



If you require assistance accessing this information or require it in an alternative format, contact the Michigan Department of Transportation's (MDOT) Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) coordinator at Michigan.gov/MDOT-ADA.

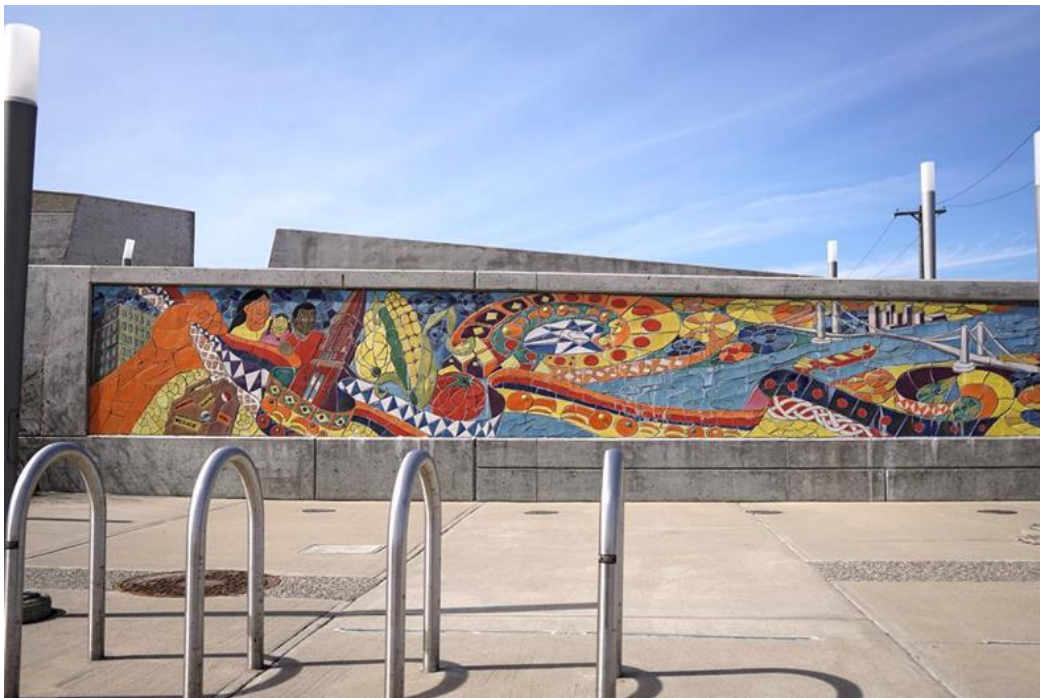
Spring 2025

Welcome to the I-94 e-Update! This edition will detail the Cass Avenue Public Art Project.

How the Sounds of Detroit came alive on the new Cass Avenue Bridge

If you've been near the new Cass Avenue bridge near the Wayne State University campus lately, you may have noticed a new public art installation. This installation is part of the I-94 Modernization Project called Sounds of Detroit and is designed to honor Detroit's storied musical heritage. This is the story of how it came to be.

It wouldn't be MDOT's first foray into public art. That happened in 2011 when the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) selected Detroit artist Hubert Massey to collaborate with neighborhood residents to produce a mural and sculpture to grace the Bagley Avenue pedestrian bridge in Detroit's Mexicantown. With that successful experience behind them, MDOT was ready for a new challenge.



The Bagley Avenue pedestrian bridge mural is named the "Spiral of Life." Hubert Massey, © 2010.

The first steps toward creating the new art installation began in 2020. MDOT hired a professional public art consultant to administer the project and convene a public art committee (PAC) to advise MDOT. The PAC was comprised of local art experts, including representatives from Wayne State University, Detroit Institute of Arts, and the College for Creative Studies. The purpose of the PAC was to assist MDOT define the project's scope and design parameters, be a liaison to the community and represent their viewpoints, and assist in selecting an artist to integrate artwork into the project.



Pictured left to right: Grace Serra (curator, Wayne State University), Barbara Heller (conservator, Detroit Institute of Arts), and Kay Willingham (Art in Motion Studio Gallery), members of the Cass Avenue bridge PAC review artists' submissions.

The next step was to prepare content for an open Call for Artists as part of a competitive process to select an artist or artist team to create the project. Detailed site information and other requirements were included in the open call package.

The first open Call for Artists was issued in March 2020 but was soon halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The call was re-issued in January 2022 and the competition was at last underway.

The PAC received and ranked 146 artists from across the country. After carefully considering all applications, the committee chose internationally recognized Cliff Garten Studio (CGS) based on their artistic vision, tested experience in the field of public art, and ability to produce sustainable and enduring works. The artist says of his work, "The public realm is brutal to artwork where there is little time or budget for maintenance. I try to make something very elegant that can stand up to its environment and still look ok."

CGS's past work includes the I AM A MAN Plaza, the award-winning National Civil Rights Memorial in Memphis, Tennessee, that pays tribute to the 1968 Sanitation Workers Strike and the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



Artist Cliff Garten has completed more than 100 site-specific sculptures throughout the United States and internationally.



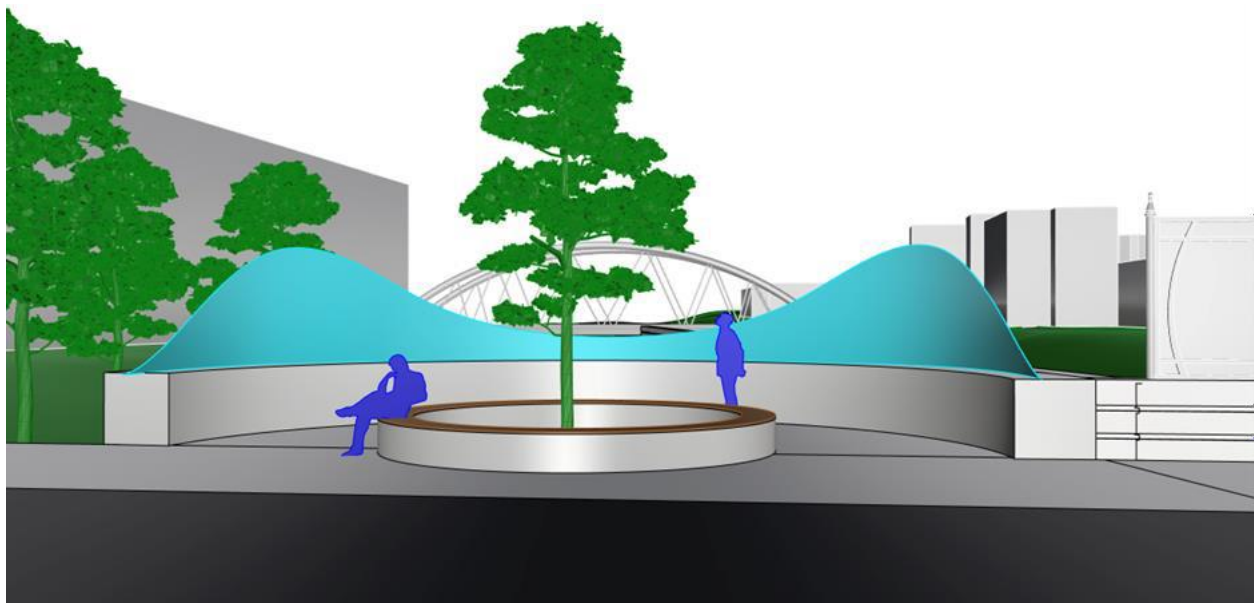
The I AM A MAN plaza features text taken from Memphis community discussions.

© 2018 Cliff Garten Studio

After final approval by MDOT, CGS began designing for the southwest corner approaching the Cass Avenue bridge with a goal to create a public gathering place. Garten participated in two community forums hosted at Carhartt across the street from the site. The first introduced the artist and gave the community an opportunity to learn more about the project and to provide input and inspiration as Garten worked on his design. The second enabled the community to offer feedback on CGS's design.



The southwest corner of the Cass Avenue bridge before construction.



This concept drawing was presented at the first community forum.

© 2024 Cliff Garten Studio

At the first forum, Garten presented design ideas for a public gathering place that included a circular bench around a planter in the middle of the site. A curving wall that features a perforated stainless-steel screen mounted on it would bound the site and frame the view to the Second Avenue bridge. Attendees agreed that the project should be a tribute to Detroit's rich musical culture. At the second forum, Garten showed a series of renderings for his work entitled Sounds of Detroit. He invited the public to identify songs by Detroit recording artists to be featured in the text on the perforated stainless-steel screen. The stainless-steel screen would contain flowing lines that represent sound waves weaving around the names of famous Detroit songs and the artists who created them.



At the first community forum, attendees were inspired by Detroit's music.



Artist Cliff Garten (center, wearing black) collaborates with community members.

After the second forum, CGS began working on the final design for what would become Sounds of Detroit. In November 2023, MDOT invited the community to participate in selecting songs by artists who recorded at the United Sound Systems Studio nearby or were from Detroit. More than 800 responses to the song survey were received and 26 songs were chosen.

Garten’s team at CGS then took all of the songs selected by the community and created the composition that was laser cut into the stainless-steel screens. In discussing the project, Garten said that “insisting that the community touch the work and leave a record of the community’s voice in the piece was the thing that made the work specific to the site and to Detroit.” He also described that “we worked together to change the bridge to create a gathering place for the community on Cass Avenue.” He further described CGS’s work with MDOT to change the bridge infrastructure as a way to give large-scale city infrastructure identity and meaning for the surrounding community and visitors. Garten praised all the community members who participated in creating the design with CGS, noting that when we all work together, everyone benefits. CGS has completed many bridges across the country and is always encouraged by transportation departments like MDOT that are willing to work with an artist and community to extend the function and meaning of bridge infrastructure.

Over the next six months, MDOT’s designers and contractors designed, prepared and built the site, and CGS worked with their team to create the stainless-steel screen. In June 2024, construction on the plaza began.



The artist’s renderings of Sounds of Detroit.

© 2024 Cliff Garten Studio

In 2024, the art wall and stainless-steel screen were installed, the art plaza bench wall was built, the colored concrete sidewalk was poured, and trees adjacent to the plaza and in the middle of the circular bench were planted.



Contractors form the circular bench wall.



Contractors prepare for the installation of the stainless-steel screen.



Contractors install the stainless-steel screen.



The songs and artists have been laser-cut into the stainless-steel screen.



The curve of the stainless-steel screen dips in the middle of the wall and frames the Second Avenue bridge.



“The lines of text move and roll with the lines of the soundwaves, much the way lyrics respond to the rhythm and timing of a song.”

– Cliff Garten

In spring 2025, contractors will apply concrete surface coatings to the surfaces around the artwork and plaza. The circular bench will be installed on the bench wall, along with decorative lighting that will highlight the artwork. The final task will be installing new landscaping next to the art plaza.

Sounds of Detroit is expected to be completed this spring. We'd like to thank everyone who contributed their time and resources to the project.



MDOT Project Manager

Adam Wayne

WayneA1@Michigan.gov

MDOT Communications

Rob Morosi

MorosiR@Michigan.gov

Send us comments and questions at:

MDOT-I94Detroit@Michigan.gov



© 2025 I-94 Project Office. All rights reserved.

If you require assistance accessing this information or require it in an alternative format, contact the Michigan Department of Transportation's (MDOT) Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) coordinator at Michigan.gov/MDOT-ADA.