

INSIDE LOOK:

AUSTIN AIPP PROJECT
AUSTIN ENERGY DISTRICT
COOLING PLANT #3



LaunchPAD

PUBLIC ART DUO

BEILI LIU | BY TERUKO NIMURA

Through the City of Austin **LaunchPAD** program, I have been given the opportunity to observe in depth, the complex process of erecting a large scale permanent public artwork. The artist I have been paired with, Beilli Liu, has moved forward through the stages of selection, design and fabrication with focus, patience and professionalism to manifest her vision. She is currently involved in the most exciting part of the work: fabrication and construction.

Beili decided to sub-contract Austin sculptor, John Christensen, to fabricate her work, *Cloud Pavilion*. She is excited to have him on board because she greatly respects his work. They came together because he saw her lecture at the AIPP/Texas Society of Architects Visionary Voices series on the project and approached her because he recognized that he could help. He has a long and very experienced career in public art. He is also extremely knowledgeable on everything from the mechanics of the industry to a thorough understanding of materials to the faceted logistics of installation. Beili is expanding her practice in using stainless steel in this public art piece, so it was valuable to have John's input and skill set.



As I watched their relationship evolve through the work I realized how important the fabricator can be in the success of a large scale work like this. From their initial meetings I could see that John was an asset. He knew so much about how to execute artwork from the perspective of an artist and not just a fabricator, and was able to suggest things that could be helpful to Beili. A very critical suggestion was to create a life size mock-up of the work. Through this to-scale "rough draft" approach, most of the inevitable kinks were worked out in less expensive material. Beili could then use the mock up as a direct one to one template for the finished work.

With the help of Beili's project manager, Blue Way, John took the specifications from Beili's 3-D rendering and cut all of the components out of inexpensive PVC pipe and plywood. Next they had the actual footprint of the sculpture printed out on huge rolls of paper that they stitched together and used to plot the points where the stainless steel pipe would mount into the concrete foundation. It turned out that there were many



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the work. It afforded her the chance to thoroughly adjust lines and rhythms of the composition in a way she couldn't have done as easily or cost effectively in the final material or during onsite installation. John understood through his own experience, that no matter how fastidious the plans are, there will be unexpected factors to deal with.

The relationship between Beili and John was very important for me to witness in order to understand what qualities I might look for in a fabricator. He willingness to work within the budget and was honest about ways to make things more cost effective. He openly gave Beili many workable options, allowing her to make the best decision for her. Beili trusts his expertise while maintaining the integrity of her design and high aesthetic standards.

I am so grateful to have had this preview on what it takes to create a successful public artwork. Through the **LaunchPAD** program I have learned so much. I cannot wait to experience the final piece when it is installed on site in 2020!

problems with the print out and they ended up drastically straying from it to suit the actual physics of the work. I was enthralled by the intricate notation system they created for changes they had to make which were scrawled in pencil on the plywood base. John also built some clever tools tailored to make production more efficient such as a 5 degree angle guide to double check the slant of each pole and custom welded stands for each pole modeled after standard flag pole holders. I was impressed by these thoughtful construction methods and saw the advantage of having such a strong team.

Beili came to view the work after the mock structure was raised. It was magical to watch as she walked in to see what had only been an idea, now manifested in space. Her face lit up as she was now able to walk in, around, under and through the work with her body, instead of just imagining what it might be like. The significance of this moment was pronounced as well because of how Beili has used herself as part of the artwork in many other projects throughout her practice to activate her installations. John's suggestion of the scaled mock up allowed her to have this early access to the realities of the sculptural experience of

