

# THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

## Public artwork focuses on State of the Union addresses

*by Philip Haldiman - Jan. 9, 2010*

The words of presidents will illuminate the Scottsdale Waterfront in an artistic installation meant to shed a reminding light on the purpose of the State of the Union address.

New York-based artist R. Luke DuBois' piece "Hindsight is Always 20/20" is on exhibit through Feb 28.

The piece was shown in October at the Scottsdale Civic Center, and Scottsdale Public Art is bringing it to the canal for day and night viewing.

Director of Scottsdale Public Art Valerie Vadala Homer said the response to the initial showing was excellent.

"One person sent an e-mail saying it was the perfect form of public art because it celebrates our political history and the public, serving a higher purpose," Homer said. "So we want to give the piece as much exposure as we can."

"Hindsight is Always 20/20" was loaned to Scottsdale Public Art from bitforms gallery in New York, said associate director Margaret Bruning.

The installation features 43 light panels, representing 41 of the presidents who gave State of the Union addresses, not including Barack Obama. There is one title panel and one essay panel. Each panel is designed like an eye chart, using 66 words instead of 66 letters, the biggest word being the one most frequently used by each president. The result is a snapshot of each presidency and the time period in which he served.

"You see - Was the country depressed? Were we at war? Were we at peace? As well as the way phrases have come in and out of popularity. And it almost works as poetry on another level," Homer said. "It really draws you in."

In 2006, DuBois started looking at presidential speeches in hopes of creating a piece for the 2008 presidential election. At the time, he was watching a spot with political commentator James Carville on CNN.

"He kept using the word vision. Vision. Vision. Vision," DuBois said. "I thought, 'that's how we evaluate our presidents-through their vision.' And we test vision with an eye chart."

DuBois said the point of the piece is to get people to pay more attention to words, and to serve as a reminder that although Congress has the right to impeach the president, the president has no power to dissolve Congress. The State of the Union was written into the Constitution as one of the president's duties. It's more than just a weird television spot, DuBois said.

"It's kind of like the president's homework. It demonstrates to everybody that the president is submissive, if you will, to Congress," DuBois said. "Hopefully (the piece) will get people engaged in conversation, and allow people to see how history unfolds with words."