

## **Tips and advice for those seeking sculpture commissions**

I think from the start it is important to be aware that very often those seeking to procure public art by competition are doing it for the first time and have little or no experience of what is involved, both for themselves and more crucially for the artist.

The standard stages by which public art comes into being comprise the following:

### **1. First stage:**

A commission is advertised by means of advertisements in press and media, inviting expressions of interest. This should give some idea of what the client is looking for - what the piece is intended to do, to celebrate, commemorate or symbolise something or someone.

Artists who respond receive a brief setting out the terms by which the competition is conducted. This document should set out the programme for the various stages, the budget, the rules pertaining to the competition, the members of the jury, a notice to submit a CV and images of existing and past work, typically ten slides, prints or a CD.

Before proceeding any further I think it is very important to try and establish whether or not funds are in place or subject to fundraising. If there is a budget you should establish whether or not this is firm and what is included in that budget, is it just for the sculpture alone, or does it include foundations and plinth, delivery and installation. An overall budget might well cover advertising, administration and art consultant's fees.

It may well be at this early stage that they ask for additional material such as outline sketches or description of what you propose. **Be warned:** if you comply with these additional requirements you could be making your first mistake, as you'll be working for nothing.

### **2. Second stage:**

From the initial submission the client draws up a shortlist of typically 5 to carry on to the next stage. For this stage the 5 shortlisted artists will learn what is required for working up proposals to a state at which they can be judged. This will include drawings and sketches to convey the idea. It may ask for outline construction drawings with plan and elevation and a rendering of the proposed piece in its setting. It should state whether or not a maquette is required and if so at what scale this is to be. Artists should satisfy themselves that these requirements are clear and consistent, and most important they should ascertain what parts of the submission are obligatory and what parts optional.

For this stage of the competition you should expect a fee or honorarium. The size of fee offered should reflect the estimated costs of preparing and presenting a proposal in terms of materials, expenses and time spent.

You should be aware that by far the most difficult and important period of commission is working up a proposal. If this stage is not properly funded, this will inevitably reflect negatively on the quality of proposals submitted.

Finally, try to hang on to a single client. Beware if your client delegates to an underling whose priority is to cover his or her backside. At best this person is likely to have no particular affinity or interest in what you are creating. At worst the project may represent a tiresome extra burden of responsibility to the delegated individual.

William Pye, March 2010