop a concept proposal. Michael Kalish has a long career as an artist and sculptor. Monumental outdoor installations include the historic Muhammad Ali tribute in Los Angeles, a series of two dozen towering pinwheels exhibited at the Tampa Museum of Art and raised the caliber on monumental public artwork currently traveling the US. Embraced by critics, dealers and contemporary art collectors, Michael Kalish's artworks are featured in the collections of world leaders, Fortune 100 companies, past presidents, professional athletes and musicians. His unique position as a preeminent pop artist has led to features in People Magazine, Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Details, Wired, Art News and a feature of stories on CBS Sunday Morning, CNN, eMSN, TLC and others. The cost of the proposed art piece and installation is estimated to be \$430,000, which is less than the required one percent of the project's total Art in Public Places fee estimate of \$517,126. The difference in any cost will be issued as a check for deposit into the Art Acquisition Fund. The Arts Advisory Panel and Cultural Development boards voted unanimously to recommend the artwork at their respective meetings on July 22nd and August 4th. The developer is required to provide for the perpetual maintenance of the artwork, which will be the sole responsibility of the developer in accordance with the restrictive covenant which will be entered into with the City following the Art in Public Places funding goals and implementation guidelines. As you can imagine, and of note, there were extensive discussions regarding the material selection and maintenance at the staff, panel and board levels. Mr. David Austin is here to present a PowerPoint about the proposed artwork and to answer questions by the Commission about the artist, artwork, materials and maintenance. So now I'm going to hand it over to David Austin.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Hello.

David Austin: Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to present to you this morning... I'm actually in Kauai.. Sorry, my video looks a little dark because it's still dark here. I think it'll come up a bit in a few minutes, and you might hear roosters crowing as well.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Where are you?

Mr. Austin: I'm in the north shore of Kauai.

Commissioner Keon: Oh.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: North shore of what?

Mr. Austin: Of Kauai in Hawaii.

Commissioner Keon: Hawaii.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Oh, Hawaii. I understood Kuwait. Yeah, how are you?

Mr. Austin: Yeah, thank you. First, I'll tell you that the developer tasked us with finding a sculpture that the population of the project could interact with. As Katherine said, this is sort of a super-duper assisted living and memory care facility, and they wanted the art, if possible, to add to both the residents' experience as well as the families visiting the residents, and of course, with public art, the population of Coral Gables as well. And I'll show you when we get to the site plan how we accomplished that with the City as well as with the people living at the facility. And with that, they wanted an uplifting sort of environment, so we presented many artists, as Catherine stated earlier. We came up with Michael Kalish, who has something in his vocabulary as sort of a garden/floral aesthetic. and so, Floral Sky is actually an interactive piece, which is a canopy -- in fact, Alex, could you please move forward to slide four, which is the rendering of the building. Catherine, is Alex there to run the PowerPoint?

Arts and Culture Specialist Cathers: Yes. I had sent him -- there it goes.

Mr. Austin: There he is. Perfect. Okay, thank you.

Arts and Culture Specialist Cathers: You want to start at the beginning?

Mr. Austin: No, actually, this one's fine. I just want to show the building quickly. So, this is the building; the sculpture, as you can see, there are two canopies actually at either end of the building, and then we'll back up to slide three, Alex, and we'll show the conceptual of the piece. So...there we go. So, the canopies come -- there are two of these, and they're comprised of approximately 125 water jet cut aluminum flowers. They're sort of intertwined, and as you can see from the scale, they're approximately 12 feet in height, 25 feet wide, 12 feet deep. There will be seated elements incorporated, which I'll show you in the coming slides, that connect the two sculptures on either end of the building. The building itself has an arcade that faces Ponce de Leon that runs the entire length of the building where the families in there and the residents can be outside. It's a covered area, about 12 feet deep. So, at either end, they can come sit either on the benches with the sculpture. Interesting thing about this sculpture is that it actually has four sides. It has a top, bottom, front and back, so, the underside of the sculpture -- when you see the armatures -- we call them the stems -- on either end, they are sort of -- the flowers are clustered above and below, so when you are beneath the sculpture, you're looking up, you're -- it's as if you're with a garden above you, but also, the building's a six-story building. The residents on the corners of the buildings looking down get the experience of looking down upon the sculpture as well, and as you saw in the rendering -- and I'll get to the site plan in a moment -- the Venetia -- pardon my pronunciation -- Santiani, which is on the other side that are perpendicular to Ponce de Leon, we placed the piece sort of diagonally on the corner so there'd be maximum visibility both for the residents and for the public. Also, the piece is set back in such a way that there will be no issues with site lines, and again, I'll get to that. I just want to talk a little bit about the connection of Michael and Florida. Michael grew up in Florida. He's actually using local flora as some of the subject matter. There will be hibiscus, morning glories -- here we go -- coreopsis, which is your state wildflower, which is that sort of pink daisy-like flower in the upper right. And so, his intent in many of Michael's pieces in the past is to involve the viewers of the sculpture so they get an experience as well. I'll talk a little bit about the materials because I know that's important in southern Florida. It's

comprised of aluminum with a military grade/aircraft grade powder coat. The -- and I should say, I understand from earlier conversations that painted materials in Florida have been an issue in the past. So, Michael's spoken -- and I have too as well -- for the powder coaters. I have 30 years' experience with sculpture installations, both on the west coast -- well, throughout the country, but in ocean communities. I also have my gallery -- previous to my becoming a consultant -- was in Palm Springs, California, which has the most intense sun I think anywhere. It was 122 degrees there yesterday. And we have installed Mr. Kalish's sculpture there in a large-scale piece that's been in 10 years and there's been absolutely no change in the pigment or the brightness of the piece. He's actually -- cleverly, these pieces are not going to be flat. This image because we're looking in a computer, it looks sort of like they're all facing up. They're actually going to rotate on those stems, so no piece will be, you know, facing straight up at any one time. They'll also create shadows upon each other. The other thing that I'll say is the underside of the piece, to me, I think is going to be the best experience, which will have no direct sun as well. I'm sorry. I think somebody made a comment. Want to answer a question or are we okay? Okay. If you don't mind, Alex, could you move forward to the next rendering slide, and the next on. So there's the detail, and you can see in the lower right, that is developing the benches. We're going to make sure -- the initial benches were sort of seats. We're going to have -- they'll have arms and backs, and there'll be laser-cut images related to the sculpture itself. And actually, let's go on forward to the next one. So, this gives you an idea, and this is a little conceptual, but this gives you an idea of how the pieces will layer above each other. And these flowers will be from 12 to 30 inches in diameter, and they will be very organic in nature, with openings, cantilevers, where they're floating in space and that will accomplish a couple of things. The staff earlier had mentioned that they -- well, they talked about maintenance. We opened the piece or Michael opened the piece up somewhat. Maintenance is low power, power washing is all that has to be done, and the developer is also -- he had a couple of palm trees on the corners. Those are going to be removed because this is where the pieces are, but also so we minimize debris, et cetera, that would be on the sculpture as well. In the next slide, I think you'll get an example of -- ah, we'll do color first. So, you saw the original palette. There was a comment early on about sort of a Florida/Miami palette. So, I think it'll fall -- or I'll say this, Michael says that the palette of these will actually fall somewhere in between

this, which is sort of like a color chart. This isn't the sculpture itself. This is sort of like a color chart; between this and a somewhat brighter palette. May I have the next slide? So, this is a related piece. It's for a public art project in Virginia. And Alex, may I have the next one? It'll give us a little -- that'll give you an idea of the scale of the flowers. In this piece, these are very densely clustered. Again, Floral Sky will be somewhat -- well, in fact, significantly more open and the flowers will be floating in space. But this piece is unfinished. This is just during the dry fit up, but I wanted you to see the scale of the pieces. And if we can move to site plan, thank you. So, here you see the site plan. The lower part of the screen is Ponce de Leon. And you'll notice that we've actually -- we moved the piece back from our original proposal, and I think it's actually more successful in that this canopy will float above the arcade, where you see the pavers -- I'm pointing with my finger. I'm used to doing this presentation with a PowerPoint. But the front of the building, you'll see behind all of those -- or above all of those hex shapes, that's the arcade, where the residents and the public, if they choose to, can walk under the piece, the benches will be there. On the -- to the right side of the screen -- I guess we would say east -- is actually a children's academy there, which is a bonus. Catherine, I didn't know that before, and I was looking at Google Earth last night. I think it's wonderful that this piece will face -- the right element of the installation will face this preschool children's academy. And at the next slide, you'll see a detail of one corner. And then the next slide's just -- I'll go quickly because these -- and one more, please, Alex. So, the benches again, this shows the material, but they'll actually have backs on the benches. And what Michael actually has come up with in the last two weeks is that the backs will actually be the floral elements. They'll be the laser cut piece or water jet cut pieces, and they'll be sort of underneath the piece. They'll almost look like the flowers have cascaded down onto the benches as well. And I think for questions, I'd like to be back to slide number four -- if you don't mind, Alex -- where we can look at the building. There we go. Or actually, let's go to slide three, where it's the piece itself. Back one more, please. Thank you. One quick personal note from both myself and Michael. Both our parents and grandparents spent significant time in assisted living facilities. And in my case with my parents, I spent significant time there with them. And I can tell you -- and I'm sure everybody here knows that it can be somewhat institutional. And the idea of having a sort of oasis where the family can come and get away from, you know, the confines would have

been a wonderful thing where both my parents were. And I think Michael's come up with a very successful solution to the site, which really did not enable for simply dropping a sculpture on a corner or in front of the building, and where it's sort of almost an architectural addition, but also an activity within the building itself and for the public. So, with that, I'll answer questions, if you have any.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I have -- thank you very much for the presentation. And I think it is a beautiful project, but with our experience with the Alice Aycock sculptures, they were installed in 2016; beautiful, two of them, very bright in colors, colors similar in intensity to what you have shown us. And today that is basically drab olive green, nondescript color because of the intensity of the Florida sun, and it'll get -- yours -- I mean, these pieces will get the same sun, east-west, that that sculpture's on. And I am concerned about fading. I'm very, very concerned about fading in -- maybe Coral Gables sun is more intense than other places, but -- which I doubt, but I'm concerned about fading, and I'd like for you to address that.

Mr. Austin: Well, again, as a dealer, I place sculptures in exterior circumstances and put many painted sculptures -- Alexander Liberman, very famous sculptor, who used similar materials; Fletcher Benton, et cetera. And I do have a lot of experience with this, and I've always had the same concerns. Again, I came from the desert, which -- and also, I grew up in Saint Petersburg, so I do know both climates well. There are powder coats and there are powder coats. It goes everywhere -- powder coats, meaning the color applications. There are what's on our doors, in our homes, which have a finite life. I've read a little bit about the Alice Aycock sculpture, and I know there's been some issue, and I don't have knowledge of exactly what she used. But I do know that with Michael's sculpture, I mentioned the one piece that I have personal experience, and it gets blasted in the desert. But this is, again, it's a military powder coating. It's used on aircraft. Michael says he doubts -- unless you had a time lapse camera -- if you looked at it over a 20-year period, that you would see much of a change. And that said, anything that's painted, the moment it goes outside -- and you could say, "Oh, well, this is a slippery slope." They're the most infinitesimal changes. Michael has total confidence in this material. Also, I will say this -- and I've discussed

this with the developer as well when the issue came up in earlier meetings -- the piece -- I don't know how the Alice Aycock is put together. This piece is actually all mechanically fastened. Every piece that's put on there is not welded. They're all mechanically fastened. So, if there's, you know, some act of God where something crashes into it, any element can be removed. So, if any piece on the sculpture were to fail, change, et cetera, the fix -- which I don't think you would have -- would be relatively simple. The artist has said he will stand behind it. The developer themselves have said, "Look, we want it to continue to live on as it does." I have...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, it's a beautiful piece.

Mr. Austin: Yeah, but I do have total -- I will say this. I do have total confidence. And he has said -- at one point, we talked about is there another wet paint type of way to paint this. This type of powder coating, again, it's on aircraft. It's on tanks. It's on -- it's meant to last. And I do believe that -- and particularly, the underside of the piece, there will -- when I say infinitesimal change -- there will never be a change. The rest of the piece -- because the pieces are canted on the armatures, again, and create shade for each other, I think he's addressed it. I think that it minimizes the, you know, 12 or 15 hour sun exposure during the day. But I have confidence in it. And again, I don't know what Ms. Aycock used with her sculpture, but Michael's confident. As I said, he's going to stand behind it and any fixes are relatively simple.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Are there any comments or questions for Mr. Austin?

Commissioner Mena: I had a question in very much the same vein as the Mayor's question, and I appreciate the answer, and it sounds very reassuring when you say it's military grade powder coat. It makes sense what you're saying. With that said, from my perspective, I look at it more -- and I've said this before, and I'll probably sound like a bit of a broken record to staff and to our City Attorney, and my question becomes, both protections are there in place if, you know, if it does fade or if there are issues in terms of whether it's fading or whatever it might be, what assurance do we have as a city that either the developer or the artist will have to take remedial action to

correct whatever the issue is. And I'm not talking about minor, as you said, infinitesimal sort of things, but if there's a bigger issue, what protection do we have so that we're confident that even if something were to go wrong, despite your reassurances, somebody's going to fix it?

Mr. Austin: I suppose there could be something in writing from the artist that -- in the form of some sort of warranty were there an issue. I think he's confident enough that that would be agreeable with him if you required that. I'd like to say it goes without saying because the developer's very proud of it and would -- wants the piece to be, you know, part of their overall image. You know, publicly it's -- you know, otherwise, they wouldn't be doing this. And the artist has stated that, you know, he doesn't want his work to be seen in a public setting in any way other than he intended it.

Commissioner Mena: Of course, of course. And again, that makes sense, and I -- you make a fair point. You presume that the building owner would want it to shed a nice light on their building in perpetuity. But again, I'm talking to staff mostly here, not -- you know, and I appreciate your insight about he might be able to consider something like that, but I'm just going to keep harping on staff. You know, I feel like we need to have -- always have those kinds of protections in place when we're -- especially with outdoor works just because of the experience we've had in the past. Anybody who's submitting a piece for an outdoor isolation is going to feel confident that it's going to work, but it doesn't always work. And so I just want to make sure from our perspective we're protected, so what are we doing on the City's side for that?

Arts and Culture Specialist Cathers: So, we enter into a restrictive covenant with the developer once it passes Commission. And based on the remarks that you've previously made regarding that, we've added in that language so we -- and we'll look at it again with this one to make sure that we're covering that.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Alright, any other comments?

Vice Mayor Lago: Yeah, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I think it's a beautiful piece of work.

Mr. Austin: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you. I agree, obviously, with Commissioner Mena's comments about preservation and the future. Obviously, you're getting your -- we're getting ourselves into hopefully not a very similar situation as what happened with Ms. Aycock. I was -- I wanted to get on the record from the dealer what is the museum background and exposure or actual ownership in regards to the artists? Do you have a list of museums that own his work or that he's exhibited at?

Mr. Austin: He -- I do, and actually, we didn't include the artist's qualifications page in the PowerPoint because we wanted to focus on the sculpture itself. Catherine mentioned earlier the exhibition at the Tampa Museum of Art. He's had an exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in Las Vegas, which actually no longer exists, the museum itself. The Pratt Sculpture Garden, which is the country's actually largest sculpture garden actually has the pinwheel sculpture. He is a younger guy. He's in his 40s. So, he has focused his career more on public projects, like the Ali Memorial, than -- and with collector base, and again, a guy in his 40s, you know, museums are coming, but it is because of the nature of his work and his large-scale installation work, which is what he does, which a lot of museums dedicate to later career artists for that sort of scope, it is somewhat limited. But he has done projects. The Ali piece was a \$900,000 piece. The pinwheel piece was a \$800,000 piece. So, the scope of the work he has much experience with.

Vice Mayor Lago: So your answer is he has -- he's in the permanent collection of how many museums would you say?

Mr. Austin: Three or four. I'd have to look at the list.

Vice Mayor Lago: You know, as we -- this is a very difficult process. I consider this to be one of the most difficult decisions that the Commission has to make because you're talking in front of an artist, you're talking in front of a dealer about art and art is very subjective. Everybody has their own opinion; everybody has their own likes. And I think it's a little bit very -- it's difficult, and we've had that discussion when we've had artworks come before the Commission. Like Commissioner Mena mentioned before, and the Mayor also, you know, we've dealt with the flowers before. We were promised -- you're talking about a world-class artist that was in every major museum in the world and is represented by a handful of galleries that attend all the major affairs throughout the world. We were promised everything. We were promised that it wouldn't fade, that it would stand the test of time, and now we're dealing with multiple issues. To me, personally -- and I think the work is a little bit too ornate. I don't think it falls in line with what I think is, in my opinion, what I'm looking for in regards to a \$500,000 sculpture. You know, that's a significant amount of money, a significant commitment. You know, and no offense to the artist or yourself, but I would like to see something different or for the developer to make that -- to pay that fee into the art trust. And at this point, I'm going to be voting no on this work. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I -- Vice Mayor, I don't think that we should oppose our tastes on a good piece of art, and that's what you're doing, and I think that's wrong. And I -- you know, the developer proposed this. It's very handsome, very beautiful. And you know, you vote no and that's fine. I would like to call for a motion on this please, if there are no other comments.

Commissioner Keon: I'll move it.

Vice Mayor Lago: Mayor, like I mentioned, art is objective.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yeah. And there's a motion on the floor. Is there a second?

Commissioner Mena: I'll second.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. Will you call the roll, Billy, please?

Vice Mayor Lago: No.

Commissioner Mena: Yes.

Commissioner Fors: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes.

(Vote: 4-1)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: It is a beautiful piece of art, Mr. Austin, and I congratulate you for it, and I thank the developers for having chosen such a beautiful piece for such an important project in Ponce, which is one of our main arteries. Thank you...

Commissioner Mena: Can I...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Both very much.

Commissioner Mena: Mayor, can I add one more point that I meant to mention earlier, just 'cause I've said it in the past to staff. We've had instances in the past where there are pieces that are sort of part of the building, for lack of a better phrase, and I've been critical of some of those in the past. I remember there were doors on the proposed hotel by Village of Merrick Park that I wasn't too fond of 'cause you couldn't really experience them from outside the building. And we've had things of that nature that we've discussed. I actually think this project and this rendering is sort of a good example of how you can have it be part of the building and it feel sort of interactive in that way, but still appreciable from outside the building. I think anybody who walks by or drives by this building can experience these pieces in a way that some of the other ones we've been critical of in the past, I didn't feel like you could. So, I just wanted to sort of point that out because it is something I brought up in the past, and I know that it's sort of a fine line (INAUDIBLE)...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Very good point.

Commissioner Mena: But I think...

Vice Mayor Lago: Commissioner, that was...

Vice Mayor Lago: This one does a good job of that.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much.

Vice Mayor Lago: Commissioner Mena, that work was a work by Michelle (INAUDIBLE), which was like a glass wall at the hotel that was proposed at the empty lot adjacent from Merrick Park, yeah. That was a good point. And I think we both voted no on that just because of the location of the sculpture.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay, thank you.