



Sculptor flags a driven world

By William Thomas
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Suddenly, there it was — a 30-foot-tall vision of the future just east of the underpass where Walnut Grove turns into Union.

Looking like a world in chaos, it is the latest work of Memphis sculptor Roy Tamboli, who decided to surprise the city with what is perhaps its biggest piece of public art.

Tamboli, 41, finished erecting his 3,000-pound sculpture at dusk Wednesday night, and it began taking motorists by surprise as they streamed past the busy location Thursday. Traffic officials estimate that in 1991, an average of 16,600 cars passed the spot every 24 hours.

Although most people probably noticed the sculpture, it is doubtful that many knew they were getting a somewhat frightening glimpse of tomorrow, as Tamboli sees it.

The steel sculpture is Tamboli's response to his own uneasy feelings about the hard, industrial, overstressed world into which children are being born.

"This seems to me to be a world out of control," said the sculptor, who points out that 57 of the biggest metropolitan cities in the world are represented in the work. From a distance, he said, it looks like the Earth in crucifixion.

Up close, there's a surprise within the surprise of the work itself. Near the bottom of the sculpture is a glass-covered cylinder with the figures of three babies inside.

The babies have a wet, newborn look about them and when the wind blows they tremble as if in the womb.

Tamboli said he wanted to show their innocence and vulnerability in a hard, cold industrial system.

The title of the work, *Pangaean Disc*, is taken from Pangaean, the hypothetical land mass that existed when all continents were joined between 200 and 300 million years ago.

Although Tamboli has pieces of commissioned art around town, this creation is strictly his.

"It is unendorsed, unofficial and unsponsored," he said. "You can't always wait for Memphis to sponsor art."

Since Tamboli had no place big enough to erect the sculpture, he saw it assembled for the first time Thursday. He had to rent a crane and forklift and call on a small army of friends to put it up.

The sculpture is on private property along Walnut Grove, just east of the underpass. Tamboli said the landowner permitted him to use the land.

"I'm happy with it," he said, pointing out where workers at Certified Metal Craft, the fabricators, had left their marks. "One of the things I like about it is that it has a raw, urgent, look about it. And, like our lives, it looks unfinished, like a world in process."

And Tamboli will not be surprised if the public becomes part of the process.

"This is public art and it's just sitting out here," he said. "In time, I suspect people will come and leave marks of their own on it — and that will be part of the process."

But right now, the sculpture is simply a provocative surprise for thousands of motorists on the Union-Walnut Grove route through Memphis.