



#RedBallProject

Countdown to Fargo-Moorhead's
Most Anticipated Public Art Debut

Words by **Tracy Nicholson**

Portrait Photography by **Dan Francis Photography**

RedBall photography courtesy of **Kurt Perschke**

We may travel through our community every single day, but do we really see it? When clay artist and MSUM Art Professor, Brad Bachmeier, spotted the RedBall Project online, he immediately took note of the way each community uniquely interacted with its arrival. This massive, inflatable ball, the creation of artist Kurt Perschke, had been crammed in between high-rises, suspended over bridges, and expertly placed in parks and pathways. This was public art that placed a giant red dot on one week's worth of locations, that begged for another glance. To get the project to Fargo-Moorhead would require a collaboration between the cities, MSUM, Plains Art Museum and a lengthy list of local supporters and sponsors. Before the ball bounces our way, Perschke made an early trip to scout out locations for its October 4th arrival. Where will the ball be? Just keep your eyes peeled, you can't miss it.



From left; Brad Bachmeier of MSUM,
RedBall artist Kurt Perschke,
Andy Maus of Plains Art Museum



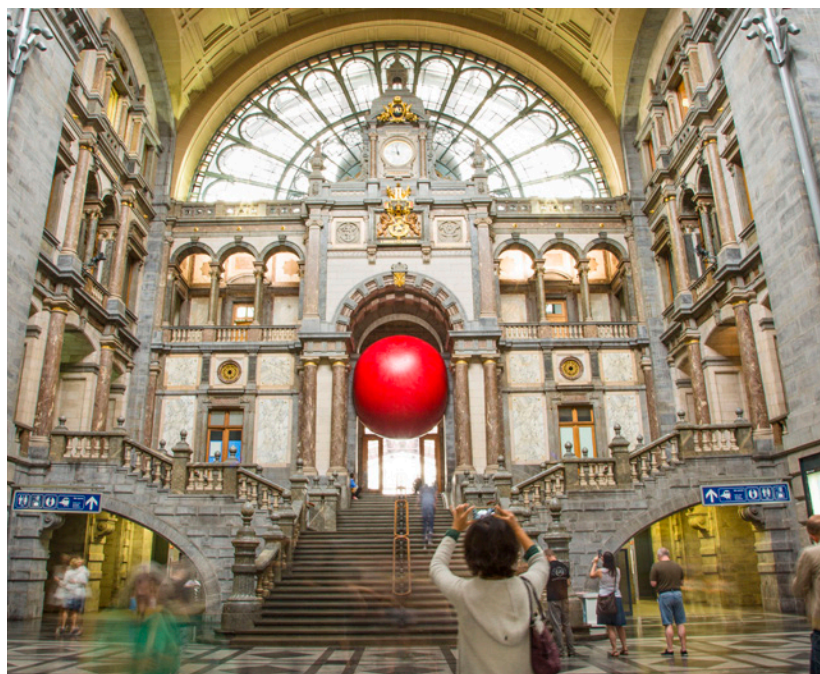
"It truly is a community project," said Maus. "We have a history of public art projects here at the museum. We've worked with MSUM in a variety of ways over the years and they're a great partner for a lot of projects, so this seemed like a natural fit. I'm really excited about the project because I think it tests some limits in a friendly way about what public art can be - I think that's an important dialogue for Fargo and Moorhead right now."



PERSEVERING PUBLIC ART

Nearly 18-years-ago, sculptor Kurt Perschke was searching for a way to expand his horizons on a much larger and interactive scale. After drawing up a plan, Perschke found exactly what he was looking for in a giant red ball, roughly the height of a semi-truck. It would have to be inflatable, but durable enough to withstand the elements. He

would spend a month on the phone before finding anyone who would understand his mission and be able to fabricate his 250-pound, inflatable canvas art. For Perschke, the public needed to be able to touch it, and it had to be able to survive being wedged up against rough building facades.



This would be a massive, public art install that would intrigue and inspire cities all over the world. After a successful, inaugural run in St. Louis in 2001, Perschke would end up on a journey that would take him around the world to cities like Paris, Bethlehem, Calgary... and now Fargo-Moorhead. To date, the RedBall Project has made its debut in over 30 international cities, moving to a new site each day. It is currently considered “the world’s longest-running street artwork”.



To get the RedBall Project to Fargo, Bachmeier and Andy Maus, CEO and Director of Plains Art Museum, would be tasked with figuring out the finite details and gathering the supporters. “The beauty of this whole project was that it allowed an opportunity for a ton of collaboration within our community,” said Bachmeier. “There are quite a few large groups of people that will be working together to pull the whole thing off. I’m really excited to get this here, in our own community. I think it will open eyes and a piece like this will bring joy - it’s hard not to smile when you look at it.”

“It’s temporary, it’s fun and it’s whimsical - it just seemed like the perfect project, at the right time to introduce Fargo-Moorhead to public art,” said Bachmeier. To get the ball rolling, he knew the ideal partner would be Plains Art Museum.

ONE WEEK ONLY

“The reason the project happens over the course of a week and not just one day, is that you actually need those different flavors as you go,” explained Perschke. “For me, there’s not one site that is everything the project is because it really needs that whole run - that way it’s theatrical. It needs to be able to move through several acts, through different days, different weather and a different audience - that’s going to create an experience that you might not get out of just one location. I just want people to come out and take the adventure with us - it’s only a week, and it will happen fast.”

FROM PARIS TO FARGO

Interested to find out more, we asked Perschke to explain how Fargo's visit would compare to its prior international locales. "The project actually operates really well in small communities. While it's been to a lot of major cities, the density of a smaller city, in terms of word of mouth, and in terms of how the project functions, works very well - it's very much an audience piece," explained Perschke. "When Brad called, I was really interested and it was immediately clear that there would be sites here that would be fun to work with."

SCOUTING LOCATIONS

To find the perfect sites, announced this fall, Perschke spent an entire week in Fargo to physically see and discuss all possible locations. "The project will always operate between well-known locations and maybe some that are surprises, but the main thing for me is thinking about how to build an audience and how to take them on a trip," said Perschke. "The idea is for you to see something that you might drive by or walk near every day, but have never really noticed. Part of the theatricality of the work is that it can go anywhere and explore and play with the landscape of a city."



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Artist, Kurt Perschke, RedBall Project



As Perschke explained, when he makes a site visit, he turns to his sculptural senses to help navigate each location. "I'm thinking about the physical opportunities there, the negative space, the sculptural aspects of the piece - that's my internal point that I begin with. Then, in the studio, there will be drawings and collages that come out of the site visits."

INTERACTION + REACTION

One of the things that Perschke expects will happen is that audiences will build up and people will organically begin to interact with the ball. Some people will find inspiration, some will question it, and for others - they'll imagine where else it could be. Whether it piques an interest, sparks an idea or simply provokes a RedBall selfie, Perschke and many others believe that public art

creates a conversation which is vital for a healthy community.

For Perschke, the hands-on interaction is why it's considered public art. In public art, people are encouraged to experience it for themselves and interact with it in varying ways. He's acutely interested to see if the ball's placement creates awe, whimsy, disbelief or even occasionally, total disregard. "For me, the surprising reaction is the person who doesn't engage - the person that walks by, even though the invitation is there," said Perschke. "I think it's really easy if you're going from point to point in a city to sort of not have your eyes open. There's always someone that will come by and they see the play of it, but they don't internally feel permission to engage. How audiences engage with it is a really fascinating part of the project."



CANVASSING THE CITY

"For me, it's about seeing the city and using the project - the charisma of it, the humor of it, as a way to take people on a pathway. But, I also think that if someone hears about the piece and says to themselves, I don't get it - they just need to see it for themselves and experience it," said Perschke. "It's not unlike anything else with performing arts or visual arts, you need to be there as an audience member and participate to really understand what it is - so for me, that's the invitation. I think if people accept that invitation at least to come out for one day, then they will understand it."

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Kurt Perschke is a Chicago native, past art educator, and artist who works in sculpture, video, collage and public space. His most acclaimed work, RedBall Project, received a National Award from Americans for the Arts Public Art Network. Perschke has a Master of Fine Arts from RIT in Upstate New York, where he resided for the past 15 years before recently relocating to North Carolina.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

When the RedBall project arrives on October 4th, for one week only - get ready to map out its locations and engage your senses. This is a public art experience that is requesting your presence. Sites will be announced closer to its arrival.

Organizing Partners

- Plains Art Museum
- Minnesota State University Moorhead

Lead Sponsors

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- Minnesota State University Moorhead

Sponsors

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- Fargo-Moorhead-West Fargo Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Fargo Parks District
- Plains Art Museum

Additional In-Kind Supporters

- Fargo Moorhead Visual Artists
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- The Arts Partnership

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