



# THE INTERACTIVATORS

Sculpture for TriMet WES Commuter Rail

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## PREFACE

Oregon's first commuter rail line, Westside Express Service (WES), was unveiled on January 30, 2009. More than ten years in the making, and one of TriMet's most innovative and challenging projects yet, WES Commuter Rail is one of the few suburb-to-suburb commuter rail lines in the nation, serving a 14.7-mile stretch between the cities of Beaverton, Tigard, Tualatin and Wilsonville, and connecting to MAX Light Rail in Beaverton.

As early as 1996, local officials had begun exploring alternatives to improve transit options for residents and employees in fast-growing eastern Washington County. They identified a unique opportunity in a 100-year-old rail corridor, owned by Pacific & Western Railroad (P&W) and used primarily for freight transport. They saw the potential to use this resource for adding a commuter rail line that would ease congestion on the heavily traveled Interstate 5 and Highway 217 roadways.

Along with county officials, the mayors of Beaverton, Tigard, Tualatin, Wilsonville and Sherwood all championed the idea. Feasibility studies were initiated, and when further studies were required,

*Facing page, left to right:  
Oregon Electric Railway, Tualatin Station  
Map of WES Commuter Rail  
Staff meeting at WES Maintenance Facility, Wilsonville*

Oregon House member Tom Brian took a leadership role to secure funding. He continued to lead the project as chair of the Washington County Commission. In 1999, the County, working with the Federal Transit Administration, staff from Metro, TriMet and the Oregon Department of Transportation, launched an Alternatives Analysis to consider the viability of commuter rail, and to assess its potential impact on the environment.

By 2001, planners had applied to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for help to fund the project. Unfortunately, the FTA had just changed the rules for how they rated projects, and the WES ridership projections no longer met their criterion for cost-effectiveness. Local leaders persevered by teaming with Oregon Governors John Kitzhaber and Ted Kulongoski, the Oregon State legislature and Oregon's Congressional delegation, including Senator Gordon

Smith and Representative David Wu, to obtain federal funding for the WES project.

Following lengthy negotiations with P&W, an agreement was reached whereby TriMet would get priority to run trains in the morning and afternoon peak commuting hours. Existing track was replaced along the commuter rail line to accommodate the new railcar speeds of up to 60 mph, and additional double track was constructed in Tigard to allow freight and commuter trains to pass each other along the route. A state-of-the-art signal system with computerized dispatch was installed for vehicle coordination and safety.

Colorado Railcar Manufacturing produced the highly specialized, fuel-efficient, DMU (diesel multiple unit) cars. The firm's financial problems resulted in costly delays, but their self-propelled railcars were the only

vehicles that met federal "Buy America" requirements as well as federal safety standards necessary to operate alongside active freight trains.

As with nearly all of our region's mass transit projects—Westside MAX, Airport MAX, Interstate MAX and the future MAX Green Line—a percentage of WES funds were set aside for art.

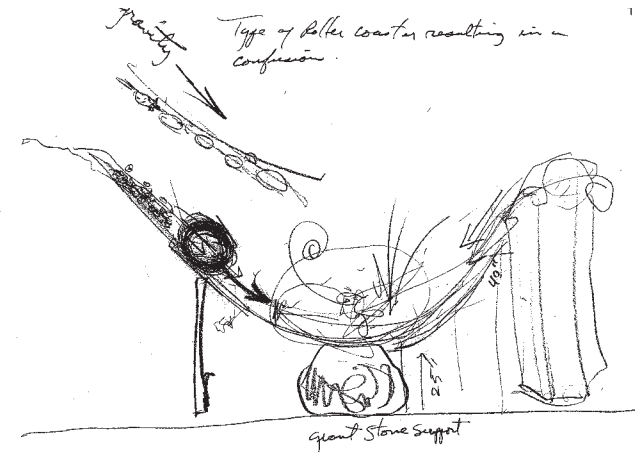
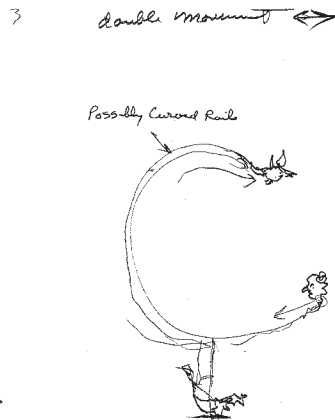
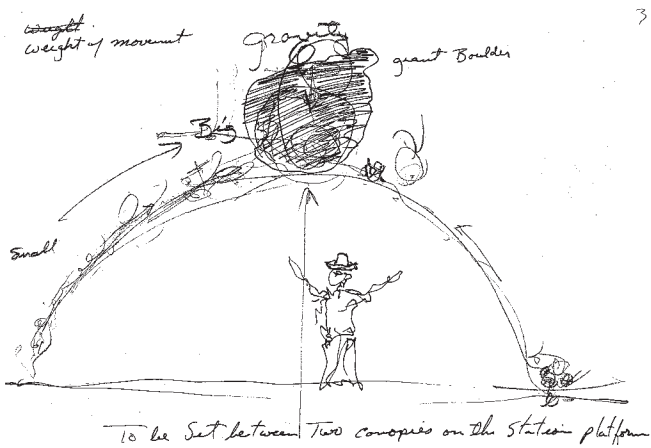
Thanks to the skillful efforts of TriMet's public art manager, Mary Priester, and art coordinator, Michelle Traver; members of the Art Advisory Committee and the artists themselves, we are able to offer another body of high-quality artwork that will serve our riders and enrich our communities for many years to come.

Neil McFarlane  
Executive Director  
TriMet Capital Projects





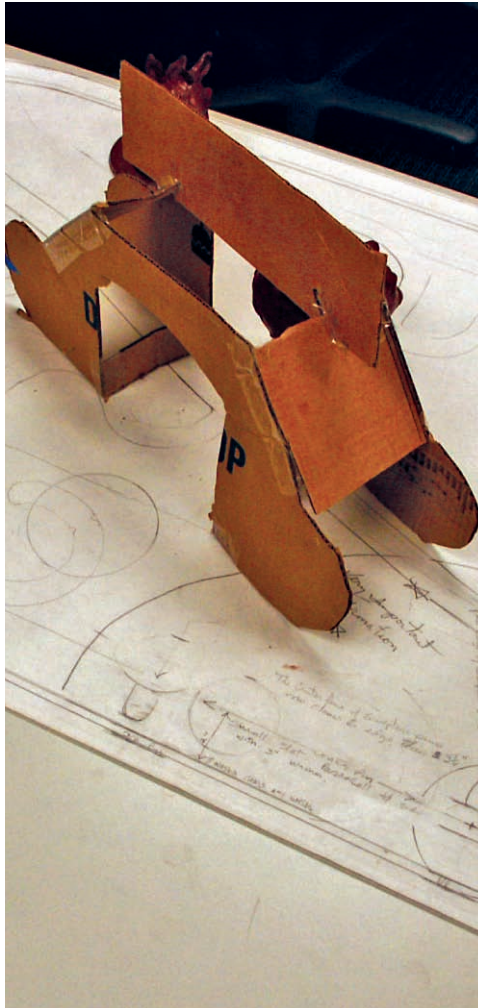
Top row: Artists meeting with the Commuter Rail Art Advisory Committee  
 Bottom row: Concept drawings for The Interactivators



## INTRODUCTION

The Washington County Commuter Rail art program officially began in the fall of 2002 in the Mastodon Room of the Tualatin City Library. At the first meeting of the Commuter Rail Art Advisory Committee, a select group of artists and art professionals came together representing each of the communities that would be affected by the new line. They met that day with much excitement and a certain degree of urgency, as the project—they were told—was on a very fast track. After introductory presentations by TriMet’s public art manager, Mary Priester, and project manager, Steve Witter, committee members were asked to verbalize their vision for the new art program. Despite their varied backgrounds, those present were in almost complete agreement: the art should be “cutting edge,” “push the envelope” and “shake up the suburbs.”

In accordance with TriMet’s percent for art policy, the art budget for the five-station commuter rail project, subsequently named WES (Westside Express Service), was \$500,000. The Art Advisory Committee was responsible for overseeing this allotment, selecting the artists, and reviewing the proposed artwork.



That fall of 2002, when the committee first met, WES was expected to receive approval to enter the final design phase within weeks, and to begin construction the following summer. Train service was scheduled to start in September 2005. But by spring of 2003, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) had not yet approved the project for funding. Unaccustomed to a suburb-to-suburb proposal, the feds were uncertain that ridership numbers would warrant their investment. While they reviewed the ratio of cost-to-riders, the project could not move forward. Final design was delayed until after June 2003, and opening day was postponed to 2006, a full year later than originally planned. Other factors such as shifting design requirements and slow permitting processes eventually added nearly three years more to the schedule.

*Transporter concept model*

Unaware of the delays to come, the committee had selected two artists, who had applied separately, to work together as a team to develop an art plan and design artwork for the new stations. To everyone's chagrin, this match proved to be unsuccessful, and only one of the artists, Frank Boyden, was asked to continue. Boyden subsequently proposed that he work with the artist Brad Rude. Based on the duo's remarkable collaboration at Doernbecher Children's Hospital, the committee approved the new team.

Boyden and Rude presented their concept in May 2003, and the bold ideas that would become the hallmark of their final work were already evident. They knew from experience that for their artwork to remain vital to commuters, who would be exposed to it daily over years, it needed to be physically engaging. Their goal was to draw in train riders with art that



would not fade into the background after several viewings, but would remain compelling and personally relevant. Rather than create numerous independent works, Boyden and Rude further proposed that the WES artwork be “a great continuous thread,” linked both visually and thematically. To their knowledge, this concept was unprecedented in public art. The committee responded cautiously, but gave the artists the green light to develop their idea for a single, interactive artwork.

The following month, Boyden and Rude arrived at the Art Advisory Committee meeting with a sheaf of freely drawn sketches, evidence of an intensely energetic and prolific creative process. Dark lines running on the verge of chaos suggested roller coasters, carousels and game boards. Animal and human figures populated these images, which envisioned the

viewer as a participant who could move or change the configuration of the artwork. The artists spoke about how their sculptures would mimic the changes of life, evolving and changing on a daily basis. The committee, with some trepidation, once again expressed their confidence in the duo. They were enthused by the notion of kinetic art engaging riders, but recognized the maintenance and security challenges inherent in creating public art with moving parts. One member optimistically predicted that riders would choose to travel the entire line just to experience the artwork.

The WES project continued to encounter difficulty winning the necessary federal funds, and there was at least one occasion when the whole complicated deal threatened to come apart. In the summer of 2006, administrators informed staff that the art program, among other important project

elements, was in danger of being cut. After a thorough and heartfelt appeal, the promise was eventually made: if the project went forward, the art program would stay intact.

On July 21, 2006, the Art Advisory Committee met to review Boyden’s and Rude’s final design. As members settled in with their coffee and treats, Steve Witter announced that his WES team had just submitted the completed design documents and contractors were starting work that very day. The excitement around the table was palpable as the artists brought out a rough model of their design for the first time. A cardboard vehicle and a few sculpted heads were evidence enough that the jumble of ideas and inspiration the committee had glimpsed three years earlier would find their consummate form.



## THE INTERACTIVATORS

*Uncle Skulky has his eye on The Scowler, but doesn't notice that he is hiding behind The Historical Head Mask, having a "cheerful" conversation with The Laugher. The Sleeper is napping, oblivious to the joke being shared between The Goofball and The Vegetable Head. What is going on here!?*

*I have spent the entire day with these characters while assisting the photographer, and they are beginning to get to me. I look at The Goofball and see my son. The Carrier of the Stone reminds me of some nagging tasks left undone (I should write my brother today and send a card to my sick friend). But I'm tired! That Sleeper makes me want to go home and take a nap!*

These sculptures have magic. I have seen it from the moment the first of *The Interactivators* was unwrapped. Like kids with a new toy, every person on the platform at Wilsonville Station was irresistibly drawn in. Construction workers, engineers and truck drivers crowded around the ten-foot long stainless steel table and began to play, moving the bronze heads and wheeled

train car around in their tracks, spouting imaginary dialogue. This happened throughout the day at every station, and continued into the next, even after the sculptures had been protectively covered. (Project manager Steve Witter confessed that he and another colleague were taking a peek when a train engineer pulled up and said he wanted a look too. He had seen the project featured on OPB Art Beat and was eager to set eyes on the finished sculptures. )

The surprising thing about all this is that the five-part *Interactivators* is not typical public art. It doesn't tell the history of the place or celebrate a cultural milestone. It wasn't vetted by the community at large or fabricated by subcontractors. In the complexity of its content, its personal scale and the rich detail of the surfaces, it is more the type of work you would see in an art gallery than in a public space. This is artwork made in

the sanctuary of the studio by artists who not only embraced the concept of public art, but also sought to elevate it.

For six years, the ideas behind *The Interactivators* brewed in the minds of the artists, Frank Boyden and Brad Rude. Seldom is there that much time to ruminate on a public art project and long delays are usually grounds for grumbling and complaint. Ideas presented at the beginning of a lengthy project seldom get reworked; more often they just get stale. So I was struck by the artists' claim on several occasions that they were actually glad for the additional time.

For Boyden, an artist who has continually pushed the boundaries of his art, this span of time was an especially fertile one. Having established his reputation as one of the finest and most innovative ceramic artists in the country, Boyden

had also completed a number of prominent sculpture commissions and an impressive printmaking oeuvre. In 2003, the year following his and Rude's concept presentation, Boyden created a series of prints titled *The Irreverences, Provocations & Connivances of Uncle Skulky*. Like Goya's *Caprichos*, which chronicled the superstitions, vanity and folly of late 18th century Spanish culture, this series was dark and introspective, a reflection of the post-9/11 era.

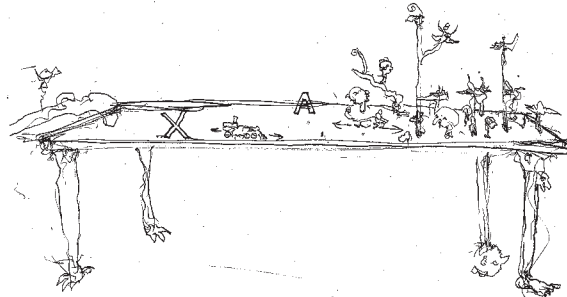
Two years later, Boyden began a series of drypoint prints titled *The Empathies*, in which he sought again to unmask the absurdity of the human condition. He describes his efforts on this series as, "a

*Clockwise from left:  
Artists drafting table top slots  
A concept drawing  
The Beaverton Interactivator (detail)*





*Team working alignment  
Possibility of children making some of the pieces.*



*Table with movable pieces -  
The pieces would revolve or move along slots on both*





*Artists sculpting the Cast of Characters at Walla Walla Foundry*





journey begun in the grip of anger and disgust and concluded in humility and compassion.” Boyden completed *The Empathies* shortly before he and Rude began developing the cast of characters for *The Interactivators*. His deep, creative explorations over this five-year period appear to have paved the way for Boyden to approach this new project with greater sympathy and humor.

Before he teamed up with Boyden on the commuter rail project, sculptor Brad Rude’s work typically featured animals, often grouped together and paired with emblematic objects such as rocks, scales and wheels. He sculpted his creatures—from dogs and goats to bears and rhinos—with a mix of realism and fantasy to create symbols of the human condition. Bringing his skills in modeling, bronze casting and patina, Rude jumped into the project with Boyden, boldly taking on the human figure for the first time.

*The Interactivators* represents a culmination of sorts in Boyden’s and Rude’s art. It brings together their desire to see clearly who we are and to mirror that reality with honesty and compassion. While the primary means is the archetypal heads, every element of *The Interactivators* contributes to this end. The table shape, which evolved from earlier loops and swirls, was selected for its simplicity and stability. Comfortably approachable, it also clearly defines the area of play. Slots cut into the tables allow for the movement of the heads and vehicles. The entire work is like a microcosm of the station itself—the table is analogous to the platform, the vehicle is the train, and the slots are like the myriad pathways people travel to arrive there.

The artists write in their proposal about

*Rude sculpting a Head  
with Animal Qualities*



the “existential problem” that travelers find themselves in, thrown together by chance and having no choice but to interact in some way or another. *The Interactivators* offer the riders of WES a surrogate world, a playground where they are invited to interact with “sculptural counterparts” without “the cultural taboos they might feel in the confines of a train station or a train car.”

To specify their intentions, the artists engraved instructions on each of the five tables:

This sculpture, a theater of sorts, explores human interactions found in places where people come together, such as this train line. The cast of characters expresses various traits, gestures, states of mind, emotions, feelings and fantasies. You decide who goes where and what path they will take. By activating, you will create new scenarios

between the characters. Use your imagination, trust your instincts and have fun.

While the game is designed to be played by one person—or an entire station full of riders—it reaches its fullest potential when more than one person plays at a time. Then, the sculptures provide an opportunity to transform isolation and awkwardness into social connection. There are no winners or losers. Players initiate encounters and invent narratives, even short plays, and in the process create connections that ultimately strengthen the fabric of our communities.

Like a permanent theater program, the Cast of Characters is engraved on each table right below the instructions:

The Kisser, The Blind Head, The Mirror of Illusion, The Sleeper, The Double Head, The Found Object

Head, The Laugher, The Faceless Mask, The Carrier of the Stone, The Scowler, The Vegetable Head, The Historical Head Mask, The Goofball, The Upside Down Head, The Head with Animal Qualities, Uncle Skulky

Boyden and Rude developed the cast to represent a universally relevant, cross-section of humanity. They only had a limited number of roles available, however, and it is telling to examine the choices they made. Although several traditional archetypes are obvious—The Kisser is the Lover, The Goofball the Fool and Uncle Skulky, though verging on parody, is clearly Death—most of the classic characters of fairy tales and fortunetelling are not present. In place of the King and Queen, the Witch and the Fairy Godmother, there is The Upside Down Head, The Blind Head, and The Carrier of the Stone. In some, we can easily identify our own





*Artists applying paint and patina to one of the Vegetable Heads*



emotions (The Laugher is “happy,” The Scowler, “angry”), but Boyden and Rude want to hold up a mirror to the more subtle qualities of our condition: befuddlement, anxiety, ennui and ambivalence, among others.

The artists strove to imbue the characters with the greatest potential for interactions and imaginative narratives. They achieved this in part by representing specific characteristics such as gender, age and ethnicity with a degree of ambiguity. They offered even more opportunities for empathy (or antipathy!) between rider and character by sculpting one-of-a-kind variations for fifteen of the sixteen character types on each table. The only character that does not appear in a different guise is The Blind Head. One of the more psychologically complex of the heads, it made sense to the artists to simply replicate for each table this blindfolded figure whose back half consists of a

polished mirror surface.

From the beginning, Boyden and Rude wanted to include direct references to the world of art and to the principal ethnic groups of the region in the cast of characters (African American, Native American, Hispanic, European, and Asian). But would every rider “get” the art world reference, and would the ethnic heads result in a divisive stereotyping? The artists’ ingenious solution was The Historical Head Mask. By expressing individual cultures with a mask, a significant art form is invoked and no one is excluded; anyone can “wear” the mask and thereby share in that particular culture.

While Boyden and Rude expect that the players will gain some insight about themselves and others, they also hope their participation will produce “a lot of pleasure and laughter and generally a good time.” To this end, humor is

liberally sprinkled on every sculpture table. You can almost hear the artists chuckling to themselves as they painted the painted turtles, devised how to make Uncle Skulky’s tongue moveable, or added the crab claw to The Goofball’s nose!

The bronze vehicle, named The Transporter for its ability to move the character heads from place to place, has a critical role to play in *The Interactivators*. Like some primitive train car, The Transporter carries the imprint of rough wood on its sides and has loosely fitting wheels that cause a clankety-clank sound when rolled across the slotted table. Players can integrate The Transporter into their narrative by using it to move their characters, or they can simply roll it along the track by itself.

The Transporter also reflects the



individual identity of the five station areas. When the artists solicited ideas from the committee members on how best to represent their community, they noticed that among the many city icons and landmarks there is one that weaves throughout the corridor. All the station areas share a geography dominated by water: either the Tualatin River Watershed or the Willamette River. The train route actually traverses native wetlands and offers views of nature otherwise inaccessible. Beaverton and Tualatin already had affiliations with wetland animals (a namesake beaver and annual crawfish celebration), and it was easy to extend the motif to the remaining cities of Tigard and Wilsonville. In addition to the identifying animal, the body of each



*Mary Priester with artists  
at Walla Walla Foundry*

transporter is painted a unique color that matches the bright stripe below the tables' surface.

The animals that distinguish the individual transporters are rendered more or less realistically in their habitat, and make a handsome juxtaposition with the cacophony of character heads spread around them. There is some intentional irony here, as those animals—endangered by the spread of the cities—ride high on the vehicles, lords of the land once again!

Boyden and Rude employed an expansive formal repertoire to render their multitude of characters and animals. From the classical elegance of *The Blind Head* to the expressive gesture of *The Scowler*, the naturalism of the animals, and the funky humor of *The Found Object Head*, the style of the sculpture is tailored to the nature of the character represented. At the

same time, all of these sculptures are unabashedly hand-made; thumbprints abound amid swells and dapples of pushed clay, and even the carefully smoothed surfaces are evidence of the artists' expert touch.

The transparency of the art-making process indirectly supports the radical idea at the heart of these sculptures—the opportunity for the viewer to engage in the making and continual remaking of the artwork. As Boyden and Rude wrote, “the participants are making a piece of art that physically and mentally works for them.” The artists have provided the elements and set the parameters of the work, but the viewer/participant is the one invited to compose it. In this way, he or she becomes a co-creator of the sculpture and continues the collaboration that Boyden and Rude began together.

Psychologically astute, socially

progressive and artistically original, *The Interactivators* is a masterwork in the oeuvre of two of the northwest's most talented sculptors. It is also a fitting counterpart to the innovative WES Commuter Rail and a brilliant addition to the public art collections of both TriMet and the region.

*As I start to walk away at the end of that long first day, I catch a glimpse of something like a spark out of the corner of my eye. Was someone on the table winking at me? I approach The Blind Head, give it half a turn and then I see it, my own bright reflection. I leave, feeling a bit tender-hearted, knowing I'll be back—for one thing, The Upside Down Head seems to be trying to tell me something...*

*Facing page:  
The Beaverton Interactivator,  
32"x 120" x 32", at Walla Walla Foundry*





## INSTALLATION VIEWS

Artists' instructions engraved on each Interactivator:

This sculpture, a theater of sorts, explores human interactions found in places where people come together, such as this train line. The cast of characters expresses various traits, gestures, states of mind, emotions, feelings and fantasies. You decide who goes where and what path they will take. By activating, you will create new scenarios between the characters. Use your imagination, trust your instincts and have fun.



## THE BEAVERTON INTERACTIVATOR





## THE HALL/NIMBUS INTERACTIVATOR





## THE TIGARD INTERACTIVATOR





## THE TUALATIN INTERACTIVATOR







## THE WILSONVILLE INTERACTIVATOR

# CAST OF CHARACTERS

with artists' descriptions

THE KISSER  
THE BLIND HEAD  
THE MIRROR OF ILLUSION  
THE SLEEPER  
THE DOUBLE HEAD  
THE FOUND OBJECT HEAD  
THE LAUGHER  
THE FACELESS MASK  
THE CARRIER OF THE STONE  
THE SCOWLER  
THE VEGETABLE HEAD  
THE HISTORICAL HEAD MASK  
THE GOOFBALL  
THE UPSIDE DOWN HEAD  
THE HEAD WITH ANIMAL QUALITIES  
UNCLE SKULKY



### **The Kisser**

The Kisser represents the need to give and receive affection. This character is important as one who has the potential to make obvious connections of love and good will.





## The Sleeper

The Sleeper is symbolic of the person in every group who is “out of it” or maybe actually asleep. We’ve all been there.





### **The Laugher**

The Laugher simply represents a very happy or joyous person.



### **The Scowler**

The Scowler is the opposite of The Laugher, representing frustration, anger and generally a bad, menacing attitude.







### **The Goofball**

The Goofball is a catawampus, crazy looking, clumsy, delightfully absurd and harmless person.



## The Blind Head

The Blind Head is symbolic of the moments in life that we cannot or refuse to see. The back of the head is a mirror that allows players to look at themselves and consider this concept. This character appears the same on each table.



### **The Double Head**

The Double Head is symbolic of duality or our states of confusion. This character has a face on the front and the back, sort of a “push-me-pull-you” concept.





### **The Faceless Mask**

The Faceless Mask represents anonymity, the desire to hide or not participate, or maybe those who cannot or will not express themselves.



### The Vegetable Head

The Vegetable Head is basically just an absurdity, a way of poking fun at humanity.



### **The Upside Down Head**

The Upside Down Head is associated with confusion, feeling topsy-turvy, being in love, or a realization that one is in the wrong place or the wrong state of mind. It can also have associations with absurdity and clowning around.







## Uncle Skulky

Uncle Skulky is an essential element in the game, as death is a reality that is always there. This character is fitted with humorous devices to break its usual heavy connotations, for instance eyeballs and tongues that can be moved by the players.



## The Mirror of Illusion

The Mirror of Illusion is a double-sided, stainless steel mirror. People look in mirrors to see who they really are, but they can never quite get the right information. Little creatures at the bottom of the mirror make fun of whoever is looking in.





### The Found Object Head

There are many everyday objects loaded with meaning that can double as heads. The Found Object Head helps participants relate themselves to the world outside specific human relationships.





## The Carrier of the Stone

The Carrier of the Stone is symbolic of whatever each of us packs around. It can be seen as something positive, like wisdom, or as a burden.



### **The Historical Head Mask**

The Historical Head Mask represents different ethnic groups. Every culture uses masks, and these pieces represent the important contribution each group makes to the world we live in.



## The Head with Animal Qualities

As humans we easily identify with other animals. These pieces present serious, comical or metaphysical references to animals we feel close to or have associations with.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The WES Commuter Rail Art Program was exceptionally challenging with many dramatic ups and downs. For this reason I am so very grateful to every one of the Commuter Rail Art Advisory Committee members who stuck with us through it all and for such an inordinately long time! Their willingness to go out on a limb in support of “cutting edge” art and to give the artists the benefit of the doubt when they needed it was what ultimately assured the success of this program. I want also to thank my colleagues Joe Walsh, who supported the art program at the earliest funding stage; Steve Witter, a stout ally throughout the years; and Michelle Traver who bravely stepped in for me when I was down in a battle of my own. Katrina Sarson and her Art Beat crew gave us all a welcome boost by highlighting our efforts on “Everybody’s Art” ([www.opb.org](http://www.opb.org)). Finally, I am grateful to Frank Boyden and Brad Rude, two artists whose talent and dedication are equaled only by their warm hearts and generous spirits. I feel immensely proud to have been part of the team that helped them bring *The Interactivators* into being.

Mary Priester  
TriMet Public Art Manager

# CONTRIBUTORS

## Artists

Frank Boyden  
Brad Rude

## Commuter Rail Art Advisory Committee

Anne Avery  
Joan Chapin  
Soo Kim Gordon  
Chris Lewis  
Paul Missal  
Loren Nelson  
Steve Witter

## Public Art Staff

Mary Priester  
Michelle Traver

## TriMet Staff

Ann Becklund  
Sandy Bradley  
Jeb Doran  
Lance Erz  
John Fall

Diane Goodwin  
Debbie Huntington  
Ken Kirse  
Monika Lackey  
Neil McFarlane  
Chris Novotny  
Tony Roberts  
Paige Schlupp  
Dave Tertadian  
Joe Walsh  
Tuck Wilson  
Steve Witter

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