



Donald Baechler's "Walking Figure" Causes Furor in Westhampton Beach

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by Pat Rogers

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WESTHAMPTON BEACH, NY-

This clashing of opinions may end up bigger than those surrounding Larry River's *Legs*. In any case, residents of Westhampton and the surrounding areas are reacting to the recent installation of Donald Baechler's *Walking Figure*. The monumental sculpture now towers as a centerpiece of the Hamptons Business District, an industrial park-in-development at Francis S. Gabreski Airport. Sited within a traffic circle near the entrance, the aluminum sculpture dominates the project campus featuring multiple buildings. The project broke ground in April 2014 and is ongoing.

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"Walking Figure" by Donald Baechler. Photo by Kyle Rogers.

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Easily seen from Old Riverhead Road (County Road 31), all 30-feet of *Walking Figure* is causing cameras to break out, small crowds to gather, and opinions to be expressed about the latest artwork to move into the neighborhood, reported multiple media outlets, including [Newsday](#), [Long Island News 12](#), [New York Observer](#) and the [Huffington Post Live](#) separately. Opinions vary wildly on the work's aesthetics and whether it detracts or contributes to the Hamptons landscape.

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Detail of "Walking Figure" by Donald Baechler. Photo by Sage Cotignola.

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Walking Figure was installed last week by Rechler Equity Partners, reported Newsday. It weighs in at 5,000 pounds and sits atop a concrete base. The work portrays a woman walking, arms in mid-swing and legs in mid-stride with seeming purpose. Baechler has made a series of similar

sculptures cast in bronze. They have been installed in numerous public spots including New York City, outside Miami and other locations.

Reactions to the Westhampton Beach sculpture run the gamut from curious, surprise, unhappiness and uncertainty. Media coverage on local reactions is popping up faster than coverage on the [Kardashians](#) moving into their Hamptons residence, setting up a new Southampton Village shop and causing a stir within the Village.



“Walking Figure” by Donald Baechler. Photo by Kyle Rogers.

Mitchell Rechler, a managing partner of Rechler Equity Partners, welcomes strong reactions to the artwork, according to [Newsday](#):

“Whenever artwork is placed in a public setting, it will cause discussion, which is part of the reason why art is created in the first place,” said Rechler, whose family has displayed sculptures at several of its developments. “We were sensitive to not have a ‘controversial’ piece. We think that this piece is beautiful.”



“Walking Figure” by Donald Baechler. Photo by Sage Cotignola.

Baechler said *Walking Figure* “...embodies the concept of forward motion,” according to [Newsday](#). “The *Walking Figure* is always going into the future, going into whatever,” he said. “I think the whole idea of an airport is exactly about that, going from one place to another. It seems like not an inappropriate subject.”



“Walking Figure” by Donald Baechler. Photo by Kyle Rogers.

Baechler paintings and sculptures have been exhibited internationally. His work is included in collections held by the [Whitney Museum for American Art](#), [Museum of Modern Art \(MoMA\)](#) and the [Guggenheim Museum](#) (all in New York City) and the [Centre George Pompidou](#) in Paris.

Baechler has made a series of similar sculptures, cast in bronze, also titled *Walking Figure*. They have been installed at various locations including New York City and the Adventura Mall in South Florida as part of its [Turnberry for the Arts](#) program.

On the East End, another sculpture in the public view to cause outcry (and a lawsuit) was Larry Rivers *Legs*, installed at the Sag Harbor home of gallerists Ruth Vered and Janet Lehr. The *Legs* arose after Rivers was [commissioned to create art](#) for the Smithaven Mall. Other well-known sculptures in Hamptons public view include [The Stargazer](#) by Linda Scott, installed in Manorville alongside Route 27, and two Roy Lichtenstein sculptures, *Tokyo Brushstroke I & II*, installed in April 2014 at the entrance to the Parrish Art Museum.

BASIC INFO: The Hamptons Business District at Francis S. Gabreski Airport is located at 150 Riverhead Rd, Westhampton Beach, NY 11978. www.hamptonbusinessdistrict.com.

Donald Baechler's work can be found at www.donaldbaechler.com.

RELATED: "[Westhampton Beach sculpture Appears at Gabreski Airport](#)" by Will James for Newsday.

"[Walking Figure Sculpture at Gabreski Airport Turns Heads in Westhampton Beach](#)" by Long Island News 12

"[30-Foot-Tall 'Walking Woman' Sculpture Upsets Westhampton Residents](#)" by Huffington Post Live

"[Speaking Up for Larry Rivers 'Legs'](#)" by Pat Rogers for Hamptons Art Hub. Published Feb. 21, 2012.

"[Lichtenstein Sculptures to be Installed on Parrish Grounds](#)" for Hamptons Art Hub. Published March 20, 2014.