

Is tech squeezing out Seattle artists? Not this sculptor, whose work fits into new urban landscape

BY **KURT SCHLOSSER** on May 18, 2017

There's plenty of talk about what Seattle's seemingly all-enveloping technology industry is doing to affordability, diversity and the culture of the place, and whether it's putting the squeeze on artists who still hope to live and work in the city.

But in the rush to say that artists are being priced out of the growing "new" Seattle, are we dismissing the possibility that the builders of a "pricier" city might actually commission more art? For one sculptor in particular, the growing city is providing a pedestal for her sought-after works.

Julie Speidel has been a Pacific Northwest artist for more than 40 years. Her sculptures can be found in galleries and public spaces as well as on corporate campuses across the country. Her father Bill Speidel is called "one of the last of a few genuine old-time Seattle characters" on the website for the city's Underground Tour, which he founded.

Speidel's 2015 artwork "Petros," consisting of several giant stainless steel sculptures, sits at the base of Amazon's Doppler office building near downtown Seattle.



"Petros," a 2015 sculpture by Julie Speidel can be seen in a plaza at the base of Amazon's Doppler tower in Seattle. (JulieSpeidel.com Photo)

And now, another signature building taking shape in the city's skyline — and to be occupied by a tech company — will be home to Speidel's next large work of art. F5 Networks, the Seattle-based infrastructure and security technology company, is moving to the skyscraper previously known as The Mark, at 801 5th Ave. On the corner of 5th and Columbia Street, a 14-foot-tall bronze sculpture by Speidel will be anchored beneath the 44-story angular glass building now known as F5 Tower.

"I think that the wonderful thing about human beings is that we're creative, in both [art and tech], and there's a wonderful marriage when you can put it together," said Speidel, who started as a jewelry maker in the 1970s. "To have the piece ... be on the corner in a front of a building that is just very beautiful ... it speaks to our city. There's all kinds of growth, and this is a good part of it. I think the building is a real honoring of creativity and being entrepreneurial and I think all of us in this are entrepreneurial."

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Steve Pollard is a former ship builder and engineer who has been at Machinists since 1988. In referencing his long history helping Speidel's concepts become reality, Pollard figured he first

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Steve Pollard of Machinists Inc. in South Seattle has worked on everything from ship parts to art to Bertha the tunneling machine. (GeekWire Photo / Kurt Schlosser)

worked with her on a piece 20 years ago. "I know how to form compound curves in ships, so I just brought that technology, that experience into this thing," he said.



Steve Pollard draws a diagram with chalk to show how he figured out dimensions for Julie Speidel's sculpture. (GeekWire Photo / Kurt Schlosser)

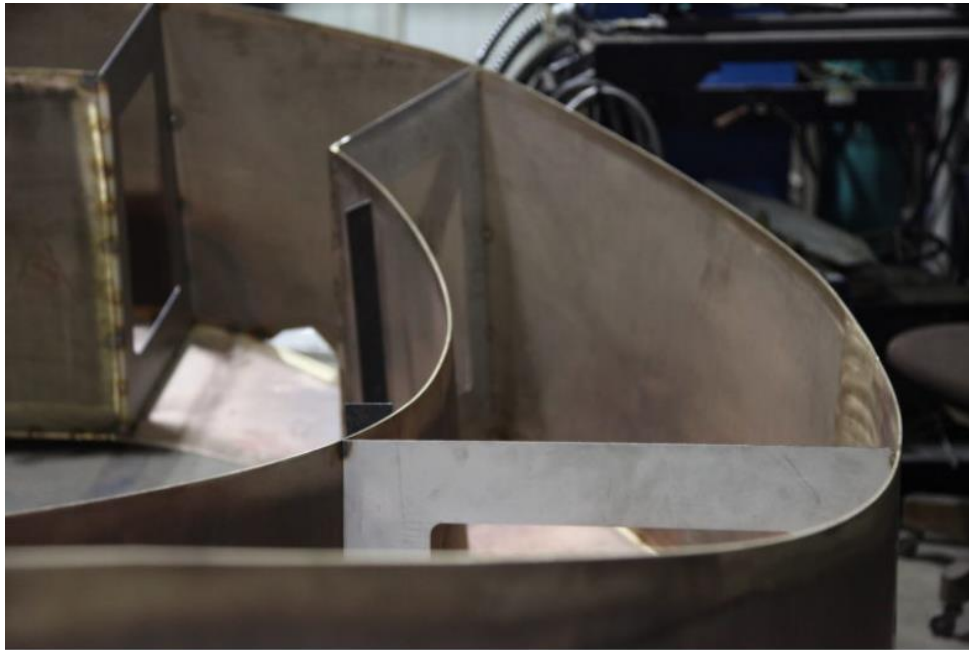


Steve Pollard and Julie Speidel review printouts of computer drawings he made for her latest sculpture. (GeekWire Photo / Kurt Schlosser)

When not working on giant pieces of art for tech buildings, Pollard has his hand in a number of objects which might otherwise draw interest from tech-minded folks. During GeekWire's visit, he mentioned, among other things, building part of the shock absorber that goes into an aircraft carrier deck in order to snag a jet's tailhook, or arresting gear.

But standing over a curvy, 4- or 5-foot wide cardboard-and-wood model that Speidel put together on Vashon Island, where she lives and has her studio, Pollard said the first thing he did was to stare at it and ask, "What is this?"

He then asked, "Where do you put your tape measure on this? How do you communicate — how do you tell somebody how to form something? How do you line it up?"



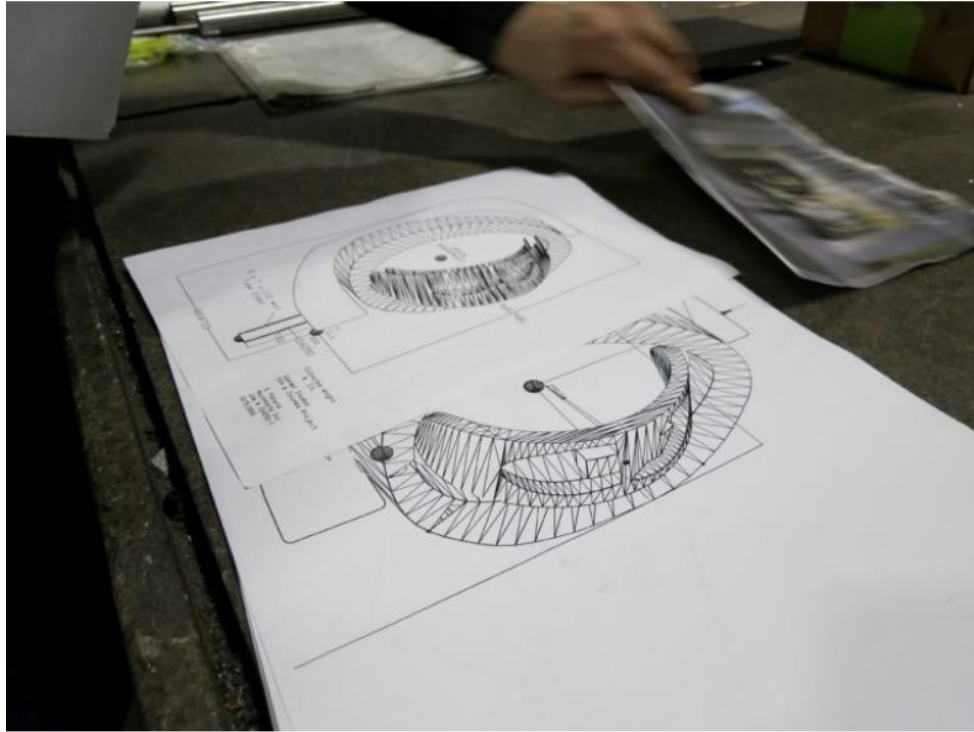
A view of the inside framework of Julie Speidel's sculpture at Machinists Inc. (Speidel Studio Photo)

"I have to get inspired because I've got to work on this," Pollard said. "These are individual pieces. Essentially I have to take each one of these pieces and create computer data so that I can then scale it up."

Another giant Speidel work called "Coppice Gate," which is at the corporate headquarters of American Greetings outside of Cleveland, was also created at Machinists. "Compared to this one, that one was basically simple," Pollard said.

Talking in tech and math and engineering terms that would probably impress workers at the giant tech company where Speidel's art will live, Pollard presented a dizzying walk-through of the processes he uses to find flat surfaces and straight lines in a work of art that appears to have none.

In the case of this piece, he said he attempted to tackle the project initially with stereolithography.



A closer look at one of Steve Pollard's drawings for the sculpture. (GeekWire Photo / Kurt Schlosser)

"I took a couple of hundred photographs and uploaded them and I got a beautiful three-dimensional scan of the forklift forks that I had it on. So that didn't work," he joked. "Then we took these over to our inspection lab and we used a coordinate-measuring machine and I tried to get, essentially, the geometry of each one of the corners. I wanted a spline curve in three-dimensional space for this corner, this corner, this corner and this corner, all in true relationship to themselves. That worked, somewhat, because it's a piece of cardboard."

Pollard, who thinks he put about 500 hours into the project, ultimately ended up drawing what he wanted to see on the floor of his garage — a move he mimicked with chalk on the floor of the Machinists shop this week. The mapping of X-Y-Z points led to the creation of hundreds and hundreds of planes — the term used when referring to surface area in sculpture. All of it informed how much material would need to be purchased and what types of cuts and internal framework would be required.

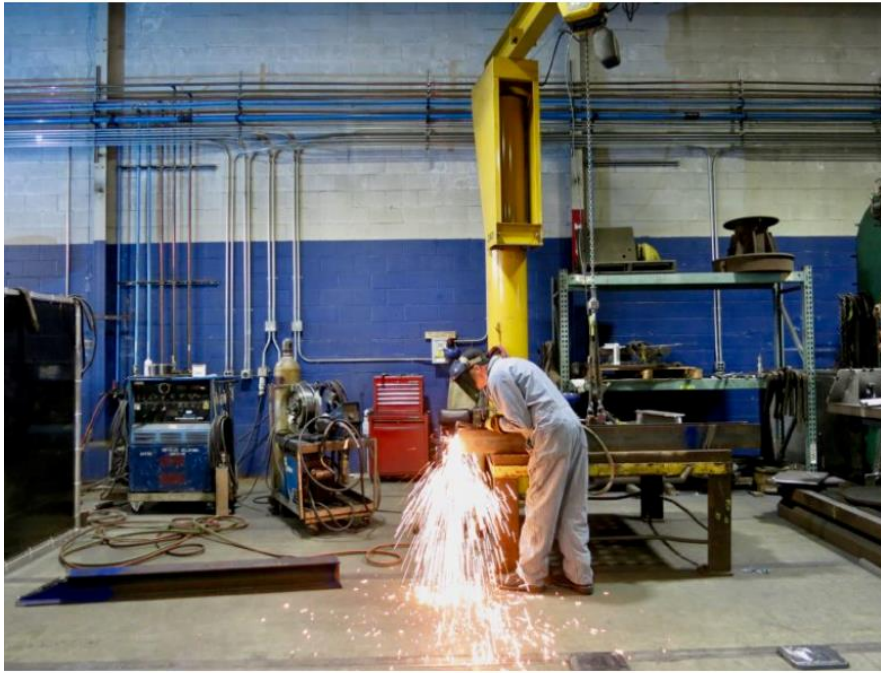
"She always says, 'Don't make it too smooth. This is art,'" Pollard said of working from one of Speidel's models. "Because the computer will smooth it out and make it perfectly round. That's not what we're trying to do. We're trying to preserve some of her character."



Julie Speidel shows off a cardboard model she created to mock up her sculpture for F5 Tower in Seattle. (GeekWire Photo / Kurt Schlosser)



Julie Speidel watches David Gaut apply ammonium sulfide to the large bronze sculpture being completed at Machinists Inc. (GeekWire Photo / Kurt Schlosser)



A worker inside Machinists Inc., a job shop in industrial South Seattle. (GeekWire Photo / Kurt Schlosser)

The finished piece will have plenty of character. Standing upright at 14-feet tall and nearly 14-foot wide, the bronze sculpture of intercepting ovals weighs almost 3,000 pounds. Propped on its side at the Machinists, workers Steve Belfrage and David Gaut, both skilled welders/fabricators from Speidel's Vashon studio, applied ammonium sulfide to give the bronze its necessary patina.

"It has this wonderful sense of emerging, like a chrysalis," Speidel said. "I didn't want to have something that was just stagnant, that just stood there. It has a sense of motion from every direction, and it's interesting from every direction."

Speidel said she chose bronze, which she calls a very noble metal, because she said it seemed most appropriate for the new space, where it will be surrounded by mirrored glass. When designing the pieces for Amazon — which are meant to pay homage to the erratic rocks left behind by a receding glacier 14,000 years ago — the finish on the artwork was chosen to play off the color in the Doppler building and reflect that color.

The new F5 location is just blocks from the architecturally iconic Seattle Central Library, which opened 13 years ago on 4th Avenue. And Speidel said that the first large piece that she made in her career is across the street from the library, in front of the U.S. Appeals Court.

Kevin Daniels, president of Daniels Real Estate, is the developer of the F5 Tower, which he said was designed to add a striking dimension to the Seattle skyline. The

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location also incorporates the historic former First United Methodist sanctuary building.

"I wanted a prominent art installation from a local, resident master that would engage the passerby just as much as the architecture does from a distance," Daniels said. "Julie's work has that magical interplay between the artist and visitor, it's timeless and visionary, which complements the design goals of our project."



A rendering of the F5 Tower shows Julie Speidel's sculpture at the corner of 5th Avenue and Columbia Street in Seattle. (Daniels Real Estate Image)

Speidel said her piece has a sense of "spinning," and in mentioning its location in the heart of the city's downtown, she couldn't help but reference another feature of modern, growing Seattle.

"It will have all these different sides, so, if you're stuck in traffic, you get to look at art."

With more tech towers potentially rising and more people coming to gridlocked Seattle, perhaps it will make sense to have a Speidel sculpture on every corner.