

Lights out for Veronica

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You're probably familiar with "Urban Light," the Chris Burden installation at LACMA on Wilshire Boulevard of old LA street lamps.

There's another public art installation of streetlights that came 15 years before "Urban Light."

It's called Veronica, because it's in a shopping center in East Hollywood at the corner of Vermont and Santa Monica Boulevards.

Or at least it was, until it was removed earlier this month.

This was a row of 25 old Los Angeles street lights, in a parking lot at the corner of Vermont and Santa Monica Boulevards, in front of Hollytron, now Staples.

It was created by public artist Sheila Klein as a self-initiated project. She went to the Bureau of Street Lighting's boneyard and chose the lights and cleaned them up.

Then she got funding from the Department of Cultural Affairs, and volunteer support from the lighting bureau.

Jeff Ziliotto, the head of the field office, was one of the primary volunteers; and his dad was a street lighter.

The installation was placed on a street corner that had burned down during the 1992 riots. It was installed on private property in 1993 with the understanding that it would be removed after a year.

The lights were a mix of then-current and rare and obsolete poles.

Klein told *DnA* that Veronica was "an urban candelabra, it was about domesticating the wide LA street; it was about getting people to look at their surroundings in a more complex way and think about what the city does."

And, she adds, "It was a cool time. It was a very special moment, and I think especially after the riots people wanted to rebuild and have a hopeful dialogue. And I think this piece was part of that. I think it became different things to different people."

This past September, attorney Glenn Freeman with the developer that owns that land (Westport Realty, a subsidiary of NSB Associates based in Beverly Hills) sent a letter to the Bureau of Street Lighting saying that they're planning to renovate the shopping center and that the lampposts need to be removed.

The Bureau of Street Lighting moved the posts to the lawn of their Field Operations office, in the same arrangement, two blocks away at the corner of Santa Monica Boulevard and North Westmoreland Avenue.

Last week Sheila Klein started getting calls and emails from all sorts of people asking why the lamps were moved. She hadn't been informed beforehand.

Freeman, by the way, now says that work was scheduled on the shopping center for February of 2018, but the project has now been postponed.

So what will happen to Veronica?

We called the Bureau of Street Lighting's outgoing director, Ed Ebrahimian, who is himself a great fan of LA's historic lights and has created a mini-museum of streetlights on the floor of his office in downtown.

He says that the Bureau very much wants to recreate the artwork in another location and that the current one is temporary while they figure out a new permanent home, in collaboration with the Department of Cultural Affairs.

He has been in touch with Danielle Brazell, the General Manager of DCA who in turn has reached out to Sheila Klein, who says she will soon meet with the City's Deputy Mayor and other folks to plan ahead for a new location.

Klein says the two main things that bugged her were the removal of the piece, and not contacting her. She says the light was very specific to the site. But it sounds as if communication between the artist and various City departments has been restored and there will be a positive outcome.

One thing to note is that Vermonica bears visual similarities to Chris Burden's "Urban Light" at LACMA and yet Klein's work came first. "Urban Light" went up in 2008. Wouldn't it be great to put the lights on the MTA plaza that will be opposite the museum and have the two artworks speak to each other?