Two custom sculptural benches designed by Kennesaw State University students were recently installed on the Southern Museum walkway in a collaboration between Kennesaw State University School of Art and Design and the City of Kennesaw. The benches were designed by students in the Master Craftsman program under the direction of Page Burch. Burch emphasized the win-win nature of the partnership, and said, “We believe the benches will complement and enhance their surroundings.”

Two years ago, Economic Development Director Bob Fox approached Geo Sipp, the Director of the KSU School of Art and Design, with the idea of a joint public art project with art students. The two met to discuss how they could work together on original art for Kennesaw’s downtown that was both functional and aesthetically pleasing. “We wanted to give art students a real-world opportunity to go through the public art commission process, including selection, fabrication, and installation,” said Fox. “The city would provide financial support.”

With Sipp on board with the concept, the next step was to draw up an agreement between the city and the Board of Regents on behalf of the KSU. The agreement specified that the School of Art and Design would submit designs and complete fabrication while the city would underwrite the material cost. An art review committee consisting of city staff and members of the Art and Culture Commission was established to evaluate the designs and choose winners.

The first pieces that were commissioned were benches to be placed on the Southern Museum walkway and at the City Hall Plaza currently under construction. Students researched relevant material and aesthetic choices, taking into account city codes and accessibility requirements and submitted their designs. Eight designs were submitted. Once the final choices were made, they began fabrication by cutting, bending, grinding, and welding the benches in preparation for installation. The Downtown Development Authority funded the cost of materials and the city’s Public Works Department did the installation.

A ribbon cutting ceremony was held on Friday, November 3, 2017, to recognize Fox, Burch, and Sipp, as well as artists Megan Pace and Thomas Daniel, both students in the Master Craftsman Program. In the next phase of the partnership, design proposals will be requested for the city’s new Gateway Park on Main Street at Sardis Street. Burch said, “The thing that excites me most about this program is allowing students to be the driving force behind it. Being able to help artists progress on a professional level is an extremely important step forward, and I find it tremendously exciting.”

By Kathie Beckett

School of Art and Design: Public Art Project

Photo, above, left to right: Page Burch, Megan Pace, Thomas Daniel, and Geo Sipp.