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PRESS RELEASE

***SLEEPING WOMAN* COMMEMORATED**

A bronze marker commemorating the highly unusual public art project, *Sleeping Woman*, will be dedicated on Sunday, November 14th at 11:30 AM along Kelly Drive (between Remington's *Cowboy* and Milles' *Playing Angels*). *Sleeping Woman*, a 1200' line of prose painted on top of the stone retaining wall along the grass bank of the Schuylkill River, is a collaborative work by poet Stephen Berg and visual artist Thomas Chimes. Commissioned by the Fairmount Park Art Association with generous support from the Pew Charitable Trusts, this "long breath of speech" or "legible whisper" was completed in July 1991. The artists conceived *Sleeping Woman* as a response to time and the landscape. Unlike a book or a poem, the text must be read and experienced at the site. The intensity of light perpetually changes the appearance of the text, causing the words to emerge or disappear. The entire experience is shared with the surrounding environment.

A month after *Sleeping Woman* was completed, approximately 250' of the stone wall containing the first 61 words of the text collapsed into the river. This catastrophe was of great significance to the artists, emphasizing as it did the powerful acts of nature that the work honors. The marker, placed in direct relationship to the location of the collapse, commemorates this occurrence.

The embankment, currently under study by the Fairmount Park Commission, was built on wooden pylons more than one hundred years ago to distinguish this exquisite view of the Schuylkill River. A recent engineering analysis outlined the need for major restoration work

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along the embankment, from Boat House Row to the Columbia Railroad Bridge. Art Association President Charles E. Mather III called the collapse “untimely” as *Sleeping Woman* had not yet been dedicated, but he announced that when the wall is secured and repaired, the Art Association is committed to restoring the parts of the text that have been submerged.

The marker, designed by the artists, consists of a 30" bronze disc with a 12" stone aggregate border which swells up from the ground creating a slight earth mound. Like *Sleeping Woman*, the marker contains multiple layers of meanings: its round shape evokes the earth, a shield, a clock, a mandala, or a compass. The Greek letters *gamma* and *eta* signify “earth.” Triangular shapes indicate the axis lines that lead to the location of the breaks in the retaining wall. Chimes, who is of Greek heritage, used the Golden Section (a figure used by ancient Greeks to measure proportionately) to determine the marker’s size and location.

Sleeping Woman was written and developed specifically for its site—a place with spiritual and nostalgic connections for many Philadelphians. Artist Chimes remembers walking there from his nearby boyhood neighborhood to climb trees and watch the river. Poet Berg remembers visiting the area for solace after the deaths of his parents. And, of course, the acclaimed artist Thomas Eakins painted spectacular views of the Schuylkill River. Other Philadelphians tell of more mundane but equally charged moments: receiving a first kiss there, sighting a great blue heron, training for the Olympic rowing team, awaiting the blossoming of the nearby Japanese cherry trees, daily jogging excursions, family fishing expeditions and picnics, and so on.

Sleeping Woman marks this extraordinary boundary between earth and water. “It is monumental in scope but intimate in detail and meaning,” observed Penny Balkin Bach, Executive Director of the Art Association.

The Fairmount Park Art Association has supported public art in Philadelphia since 1872, when it was chartered by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to commission and purchase sculpture to “promote and foster the beautiful in Philadelphia, in its architecture, improvements and general plan.” It is the nation’s first non-profit public art organization dedicated to the integration of art and civic life.

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Photographs available upon request.