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Excellence in Creative Activity Award Citation for Rob Neilson

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2020 AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN SCHOLARSHIP OR CREATIVE ACTIVITY

Rob Neilson

You came to Lawrence in 2003 having already completed public art commissions in New Mexico and North Carolina. In retrospect, these two projects can be seen as a bit of a warm-up and a portent of things to come. Since then, you have completed 14 public art commissions, placing thoughtful, engaging sculptural work in communities from California to Washington and Nebraska, in addition to Appleton, which you have blessed with five works since making the town your home.

Most recently, you have contributed two elegant pieces to the new Fox Cities Exhibition Center. "You Are Here" evokes a large map of Wisconsin with a red push-pin denoting Appleton. The 10 dramatic, oversized images of "We Are Here" are comprised of some 10,000 photographs of Appleton community members, combined in mosaic fashion to represent a moving, composite portrait of human togetherness and community.

By your own admission, you did not set out to be an artist known for creating public work. But you have clearly been called to make your aesthetic contributions to the world in ways that heighten our sense of the beauty of shared experience, to the benefit of us all. As you have written, "art in the public realm recalls to us what we value and reiterates back to us our view of ourselves and what we aspire to be. It encourages us to remember our history and demands we recall our humanity. It shows us not only how we have constructed/created our civilization but why we have done so. In a society dominated by screens, virtual realities, and cyber worlds, art in the public realm provides an increasingly rare opportunity for sincere and sustained contemplation of our physical world. It stimulates consideration of the culture we collaboratively have built, as well as our individual and collective role therein. Art in the public realm matters because it illuminates why we matter." It gives me great pleasure to present you with the 2020 faculty award for Excellence in Creative Activity.

June 2020