

Border monument: Juárez sculpture to be dedicated May 24

By Lorena Figueroa \ El Paso Times

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Mexican sculptor Sebastian's "The X" or "La Equis" monument will be dedicated May 24 in Juárez. The 197-foot monument near the Rio Grande will include an esplanade, an acoustical shell and two parking lots. (Jesus Alcazar / El Paso Times)

JUAREZ -- The city's newest icon, an enormous red X that sits near the Rio Grande, will be inaugurated this month in a celebration expected to be as huge as the structure itself.

"The X," or "La Equis," monument will include a big esplanade, an acoustic concert shell and two parking lots below the steel sculpture, officials said.

It will be dedicated on May 24.

Although a list of invitees and performers for the dedication is still in the works, Mexican conductor Alondra de la Parra and the El Paso Symphony Orchestra are scheduled to perform that day.

Internationally known Mexican sculptor Sebastian -- whose real name is Enrique Carbajal González -- said Wednesday that he will not be able to attend the inauguration of his 197-foot-tall monument.

That same weekend, the Chihuahua-born artist will be recognized for his work in Naples, Italy, he said.

However, his son Matías Carbajal García, who along with Sebastian supervised the mounting of the sculpture, will be representing him.

"My son will deliver a message to the Juarenses for the honor of letting me create this piece and the extraordinary feeling that it is finally finished," Sebastian said.

This week the Department of Public Works worked on the middle of the two towers which will be a viewing area that will allow visitors to look into El Paso and over Juárez. The middle area may one day become a restaurant, officials said.

Arcadio Serrano García, public infrastructure director for Juárez, said the agency's crews are installing a window on the south side of the planned restaurant to accommodate 70 people. Next week, the north side window will be completed, he added.

"We are working tirelessly to have the sculpture and everything ready on time," he said.

Serrano García said the sculpture, commissioned by the city, cost about \$2.8 million. That figure includes Sebastian's fee as well as the mounting of the piece.

He added that about \$3.2 million has also been invested to construct the "La Mexicaneidad" esplanade, which will have an outdoor theater, gardens and a shopping plaza.

The esplanade can hold thousands of people who will be able to enjoy music performed at the acoustic shell, he said.

El Grito

The inauguration of the giant sculpture, on Rafael Pérez Serna Avenue, comes years after its conception and not quite as it was first planned.

The concept for the project began six years ago during the previous administration of current mayor Héctor Murguía. Work on the X project was suspended for three years when Murguía's first three-year term ended in 2007. His successor, Mayor José Reyes Ferriz, decided to cancel it because he did not consider it a priority.

"I said to him not to worry, that it was going to be finished," Sebastian remembers saying to Murguía at the time. "And, like with other huge monuments in other parts of the world, you have to have patience and strength."

In 2010, when Murguía began his second term as mayor, the project was restarted.

Initially, the sculpture was scheduled to be completed in the spring of 2012, but authorities changed the date to last winter, before the final inauguration date this month, according to news archives.

At first, a museum dedicated to the history of the border or of Juárez and El Paso was going to be constructed in the esplanade below the sculpture.

However, "plans changed" and the museum will no longer be constructed on the site, Serrano García said.

The installation of an elevator that will take visitors to the area of the planned restaurant and the viewing area won't be ready for the inauguration. Serrano García said the elevator will be installed by the end of August.

A balcony also in the middle of the X will be ready by Sept. 16, when Independence Day in México is celebrated. This is where Murguía plans to give "El Grito," Serrano García said.

Mejico to Mexico

Sebastian said "The X" will eventually become an icon, not only for Juárez, but for all of Mexico and the rest of the world.

"It is a symbol full of meanings, a mark to welcome people (to Mexico) and to demonstrate the ancestral Mexican culture," he explained.

Sebastian said the sculpture is a tribute to Juárez's namesake, Mexican President Benito Juárez.

Juárez was remembered for changing the spelling of the country's name in the 1800s, from Méjico to Mexico.

The two intersecting arms of the X symbolize the mestizaje, or the merging of two cultures in Mexico -- the indigenous people and the Spanish.

Being the first president with Aztec blood, Benito Juárez is credited with bringing together the races.

Sebastian also said the X, which resembles a cross, is an Aztec religious symbol -- the Nahui-Ollin -- of the ancestral Mexicans. It symbolizes the blood sacrifices offered to the gods during the Aztec times.

That's why the monument had to be huge, Sebastian said. The monument is the size of a 15- or 17-story building.

"It couldn't be 30 feet tall because it would have been lost in the urban perspective," he said. "It had to be big enough to be enjoyed from different parts of the city, big enough like the Egyptian pyramids or the Eiffel Tower."

During the past few years, people have questioned the use of public resources for this project.

"Controversy is always good," Sebastian said. "If there wasn't any (controversy), this piece wouldn't have any sense. It would have been mediocre."

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