

Mass Ave.'s electronic 'Ann Dancing' needs \$262,800. Here's what's behind that number.

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Indianapolis is in the midst of an old-fashioned public art debate about a newfangled digital sculpture on Mass Ave.

On Thursday, the nonprofit Indianapolis Cultural Trail Inc. set in motion a crowdfunding campaign to "Keep Ann Dancing." with the goal of raising \$262,800 by June 29. The money would go toward buying a new body for the electronic sculpture that looks just like the old one, which has often shorted out and been taped together in more than 10 years just outside Tavern at the Point.

Mere minutes after the announcement, people flocked to social media. Some proudly tweeted their support. Others balked at the cost.

Usually, public art conversations in Indianapolis involve controversy over what is depicted, like the mural of two cartoon rabbits having sex on the side of Beholder or the "Homeless Jesus" bronze. But this time, residents are reassessing the value of an iconic piece of the art that has danced with thousands of passersby and been the muse for a popular Halloween costume.

The campaign relies mostly on personal donations. And it comes down to this: How many people think Ann is worth handing over their own cash?

"Not just the physical nature of the artwork but the conceptual nature of the artwork can change," said Julia Muney Moore, the director of public art for the Arts Council of Indianapolis.

What's behind Ann's fundraising goal?

As of Tuesday afternoon, about 28% of the goal had been raised, with \$16,468 of that from the crowdfunding campaign. Corporate sponsors, which are listed at keepann dancing.org, came up with an initial \$56,000, said Kären Haley, executive director of the Cultural Trail.

And the public discussion continued.

Some said the money could be used in a better way. Wildstyle Paschall, a music producer, photographer and graphic artist, tweeted, "There's A LOT of push back on my TL about \$262K to keep Ann dancing on Mass Ave but my guess is she's just trying to take care of

her sick family members and make it through college like all the other dancers"

There's A LOT of push back on my TL about \$262K to keep Ann dancing on Mass Ave but my guess is she's just trying to take care of her sick family members and make it through college like all the other dancers 🙏🙏🙏

— WildStyle DaProducer (@MrWildstyle) May 31, 2019

Other posts on Twitter and the Keep Ann Dancing Facebook page urged people to donate so she could move again.

"World-renowned artists are important too," Andrea Watts, chief communications officer for the Department of Metropolitan Development, "Plenty of local artists also featured along the Cultural Trail. @KeepAnnDancing & keep coming at me."

World-renowned artists are important too 🙏🙏

Plenty of local artists also featured along the Cultural Trail. @KeepAnnDancing & keep coming at me 🙏🙏🙏 <https://t.co/OrqZzmvMgh>

— andreawatts.gif (@andreamwatts) May 31, 2019

In response to questions about the cost, the trail released a budget breakdown. The largest chunk will go toward replacing Ann's technology and hardware for \$152,424. The rest is divided evenly three ways for an ongoing maintenance fund, refashioning the sculpture's base and maintaining the plaza around her, and seed money for future art on the trail.

Keeping the sculpture moving for the longterm requires electrical boards integrated with fans that are designed to be easy maintenance and arranged to withstand a larger power draw, Haley said.

"These screens are more than screens. It's an entire unit, and they are specifically designed for longterm use outdoors with the elements, and everything is fully incorporated within the screens, like the fan system," Haley said.

Haley said she doesn't have a line-item budget at this point because the work hasn't been done. The \$262,800 goal is based on quotes that stay true to artist Julian Opie's intent, which includes keeping Ann's amber color and moves.

"We're doing this as a not-for-profit organization, and we are being very, very fiscally conservative because this is (a project) that we're going out and raising money to do," Haley said. "We want to make sure that we're being true to what the donors want to fund but also true to the artist."

Matt Panfil, who teaches at the Herron School of Art and Design and University of Indianapolis, said he's always loved the sculpture but doesn't think it's worth the money.

"I do wonder if you can create public art that is engaging and beautiful and interactive and iconic with much, much, much less money, and I think that is possible," Panfil said.

"Ann Dancing" originally cost about \$150,000 and was installed in 2008, according to IndyStar archives. At the time, the electronic sculpture was the first piece of art purchased for the Cultural Trail. Ann's dance was a simplified version of one of Opie's friend's moves, according to Moore. She was created after the artist's "Signs" exhibition that ran from 2006 to 2007.

The London-based Opie is a major name in technological art, and his static work now goes for six figures at auction, said Christopher West, an art consultant and gallery owner at [Christopher West Presents](#). The artist's work is shown all over the world, and [he's represented by Lisson Gallery](#), a significant contemporary art gallery.

In terms of today's value, Moore said public art that requires updating and lots of parts can run \$300,000 to \$500,000.

"When Ann first came out, she was seen as terribly futuristic," Moore said. "People are looking at her and going, 'What the heck?' What do you mean we have an artwork that's made out of this advertising medium, this signboard. We're used to seeing where the sales are using this medium. We're not used to actual, real, respectable art.' That's her value, is it completely flipped people's heads around what public art is."

"It's still fresh, and I think it's still exciting, and I think it's still innovative enough that, yeah, I think conceptually, it won't go out of date as quickly as its physical nature went out of date."

The challenges of digital sculptures

The bigger issue about Ann's future is how Indianapolis feels about keeping outdoor digital sculptures alive after their technology ages. Whatever is decided in this case will say a lot about how residents feel about the medium.

The issue of how to preserve digital technology has been a hot topic in the past 20 to 30 years, West said. Symposiums and courses are dedicated to it. In February, for example, New York University's Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences shared how it was helping the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum [restore and conserve online works](#). In the process, the university has been developing best practices to care for aging software-based art.

Trying to preserve the work while holding to the artist's original intent can be difficult when he or she has died, West said.

"The benefit with someone like Julian Opie right now is we still have him alive, and a lot of those questions can hopefully be answered so it can be maintained forever," West said.

The issue of preserving art that moves has already hit home in Indiana. Nam June Paik's "Who's Your Tree" TV-based piece at Newfields is currently not on display because some of the TVs need to have their tubing replaced, said Mattie Wethington, public relations manager at Newfields, home of the Indianapolis Museum of Art. With more than 50,000 pieces, the museum must use its conservation funds efficiently and depending on what's planned for display, she said.

At The Commons in Columbus, Swiss artist John Tinguely built the 7-ton kinetic sculpture in the 1970s on a commission from the Miller family. Scrap metal, electric motors and more combine to rotate in "Chaos I." Cummins Inc. engineers are currently donating their time to fix parts of the sculpture that no longer work, [The Republic reported](#). "Chaos I" only runs at scheduled times for preservation purposes, [according to Visit Columbus Indiana](#).

Ann's maintenance fund includes \$36,792 for inevitable minor fixes and possible major repairs that might be necessary in the future to avoid the same scenario in 10 years, Haley said.

Artists can only use the technology that's available to them at the time, Moore said. At some point, the parts and software they use become obsolete and can't handle upgrades.

"It's like, for example, if I had my computer from 2005, and I tried to run programs that weren't even invented until 2019 on a 2005 computer, I couldn't do it because there's not enough memory, the protocols for cloud transfer aren't really there. The world has moved on, and you need to make sure that the technology that you're using moves on with it," Moore said.

The Arts Council is not involved in the fundraising campaign, she said.

If Ann is to be saved, Panfil would like to see it done for less money and have her energy conserved.

"That doesn't seem efficient," said Panfil, who is the art director for [Healer, a music venue and artspace](#). "It's on for 24 hours a day. Is that even really necessary?"

How long will Ann have value in Indy?

Ann's origins with a London artist have been unpopular for critics of the "Keep Ann Dancing" campaign. Citing how tough it can be for local artists to obtain funding, Panfil would instead like to see a \$262,800 campaign for several Indy artists to create work or a community arts engagement activity.

"There's so many ways, I think, that that amount of money could be used and divided," he said.

West said local artists are better placed in context with international work, which Opie's Ann offers.

"I think that's what a piece like Julian Opie's does on Mass Ave. For every local piece of public art that is installed, it provides a broader context and kind of puts it into a expanded dialogue with what else is happening in the world."

If the Cultural Trail doesn't raise the money, Ann as she was can come back to life for a while. But it won't be sustainable, Haley said. The sculpture is temporarily dark while the trail collects donations at keepanddancing.org.

"The only thing that makes her continue to have value is what we're building up right now, our impressions of her, our memories associated with that corner and the Cultural Trail and Mass Ave.," Moore said.

In this case, the value will be pretty simple to calculate by the end of the month. It will either hit the financial goal or it won't.