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# Claes Oldenburg And Coosje Van Bruggen, Cleveland's Free Stamp



Claes Oldenburg and  
Coosje van Bruggen,  
*Cleveland's Free Stamp*

Edward J. Olszewski

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## Synopsis

In 1985, the Sohio oil company commissioned Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen to design and construct a large outdoor sculpture for its new corporate headquarters in Cleveland, Ohio. The result was Free Stamp, a bold and distinctive installation that captured both a Pop Art sensibility and a connection to the city's industrial past. Sohio executives approved the design, and work was already underway, when British Petroleum acquired the company. The new owners quickly decided that the sculpture was inappropriate for their building and attempted to rid themselves of Free Stamp by donating it to the city of Cleveland—a gift that the city initially had no desire to accept. After much debate and public protest, the sculpture found a home in Willard Park, where it stands today. This is the first study of any sculpture by Oldenburg and van Bruggen to examine the genesis of their art from conception to installation. Edward J. Olszewski has put together a fascinating narrative based on interviews with the artists, archival material from city records, and in-house corporate memoranda, as well as letters to the editor and political cartoons. He traces the development of the sculpture from the artists' first sketches and models to the installation of the completed work in its urban environment.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 208 pages

Publisher: Ohio University Press; 1 edition (August 4, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0821422715

ISBN-13: 978-0821422717

Product Dimensions: 8 x 0.7 x 10 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.9 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

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“This book is for anyone who has ever passed an oversized Oldenburg & van Bruggen object and wondered about the artists' creativity and the daunting process of bringing such a colossus into being. It is the definitive account of Cleveland's Free Stamp.” —John Garton, Clark University

Edward J. Olszewski is emeritus professor of art history at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. He has published numerous books and articles on topics from Praxiteles to Renaissance master drawings, late Roman Baroque patronage, and the art of Goya, Degas, and Picasso.

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