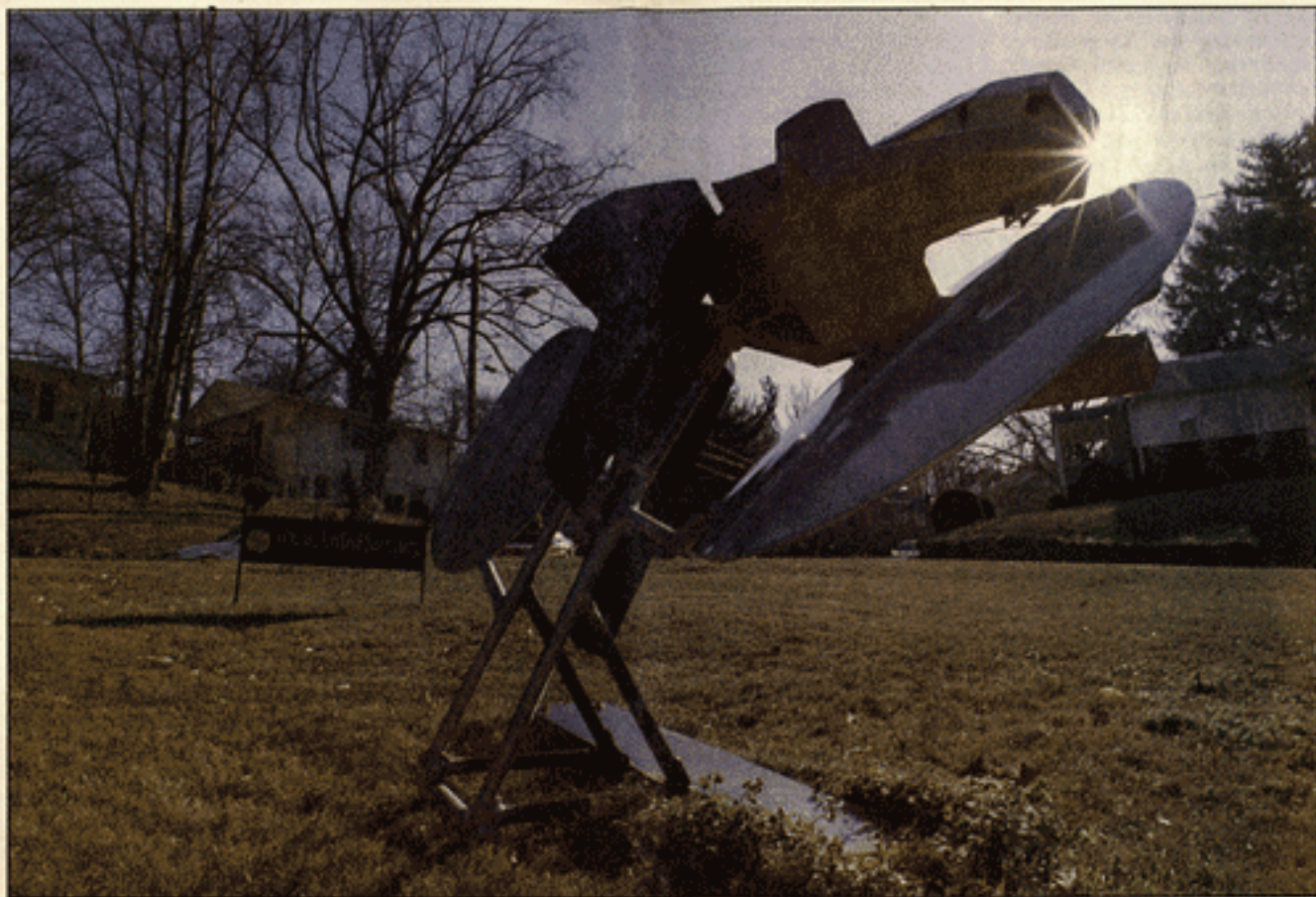


Region & State

Charlottesville, Virginia



The Daily Progress/Tengku Bahar

Vandals bent a steel wheel of "The Biker" sculpture on McIntire Road in Charlottesville, one of two ArtInPlace works that were damaged.

Vandals strike Charlottesville sculptures

By **CLAUDIA PINTO**
Daily Progress staff writer

Two of the six ArtInPlace sculptures that adorn median strips around Charlottesville have been vandalized.

"Transformer," the \$10,000 sculpture located on the U.S. 250 Bypass near the Charlottesville Fire Department, was knocked down and damaged beyond repair.

Meanwhile, one of the steel wheels on "The Biker" was bent. That sculpture, located on McIntire Road, is valued at \$7,000.

"I'm obviously upset about it," said sculptor Aaron Fein, creator of "Transformer." "It's something that took six people 200 hours to assemble and it probably took two people a half-hour to destroy."

"They took something from the public," he said. "I hope whoever did this will learn the value of creative energy instead of destructive energy."

Charlottesville police Sgt. C.R. Smith said the incidents are under investigation. Anyone with information is encouraged to call Crimestoppers at 977-4000.

Smith said the damage to the art pieces was reported to police on Dec. 24.

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Sculptor Aaron Fein

Ironically, "Transformer" was placed in the divider of the U.S. 250 Bypass because it's somewhat delicate and it was thought the site, accessible to pedestrians only if they cross two lanes on the usually busy highway, would protect it from vandalism.

Elizabeth Breeden, president of ArtInPlace, doesn't believe a car did the damage because there were no tire marks on the median.

"It looked like people tried to climb it. It was completely knocked over," Breeden said. "They had to be malicious to knock it down. The steel rods were inserted into the ground very firmly."

Fein said "Transformer" can't be repaired, but its parts could be fashioned into something else.

"A lot of people looked at it as a fence-like structure. What it was in fact was 2,000 individual parts interlaced around the steel. I managed to salvage those parts," Fein said. "I have no immediate plans to rebuild it and it can't be repaired."

"I won't be rebuilding it for ArtInPlace," he said. "This specific sculpture is too delicate."

Fein, however, said he's not sorry he displayed the work.

"I'm more glad it went up and lived the short life it did than not," he said.

Breeden said that Dr. Richard Whitehill, creator of "The Biker," plans to repair the damaged wheel and continue to show his work of art.

The ArtInPlace sculptures were put up in October and will stay in place until September, when new pieces are selected to take their place. ArtInPlace is intended to introduce a variety of public art for the community to enjoy.

Breeden expressed disgust about the vandalism.

"The whole notion of wrecking something for the sake of wrecking it is very depressing," she said.

For more information about ArtInPlace visit its web site at www.artinplace.org.