

Project Explanation

by Jim Sanborn, Sculptor

(Courtess of NCVA)

December 15, 1989

Dear Agency Employees:

I am writing this letter to give you an idea of what I am up to at the Agency, and to explain those big tilted slabs of stone.

The stonework in the courtyard and at the entrance to the new building serves two functions.

First, it creates a natural framework for the project as a whole and is part of a landscaping scheme designed to recall the natural stone outcroppings that existed on this site before the Agency, and that will endure as do mountains.

Second, the tilted strata tell a story like pages of a document. Over the next several months, a flat copper sheet through which letters and symbols are cut will be inserted between these stone "pages". This code, which includes certain ancient ciphers, begins as International Morse and increases in complexity as you move through the piece at the entrance and into the courtyard. Its placement in a geologic context reinforces the text's "hiddenness" as if it were a fossil or an image frozen in time.

An installation in the courtyard further explores this theme. On the paved surface, supported by a petrified tree, will stand a curved, vertical copper plate. Approximately 2000 letters of the alphabet are cut through this plate (a process which requires four months of work). The left side of the plate is a table for deciphering and enciphering code, developed by Blaise de Vigenere in 1570.

The right side is a text that can be partly deciphered by using the table and partly by using a potentially challenging encoding system. The text, written in collaboration with a prominent fiction writer, is revealed only after the code is deciphered.

My choice of materials, like code, conveys meaning. At the entrance, a lodestone (a rock naturally magnetized by lighting [sic]) refers to ancient navigational compasses. The petrified tree recalls the trees that once stood on this site and that were the source of materials on which written language has been recorded. The copper, perforated by text, represents this "paper". I also use another symbol; water. In a small pool on the plaza, partly surrounded by the copper plate, water will be turbulent and provocative, constantly agitated into standing waves. In the other pool, located among trees in the courtyard and between two massive outcroppings, water will be calm, reflective, contemplative. Other materials around the site - large stones, ornamental grasses, and small trees - are designed to make the natural features surrounding the Agency more visually interesting and thought provoking.

My work at Langley is approximately two thirds complete. If you see me or my apprentices working, please don't hesitate to ask questions about the work.

Sincerely,

Jim Sanborn

KRYPTOS Dedication

by William H. Webster, Dir. CIA

(Courtess of NCVA)

Remarks by William H. Webster Director of Central Intelligence at the dedication of the Sculpture for the New Headquarters Building November 5, 1990.

Thank you Harry. All of us have enjoyed the privilege of having this courtyard between the two main buildings. It is made all the more significant by the work of the artist we honor this afternoon.

What we have always wanted — in our buildings and in the art that makes them live — is to create an ideal place. For us, that would be one that is right for both reflection and challenge. Today we pass a milestone in the Agency's commitment to these two — and it is both a milestone and a beginning. Today we dedicate a work of art commissioned solely for the Central Intelligence Agency — a work made possible by the Art in Architecture program. I want to congratulate the artist, Mr. James Sanborn, for his excellent work. This is a first for us: We have "placed" art before — even come to count on it as a familiar and expected comfort — but we had not watched it evolve. Mr. Sanborn has changed this. It is his vision that we have watched develop here. And it is his vision that has inspired our curiosity, questions, and admiration.

Mr. Sanborn has accomplished a very difficult thing — he has created something that speaks to a sense of place. He has worked to give us art that is appropriate to this institution, that embraces larger truths, and that speaks of a sense of mission. This could not have been easy.

I know that art is solitary work. That, in its many manifestations, it deals with language, communication, and with creating a shared view of the world. I don't pretend to know how these things are done.

But art that captures this place and these people must deal with a host of things: it calls for understanding intellect, solitude, the unyielding nature of the work, and capturing an integrity of place. And this artist has, as well, tried to recreate something of the character of the nation. It is impressive that in this enclosed courtyard, we could have so clear a sense of the rugged nature and vast expanse of our country.

Mr. Sanborn, you have used symbols of water and rock most effectively. But I know that all intelligence professionals will enjoy the opportunity to tackle the code you've presented us in this courtyard. You have captured much of what this Agency is all about. We like to be tested. And we enjoy a challenge. The sculpture in this courtyard is both a symbol of that challenge and the very thing itself. It is a welcome addition here, and in years to come it will be enjoyed again and again. Thank you for the work that you have done.

CIA has \$250,000 Headache

by Jim Yandle (NCVA)

According to the artist, KRYPTOS is situated to blend in with natural rock outcropping on the agency grounds. A copper sheet is designed to fit "between these stone 'pages'". The copper sheet has been cut to show letters and symbols. According to Sanborn, "this code, which includes certain ancient ciphers, begins as International Morse and increases in complexity as you move through the piece at the entrance and into the courtyard. About 2,000 letters were cut. On the left, "is a table for deciphering and enciphering code, developed by Blaise de Vigenere in 1570. The right side is a text that can be partly deciphered by using the table and partly by using a potentially challenging encoding system. The text, written in collaboration with a prominent fiction writer, is revealed only after the code is deciphered.

A recent story by the Associated Press out of its Washington, D.C. bureau must have caused a lot of smiles throughout the intelligence community especially those of us who, past and present, served with the Naval Security Group.

That big \$250,000 headache comes from a sculpture crafted by Jim Sanborn which is set outside the employees' cafeteria at the CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia.

It's not so much the cost of the sculpture, but the message it conveys that has caused this mammoth headache. And therein lies the story.

Sculptor Sanborn, that crafty creature, has tantalized the gumshoes by etching into the copper artwork a 2,000 letter "cryptogram" which no one has been able to break. Imagine that! The super-duper spy agency can't break the "homemade" code, and it has reportedly asked its "blood enemy" the National Security Agency to put their experts and Cray supercomputers on the problem in hopes of breaking that blasted code.

Sanborn titled his work "Kryptos" which is Greek for "hidden" and that hidden message is driving the super spooks silly. Only Sanborn and CIA director William Webster know the contents of the "Kryptos" communication which makes the puzzle a genuine problem.

When discussing "Kryptos", the Associated Press story said, "Sanborn retreats behind the elliptical speech of somebody who's trying to hid something." Does that sound familiar? Sounds like a "hugger-

mugger" story to me. Don't know hugger-mugger? Look it up.

Sanborn took a dig at the CIA when he said, "If they don't know what's going on in their own back yard, how would anyone believe they'd know what was going on in the rest of the world?"

And "Kryptos" still stands in the courtyard mocking the best sleuths in the U.S. of A.

To prove that the message is authentic, Sanborn presented Webster two sealed envelopes when the sculpture was dedicated in November last year. One contained the message translation while the other contained the keywords required to break the code.

The artist said his sculpture deals with the agency's tradition of secrecy. It must really gall the undercover boys and gals to have to look at that mocking sculpture every time they go to the cafeteria. We're looking at a \$250,000 conversation piece!

What is more troublesome is that once the initial code is broken and the "message" read, it opens up another bucket of worms.

Sanborn said, "They will be able to read what I wrote, but what I wrote is a mystery itself ... People will always say, 'What did he mean by that?' What I wrote out were clues to a larger mystery."

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