

= Vaillancourt Fountain =

Vaillancourt Fountain , sometimes called Quebec libre ! , is a large fountain located in Justin Herman Plaza in San Francisco , designed by the Québécois artist Armand Vaillancourt in 1971 . It is about 40 feet (12 m) high and is constructed out of precast concrete square tubes . Long considered controversial because of its stark , modernist appearance , there have been several unsuccessful proposals to demolish the fountain over the years . It was the site of a free concert by U2 in 1987 , when lead singer Bono spray painted graffiti on the fountain and was both praised and criticized for the action .

= = Location = =

The fountain is located in a highly visible spot on the downtown San Francisco waterfront , in Justin Herman Plaza , where Market Street meets The Embarcadero . The Hyatt Regency Hotel is at the edge of the plaza , adjacent to the other four highrise towers of the Embarcadero Center . Across The Embarcadero is the Ferry Building , and the eastern end of the California Street cable car line is on the other side of the Hyatt Regency Hotel .

When Vaillancourt designed the fountain , the Embarcadero Freeway or Interstate 480 , was still in existence along Market Street and the Embarcadero . The fountain was designed with the freeway environment in mind , but it was built to bring people there . At the time the city was expanding and wanted to build a plaza . What is now Justin Herman Plaza , was once an empty dirt lot under the freeway surrounded by piers , warehouses and ship yards .

= = Design and construction = =

Vaillancourt Fountain was a product of the redevelopment of San Francisco that took place in the 1950s and 1960s The Transamerica Pyramid was constructed from 1969 @-@ 1972 and BART was also being constructed , the Embarcadero Station would eventually open in 1976 .

Justin Herman , for whom the plaza was named , was a leading figure in this process and the executive director of the redevelopment agency in charge . Modernist landscape architect Lawrence Halprin was selected for the redesign of Market Street from the Embarcadero to the Civic Center , the most visible two mile thoroughfare in San Francisco . Halprin had designed other spaces in the city such as Ghirardelli Square and the United Nations Plaza . He designed Justin Herman Plaza , but hired Armand Vaillancourt to design the fountain . Vaillancourt , 38 years old at the time , had won the invitational fountain design competition that Halprin had judged . Halprin was quoted as saying that if the fountain didn 't prove to be among the " great works of civic art ... I am going to slit my throat " .

The fountain is about 40 feet (12 m) high , weighs approximately 700 short tons (640 t) , and is constructed out of precast concrete square tubes . The fountain is positioned in a pool shaped like an irregular pentagon , and is designed to pump up to 30 @,@ 000 US gallons (110 @,@ 000 L) of water per minute . Vaillancourt Fountain looks unfinished , like concrete that has not been mixed all the way . Up close it is very rough and textured , painfully sharp . There are several square pillars or cubed tubes that form a semi circle inside a pentagon shaped pool . The natural colored pillars jut out and crisscross from the corner of the plaza ? like the tentacles of some immense geometrical octopus ? .breaking open . ? There are two bridges , or walk ways (with stairs) , that allow the public to stand in @-@ between the tubes and have a view overlooking the plaza and city . The fountain and plaza are easily accessible to the public at all times and in all conditions , rain or shine . The fountain 's budget was US \$ 310 @,@ 000 , and it was dedicated on April 22 , 1971 . The Los Angeles Times reported that its actual cost was US \$ 607 @,@ 800 .

Just before the dedication , the slogan " Quebec Libre " (a reference to the Quebec sovereignty movement) was painted on the fountain at night , and the graffiti was erased . During the dedication , attended by Thomas Hoving , director of New York 's Metropolitan Museum of Art , a rock band played , and Armand Vaillancourt himself painted " Quebec Libre " on the fountain in as many

places as he could reach . A redevelopment agency employee started to paint over the slogans during the ceremony , but Herman stopped him , saying it could be done later . When asked about why he defaced his own fountain with graffiti he responded , ? No , no . It 's a joy to make a free statement . This fountain is dedicated to all freedom . Free Quebec ! Free East Pakistan ! Free Viet Nam ! Free the whole world ! ? Vaillancourt said his actions were " a powerful performance " intended to illustrate the notion of power to the people . " Quebec Libre " has been an alternate name for the fountain since .

= = Critical reaction = =

The fountain has been considered controversial since its construction , and criticism of it has continued over the years . Hoving , in his dedication speech , said of the fountain had some of the daring of Baroque sculpture and that " A work of art must be born in controversy . " Herman himself said it was " one of the greatest artistic achievements in North America . "

At the time of its dedication , the San Francisco chapter of the National Safety Council said that the fountain " may be a safety hazard " . Opponents of the work handed out leaflets at the dedication of the fountain describing it as a " loathsome monstrosity " , a " howling obscenity " , an " obscene practical joke " , " idiotic rubble " , and a " pestiferous eyesore " . Art critic Alfred Frankenstein of the San Francisco Chronicle responded that " its very outrageousness and extravagance are part of its challenge " and therefore , it " can 't be all bad . " He added that the fountain was intended to be participated in rather than just observed . An early comment by architecture critic Allan Temko , often repeated over the years , describes " technological excrescences " that had been " deposited by a giant concrete dog with square intestines " . Another pithy remark that gained press attention , from critic Lloyd Skinner , was that the fountain was " Stonehenge , unhinged , with plumbing troubles " .

Artists have been critical of the work as well . Sculptor Benny Bufano called it " a jumble of nothing " , artist Willard Cox likened it to " dynamited debris " , and sculptor Humphrey Diaquist said it had been created by " a figure of deranged talent " .

The fountain has been called the " least revered modernist work of art " in San Francisco . Due to its size , it has been said that it " dominates the landscape " of the north side of Justin Herman Plaza . It has also been said that the design intent was " to mock and mirror the clumsy , double @-@ decked roadway " , referring to the elevated Embarcadero Freeway which separated the fountain from the waterfront at the time of construction .

= = 1987 U2 free concert = =

On the first leg of The Joshua Tree Tour by the rock band U2 in 1987 , they performed concerts at the Cow Palace just south of San Francisco on April 24 and April 25 , 1987 . On the third leg of the tour , concerts had been announced for November 14 and 15 , 1987 , across the San Francisco Bay , at the Oakland Coliseum .

On the morning of November 11 , 1987 , local radio stations announced that U2 would hold a free concert that day in Justin Herman Plaza , with the stage set up in front of the Vaillancourt Fountain . Within a few hours , a crowd estimated at 20 @,@ 000 people gathered in the plaza . The concert was jokingly called " Save the Yuppies " , in reference to the 1987 stock market crash that had taken place three weeks earlier .

The band closed their nine @-@ song performance with their hit " Pride (In the Name of Love) " . During the instrumental portion in the middle of the song , Bono , lead singer of the band , climbed onto the sculpture and spray painted graffiti on it , reading " Rock N Roll Stops The Traffic " . Mayor Dianne Feinstein , who had been waging a city @-@ wide campaign against graffiti that had resulted in over 300 citations during the year , was angry and criticized Bono for defacing a San Francisco landmark . She said , " I am disappointed that a rock star who is supposed to be a role model for young people chose to vandalize the work of another artist . The unfortunate incident marred an otherwise wonderful rock concert . " Bono was issued a citation for misdemeanor

malicious mischief . U2 manager Paul McGuinness said , " This is clearly not an act of vandalism . This act was clearly in the spirit of the artwork itself . " The numerous callers to Ronn Owens ' radio talk show on KGO @-@ AM were evenly split , with younger listeners defending the singer 's action and older ones not . Bono soon apologized , saying " I really do regret it . It was dumb . " The singer explained that he thought that he was honoring the artist 's work and that the artist had agreed , but later Bono realized that the city owned the fountain . The group covered the cost of removal of the graffiti .

Armand Vaillancourt flew from Quebec to California after the incident , and spoke in favor of Bono 's actions at U2 's Oakland performance several days later . Vaillancourt said , " Good for him . I want to shake his hand . People get excited about such a little thing . " The sculptor spray @-@ painted a slogan of his own on the band 's stage , " Stop the Madness " .

The episode received further attention when it was featured in U2 's 1988 documentary film Rattle and Hum . There , footage of it was shown over , and interspersed with , the band 's opening number , " All Along the Watchtower " , a song by Bob Dylan that had been a big hit for Jimi Hendrix . This has led some people to misidentify the song being played when the spray painting occurred . In any case , the fountain and plaza ended up on one U2 fan site 's list of recommended group @-@ related places in the U.S. to visit .

= = Proposals to demolish = =

On October 17 , 1989 the context of the Bay Area changed because the Bay Bridge collapsed , and so did the Cypress Street structure (Interstate 880) . A section of the bridge collapsed , resulting in 1 death . While in West Oakland , the upper level of the freeway collapsed onto the lower level crushing cars and killing 42 people .

The freeway around Vaillancourt Fountain was damaged by the quake , but the fountain was not . On that day , the twisted concrete design of Vaillancourt Fountain took on an appearance of ill fated irony . The city decided to remove the freeway rather than repair the old infrastructure and proposed an idea of turning the Embarcadero into a wide , palm @-@ lined boulevard .

An architect hired by the city proposed demolition of the fountain , but no decision was made . In 2004 , San Francisco Supervisor Aaron Peskin renewed the call to demolish the fountain . The water supply to the fountain had been turned off for several years , because of California 's energy crisis of those years . Armand Vaillancourt immediately pledged that he would " fight like a devil to preserve that work " . Debra Lahane , a member of the San Francisco Arts Commission , said that " it succeeds as a work of art if it provokes dialogue and discussion . Art that engages the public has had a measure of success . "

It is a reminder of , and a link to , old San Francisco . It was one of the first public artworks in the Embarcadero area . It has not lost its context because the freeway or water has been removed . The removal of the freeway and water has changed the context of the fountain into a monument or memorial .