

# The Institute for Rejected Art

**T**HE FOOT has fallen as civic art. This moves me to propose a new "Institute for Rejected Art" which could make San Francisco world famous as an art center. This garden of failed sculpture would be a collection of statues which, when vetoed by public or politicians, shocked the people who commissioned them.

Rejected art, often more interesting than accepted art, usually comes with an intriguing story.

A collection would make a more provocative tourist site than the usual sculpture garden. Lectures about the works and their various histories would make the rounds of world art centers; coffee table books would be sold to visitors.

In Paris, Edgar Degas' "Little 14-Year-Old Dancer" was hissed out of sight in 1881. It was reviled because the face was dirty, and she was disheveled. Until then, art had depicted ballet girls as fantasies — picturesque and elite — and not as street urchins. Degas' wax statue was rediscovered after his death and made into a bronze. It is now considered by many his finest sculpture, one of the world's most revered works of statuary.

San Francisco has itself a nice history of art controversy.

Most poignant was the late Robert Arneson's cartoon-like bust of slain Mayor George Moscone, unveiled by his widow, Gina, in 1981 at the dedication of the convention center named after him. There was a gasp from the crowd. The statue, with its oozing wounds and Twinkies, was a crazy mix of images reflecting the problems of our time. It was soon removed after the weeping widow left; its reflection of modern times was judged unkind to his memory.

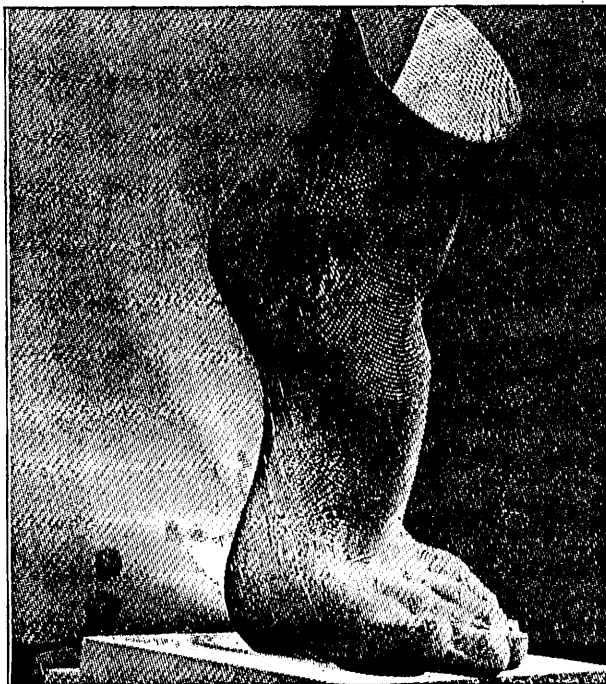
The example of Degas' ballet dancer suggests that time is an interesting factor in rejected art. I've a hunch the Moscone statue, recently included in a tour of American statuary in Europe, will be back again.

There is no shortage of opportunity to secure pieces that have been rejected. Several years ago a huge steel company built a new skyscraper headquarters. The board hired an artist to create a suitable

artistic statement for it.

The company president was viewed as a tough, demanding type who made normal men tremble and whom only yes-men could serve. The courageous artist proceeded.

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'Foot,' rejected. Sculpture by Buster Simpson.

The day came when, at a large public function, the statue was unveiled by that crusty president.

The curtain parted and the large crowd beheld a huge steel model, many feet high, of a rubber stamp. It represented the demands of that executive for yes-men. He hated it and had it removed.

That statue is one The City should seek out for its collection.

In proposing the Institute of Rejected Art while waving goodbye to the proposed Foot, it's worth a look at the role that rejected art serves in a free society: It stirs up the public. The money it cost to pay the artist to develop The Foot resulted in a community awakening.

It's important for politicians to know the critical public is alive and well.

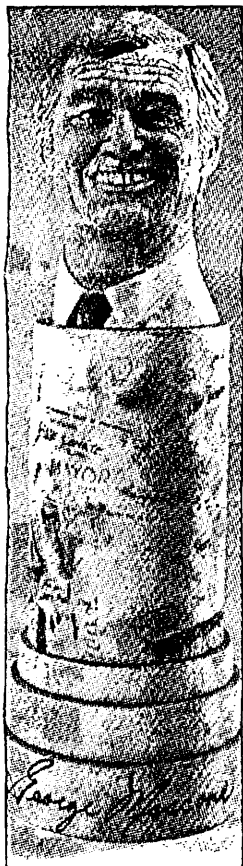
The delightful high point of The Foot conflict came at a hearing in which the Board of Supervisors, acting as commis-

sioners of the Transportation Authority, voted it down.

Art advocates in the room were nearly berserk. They were nasty and demeaning, attacking anyone who dared to speak critically.

Afterward, in a TV interview, a small, graceful, older San Francisco woman said to the worked-up art crowd: "Wait a minute, what you are dealing with is a democracy, not an art selection committee. The majority can and should decide this. And please stop insulting me. As a member of the public I exercise my right to reject a concept and do not deserve to be berated. This remains a free society."

As to the sculpture garden of Rejected Art, such a collection might be more likely in Copenhagen. I think, however, San Francisco is up to it.



'George Moscone,' rejected. Ceramic sculpture by Robert Arneson.



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