



**CASE
STUDY**

**Houston
unveils
permanent
art parking
meters to
a happy
community.**

DESPITE BEING ONE OF THE LARGEST and fastest-growing cities in the nation, there's one thing the City of Houston can't get enough of: free parking. In Houston's Warehouse District, streets fill rapidly with the vehicles of employees and university students, leaving area residents and business owners searching for spots. The situation became so overwhelming that in 2013, the community reached out to the city and requested parking meters (believe it or not).

The Warehouse District, located on the northeast side of downtown Houston, is an eclectic mix of residential lofts, artist studios, industrial companies, and fine dining. The city's parking management division wanted a solution that not only solved the parking problem but also embraced the culture of the neighborhood. Thus, the Art Parking Meter program was born, and on Oct. 22, 2013, Mayor Annise Parker unveiled what we believe to be the nation's first permanent art parking meters, right there in the Warehouse District.

"The Warehouse District has a one-of-a-kind atmosphere, and we wanted one-of-a-kind meters to reflect that feeling," says Maria Irshad, assistant director of parking management. "Our goal was to reduce serious street overcrowding with a solution that adds a fun and unique twist to traditional parking meters. The art parking meters are an example of how residents from across the city are working together to make Houston shine. Thanks to the amazing talent of four local artists, the meters will leave a memorable impression on visitors and Houstonians alike."

Artistry

Gumball Machine
art meter sculpture
combines organic
and industrial
objects to create
unexpected
artifacts.

By Melonie Curry

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Kicking Off

The first step in launching the program was figuring out how to make parking meters beautiful. That meant finding the right people for the job.

Artists for the project were strategically chosen through a selection process by a panel of representatives from the city and the Houston Arts Alliance, a nonprofit agency established by the city to enhance the quality of life and tourism by advancing the arts in the Houston region. The Houston Arts Alliance invests and nurtures Houston’s thriving creative community by providing more than 225 grants to nonprofit arts organizations and individual artists each year, commissioning the work of artists for public spaces, managing the city’s art collection, and showcasing Houston’s rich folk-life traditions. Applicants were asked to propose a creative idea for a parking sculpture that was durable, functional, and could withstand time, weather, and high-volume traffic.

The Art

The four artists chosen to art-up the city’s parking meters represent the diversity and talent Houston’s art commu-

nity has to offer. Ketrina Scott, designer of the Gumball Machine art meter sculpture, described her work as a combination of “organic and industrial objects to create unexpected artifacts, suggesting a story or an artifact of unexplainable occurrence or transformation. My hope is that the piece holds the viewer’s attention for a moment and gives him or her pause to wonder and create his or her own story of how it came to be and what it means. Basically, it’s a starting point for the viewer’s story.”

“The auto industry that changed America continues to play a major role in Houston’s energy economics today,” says sculptor Devon Christopher Moore, whose fabricated sculpture combines the head and base of a parking meter with an assemblage of vintage auto parts.

Artist David Medina’s Found Art meter sculpture captured many different discarded items found in the district. Medina, a faculty member at the prestigious Glassell School of Art, works in a variety of media. He decided to cast the items in bronze and attach them to a traditional meter.

Anthony Thompson Shumate contributed three very unique pieces to the project, The Wind Blown Meters,

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which appear to be suspended in mid-air and to defy gravity on a daily basis.

Spreading the Joy

Before the meters were installed, unmanaged curb space resulted in a parking free-for-all, with increased traffic from drivers circling the area, frustrated residents unable to park by their homes, and hindered economic development. By collaborating with the community, the program reduced parking stress and encouraged curbside turnover. The artistic component enhanced the area's curb appeal and added to the unique atmosphere, which makes the Warehouse District a destination for visitors and resident Houstonians.

The warm welcome received for the first Art Meter Project created the opportunity for a second project along Houston's Washington Avenue Corridor. Established in 2012 as Houston's first Parking Benefit District (a defined geographic area in which a portion of meter revenue is returned to the district to finance improvements that enhance the quality of life and promote walking, biking, and public transportation use), the Washington Avenue Corridor was a growing nightlife destination in desperate need of a parking management strategy.

Houston's Parking Management Division faced a different challenge on Washington Avenue: convincing people to pay at the meter. Meters were new to the area, and people did not know where or how to use them. At the start, curbside parkers didn't feed the meters and racked up serious citations. It was clear that customers were not aware that the meters were in effect until 2 a.m.

The second art meter project was designed to draw attention to and better illuminate the meters for the parking public.

Troy Stanley, a sculpture and mixed media artist and a resident of the Washington Corridor, was commissioned for the new art meter project. As a resident, Stanley had a special insight into the culture of the neighborhood and created pieces to reflect the area's



Sculptor Devon Christopher Moore fabricated a piece using a head and base of a parking meter with vintage auto parts.

spirit. The series, Urban-Over-Growth, utilizes lighting to decoratively enhance meters that are primarily used at night. A light fixture inside the sculptures, aided by mirror vinyl wrap, illuminates a cut-steel floral design that is projected onto the surfaces surrounding the meters. Each Urban-Over-Growth meter is unique and represents Houston's typical three-season weather: Urban-Over-Growth-Spring, Urban-Over-Growth-Summer, and Urban-Over-Growth-Fall.

Feedback and Results

"Houston's Parking Management has been a great partner," says Jonathon Glus, president and CEO of the Houston Arts Alliance, which seeks opportunities to engage local artists and fabricators in creative place-making across the city. "The six 2013 meters were the first parking meter project in the nation to employ sculptural elements to design; the 2014 meters are the first to accommodate an electric design. The Art Parking Meters exemplify two important elements in public art: permanence and distinction."

Houston's Art Parking Meter program provides a solution that adds a fun and creative twist to traditional parking meters. The meters reflect the uniqueness of each district, maintain full functionality, and help the city more effectively manage curbside parking. The City of Houston looks forward to future opportunities to collaborate with artists and the community to highlight the cultural nuances of Houston through better parking management.

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