

## MONSTROCITY: - PARENTS WILL WORRY, AND KIDS WILL LOVE IT

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### CITY MUSEUM

He's created a MonstroCity.

And artist Bob Cassilly will unveil the City Museum's newest attraction -- an enormous jungle gym in the sky -- on July 4 at a free party.

The project is called MonstroCity for obvious reasons: It looks scary, and it's at the City Museum. It also is a city unto itself, where roads of rusty metal connect various icons of city life -- in this case airplanes, a fire engine, trams and an ice cream shop.

Like all cities, this one is designed to be inhabited. Visitors can scale the stairs of an ancient castle, cross an enclosed balance beam, rest under the shade of enormous metal mushrooms and shoot paper airplanes out of the real thing. Part sculpture, part playground, MonstroCity is designed to arouse both awe and dread in those who experience it on or off the ground.

Like many attractions at City Museum, Cassilly insists that MonstroCity only looks dangerous. To prove his point, he took a break from construction on a recent sunny afternoon and scrambled up an enormous Slinky-like coil that stretches from a treehouse to a metal crosswalk.

"This is the safest thing in the whole place. If there was an earthquake, this is where you would want to be," said Cassilly, adding that MonstroCity "will make parents' hearts palpitate and give kids a chance to scare their mothers."

And what about the heart of Joe Klitzing, the architect who reconciles Cassilly's imagination with the city's building code? He says the installation is as safe as the average playground attraction.

"Bob creates the problems and we try to solve them, and it can be a challenge," said Klitzing, who first started work with Cassilly when he mounted the old dome of the St. Louis Science Center Planetarium on top of the City Museum building. "A lot of the pieces are not typical building materials so we stress test, we load test, we make sure the handrails and guardrails are correct."

For instance, Klitzing directed Cassilly's crew to reinforce the tree house by pouring concrete in the trunk. The Slinky, however, may not be the refuge from natural disaster that Cassilly suggests.

"We haven't totally dealt with that yet," he said, adding that the Slinky will have to be code compliant by opening day.

Other materials used for MonstroCity are equally unlikely. In typical Cassilly fashion, he has salvaged other people's junk -- carved stones, rusty gears, battered shingles, factory equipment -- and reincarnated them into interactive sculpture.

"I just shake my brain until everything falls into place," he said. "It's like a Stravinsky symphony. All of these dissonant objects play off of each other and make their own harmony."

That vision is rarely fixed. Only recently has he decided to install a half-pipe for skateboarders and an ice cream shop/wine bar in the old log cabin outside of the museum. He also came across 200 bungee cords that he would like to fix to the canopy near the entrance. The idea of kids bouncing on the cords like frogs while visitors shoot paper airplanes out of hanging planes makes the mischievous Cassilly laugh.

Still, the success of MonstroCity is serious business. Cassilly recently acquired the City Museum from the board that had operated the institution since its 1997 opening. The museum, which teaches kids about art, old architecture and a variety of odd interests, relied on donations for about \$1 million of its \$2.6 million budget. No longer a nonprofit organization, City Museum can't access grants and charitable gifts and must survive on gate receipts.

Arts managers question whether Cassilly can keep the museum viable, but he hopes new attractions like MonstroCity will deliver more guests and money.

Admission to MonstroCity is \$2.50 but will not include access to City Museum, which will remain \$7.50. He recently started to charge for parking at "Greedy Bob's Parking Lot."

Cassilly also plans to open a City Museum expansion, which could include an inside climbing wall and a rooftop restaurant. Meanwhile he continues to collect the pieces of the next puzzle.

"It's a game for me not knowing where I'm going next," he said.

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MonstroCity

opening day

Where: City Museum, 701 North 15th Street

When: 7 p.m. to midnight July 4

How much: Free (opening day)

Admission to MonstroCity is \$2.50

Admission to City Museum is \$7.50.

More info: 314-231-2489

- Caption: PHOTO(1) Color Photos by CHRIS DOANE / Post-Dispatch - Airplanes hover over carved stones, rusty gears, battered shingles, factory equipment and other items reincarnated by artist Bob Cassilly into interactive sculpture. It's all part of MonstroCity, part sculpture and part playground, outside the City Museum downtown. (2) Color Photo - Welder Zack Miano works on a beam that supports a half-pipe used by skateboarders at MonstroCity outside the City Museum. Artist Bob Cassilly says MonstroCity "will make parents' hearts palpitate and give kids a chance to scare their mothers." (3) Photo by Chris Doane/Post-Dispatch - Armand Mossotti skates on a half pipe inside the MonstroCity playground at the City Museum.

- Memo: CITY MUSEUM

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