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Downtown Barre sculpture garden is vandalized

By [David Delcore](#)
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BARRE — A temporary sculpture garden that had been well received and respected since it was created on a vacant city-owned lot more than a year ago was vandalized over the weekend.

Just weeks before the remaining pieces were to be removed to make way for an anticipated groundbreaking for the City Place development, Sue Higby, executive director of Studio Place Arts, said one of the sculptures was tipped over and damaged in an incident early Sunday that lasted less than a minute.

According to Higby, that minute — give or take — was captured by two security cameras that were trained on the sculpture park as a precaution. Higby was in the process of copying that footage and turning it over to police late Monday afternoon.

Higby said the footage, which was recorded shortly after 12:30 a.m. Sunday, shows three young white men crossing North Main Street from Depot Square, one ahead of the other two. The leader, she said, strode deliberately up to “Brothers from Machu Picchu” — an original sculpture by Gampo Wickenheiser — and pushed it over before all three scattered.

“It is incredibly disheartening to watch,” said Higby, who persuaded Wickenheiser and other sculptors to supply pieces for the temporary sculpture garden that sprang up on the lot between SPA and the Paramount Theater in June 2011.

For more than a year, Higby said, none of the pieces was damaged and residents of all ages seemed to appreciate and enjoy the public art display that, among other things, has featured a life-sized granite armchair carved by Giuliano Cecchinelli II and a huge marble skeleton key carved by Jerry Williams.

It also featured two more abstract pieces by Wickenheiser, one of which — possibly because of its manageable size — was toppled and damaged in what Higby described as a senseless act of vandalism.

“It’s really tragic,” she said, noting the fall caused the sculpture to crack along a granite surface where a series of slate “appendages” are attached.

For the time being, Higby said, the sculpture will remain in its toppled state.

“It has a forlorn quality that I think needs to be there for a while,” she said.

Higby described the three men captured by the security cameras as “somewhere between 18 and 25 years old” and expressed hope that one or more of them wouldn’t wait for police to identify them.

“I would like the folks involved in the vandalism to step forward, take responsibility and do the right thing,” she said.

According to Higby, it is not clear whether the sculpture can, or should, be repaired, though she said it did have sentimental value to Wickenheiser.

At its height, the tiny pocket park featured eight distinctly different works of art. That number now sits at six, according to Higby, who said that with the development company behind the City Place project pushing for a Nov. 1 groundbreaking, arrangements will be made to remove the remaining sculptures over the next few weeks.

Despite this weekend’s incident, Higby said she has been heartened by the way the sculpture garden was received.

“You have to look at the vast majority of people who looked, enjoyed, loved and were thrilled instead of the one, single person, who — perhaps even under the influence of alcohol — went out and did some damage,” she said. “The numbers definitely support ‘art lovers’ not ‘art haters.’”