

## A pusher of boundaries - Our view • Robert J. Cassilly Jr., 1949-2011. - OPINION

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In the organic sense, which is the way he liked things to work, a remembrance of Bob Cassilly would be developed like a Bob Cassilly sculpture piece. It would go out in the dead of night and scavenge a treasure or two and incorporate them in whimsical ways into something new and wonderful. It would pay no attention whatsoever to rules or public opinion, mutate like a virus several times and never quite be finished.

It would pay homage to the past, look to the future and acknowledge that nothing is permanent. If at all possible, it would contain an element of danger, or at least the illusion of danger, because, as Bob Cassilly told the Post-Dispatch a long time ago, "The illusion of danger is essential for any kind of adventure."

Here's something to scavenge: Eleven years ago, when he began working to turn the old Lafarge Cement Plant on the north riverfront into what surely would be the world's only post-industrial Precambrian-themed amusement park, Bob Cassilly told D.J. Wilson of The Riverfront Times how he worked:

"I drive on the bulldozer and push stuff. You get free association going. Things come up that are random chance - you take advantage of that.... That's a very dangerous combination - and potent."

Robert J. Cassilly Jr. was found dead Monday morning on his bulldozer at his still-unfinished cement plant project. The co-founder and creative genius behind the City Museum, the Turtle Park and dozens of lesser-known pieces of public art was 61.

His was a peculiar kind of genius, very rare anywhere and almost unheard of in St. Louis. We can think of no one else in a metro area of 2.6 million people who would even think of putting a Ferris wheel atop a 10-story building. We can think of no one else who would see an abandoned cement plant and think "tourist attraction."

Bob Cassilly's visions were bold, eclectic and often chaotic, all harnessed to a go-to-hell attitude. He had little patience for the bureaucrats and lawyers with whom an artist and museum director must work.

His work brought him fame, about which he did not care, and wealth, which he would leverage into his next project. He seemed most at home in jeans and boots, in the company of the artists and craftsmen who flocked to him, pushing boundaries to the last.

"You create a rigid order," he told a KETC-Channel 9 interviewer in 2008, "and then you can break the rules."

- Caption: Photo by J.B. FORBES • Post-Dispatch Bob Cassilly works on a project at his desk in his office in the City Museum in 2002.

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