

TampaPublicArt



Title of Project:	Taking Breath
Artist:	Wendy Babcox
Year Completed:	2006
Materials	Video Installation
Commissioning Agency:	Lights On Tampa / Friends of Tampa Public Art / City of Tampa, Public Art Program
Location:	National Wall Art Gallery, SW corner of Park Tower building, intersection of Ashley & Kennedy



Lights On Tampa is a new biennial program of the City of Tampa, Public Art Program, a division of the Department of Arts & Cultural Affairs. It is a public/private partnership that has grown out of a local grassroots effort and is intended as a cultural/aesthetic event that engages, entertains, and educates.



Site/Project Description

Taking Breath is a five-channel rear projection featuring footage from regional tourist attractions such as Weeki Wachee Springs, Homosassa Springs and the Lowry Park Zoo. The challenge of this project was to offer a pedestrian and drive-by experience at a major downtown intersection.

Artist Concept

History, memory and geography are regularly mapped onto the cultural identity of a region through the markers and events that come to represent it. In Florida these markers are evident in the tourist attractions, which reflect or invent the collective regional sense of character.

This work speaks to the significance of

water to Tampa's history, identity and in particular to the regional tourist industry. The videos feature footage of the mermaids from Weeki Wachee Springs and of the manatees at Homosassa Springs and Lowry Park Zoo. Manatees are known scientifically to belong to the order Sirenia, named after the ancient Greek myths of sirens that lured lovesick sailors to their deaths. The videos recall the reported sightings of mermaids by early sailors to the Americas. However, it is believed that the creatures they saw were in fact manatees rising to the surface to take a breath. The irony of this confusion is the departure point for this work.

The installation draws upon a fascination for the natural and the spectacular

so regularly featured in Florida's tourist attractions. It also points to the presence of the nearby Hillsborough River and the manatees that reside there during the winter months. The videos are reconfigured by the presence of the viewer in the space as traffic passes by the moving images. The videos are paced to relate to the general manner in which cars and pedestrians use this corner of the city.

The mission of the City of Tampa's public art program is to promote the involvement of artists in projects throughout the city that enhance the physical environment and celebrate Tampa's unique character and identity. The public art program is a division of the Department of Arts & Cultural Affairs.

City of Tampa Department of Arts and Cultural Affairs • Public Art Program

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