



## Artist speaks out after Philosopher's Grove sculpture removed amidst issues of criminal activity

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MADISON (WKOW)-- One day after Madison city officials decided to remove the stone sculpture at Philosopher's Grove, the artist who created the piece is speaking out.

"Police and the mayor felt desperate and wanted to make a very visible statement," artist Jill Sebastian says. "I disagree with that statement, but the city owns the artwork."

Sebastian was commissioned to create the Philosopher's Grove stones nearly ten years ago. She says the purpose of this piece was to create a gathering place where people can debate political ideas and lead a healthy dialogue. She says it's painfully ironic that a debate over the issue of homelessness has led to the removal of her artwork.

"I think that criminal activity isn't solved through art or the absence of art," Sebastian explains. "There will be people gathering here whether there's a place to sit or not."

Madison police say Philosopher's Grove, located at the corner of Mifflin Street and State Street has become a hot spot for criminal activity. Over the last few years police say they've seen an increase in violence, drug deals and public intoxication in this area. Officers say they've responded to a handful of overdose cases at Philosopher's Grove and explain how it has become a popular spot for people to gather and do drugs.

Instead of wallowing in despair, Sebastian has decided to finish her piece the way she always intended.

"Originally the idea was to include written word and drawings on the stones," Sebastian explains.

On Monday, Sebastian received a call from the mayor's office letting her know that the artwork was scheduled to be removed. She was shocked to see Monday afternoon that several of the stones had already been removed. On Tuesday morning she started drawing on the stones using chalk. She says it's her way of coping with the situation and also paying tribute to a piece of art she says was never fully finished.

"Yes, it's personally difficult to see this happen," Sebastian explains. "My way of dealing with difficult things is to make art."

Her art probably won't last the week with city workers removing more stones each day. Sebastian says she'll continue drawing artwork on the stones that remain.

City workers say the removal process could take a few more days yet. Madison Mayor Paul Soglin says the city hopes to move the Philosopher's Grove sculpture to a new location in the city. He says his office will work with Sebastian to determine a suitable location for her work.