

# Expected demise of Maze musters students

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**A**MHERST - No, It's not the end of the world, but still, It's one of those teapot tempests where sentiment hassles necessity and

then suggests where there's a will there's a way.

Here's the thing.

Next to the stadium at the University of Massachusetts stands something called The Maze, a formidable walk-in labyrinth of galvanized pipe and chain link.

Constructed in 1978 by the Providence environmental sculptor Richard Fleischner, the installation sprawls in its field like some huge walk-in kennel. For years, its perplexing corridors have amused thousands of UMass students, who found kicks aplenty in the industrial update of a traditional garden maze.

Here, as one young scholar noted, was "a giant rat maze," where the rats were human and the wandering good fun.

Only now such fun may be ending.

The increasingly derelict structure was slated last month for destruction by the university's Fine Arts Center, but an outpouring of undergraduate affection is trying to win its restoration, though the sculptor himself desires removal.

"Landmark maze to come down," headlined The Collegian. "Save the Maze," pleaded the Save the Maze Coalition. Even a maze petition drive got under way last week, demanding a "maze transformation." In five days, some 2,400 signatures were collected, enough to force a campus referendum.

An unlikely center for an unlikely controversy, the steel-mesh array has raised thorny issues of who controls art and has generated all manner of comment.

Says senior Joel Rabinowitz, who organized the Save the Maze Coalition. "The Maze is a landmark, it's fun, and it would be a shame to lose it." But others, who admit they're sorry, see it differently.

The sculptor, for one, specifies that "what's there cannot remain: It must be rebuilt or destroyed." Director Helaine Posner of the Fine Arts Center in whose hands the sculpture's fate rests, remains pleasantly adamant as well.

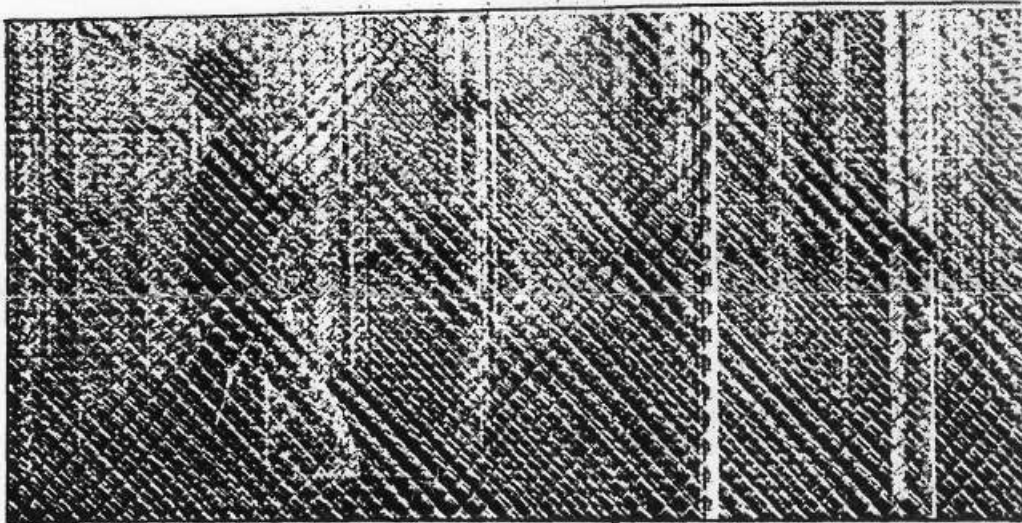
"Environmental works have a life span," she says. "I think perhaps The Maze has reached its span."

## Decline and money

The problem, of course, is not love but decline and money.

The work of an increasingly well-regarded environmental artist whose more recent efforts have included a 2 1/2-acre courtyard at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and another large piece at the Alewife subway station, The Maze began as an elegant dog run of precise geometry.

Built with funds from the University Art-



Layers of pipe and metal obscure person within "Chain Link Maze."

Gallery and the National Endowment for the Arts, it earned respect steadily, but achieved cult status quickly. Early, as one sophomore attests, it became "a sort of school mascot," a place frequented by bands of roaming freshmen and late-night dates.

"I went my first week out here," says Rabinowitz, while a classmate adds that "parents come up and the students show it off." Others such as senior Greg Collins, speak with certainty, too. "I mean," Collins reports, "a better proportion of the school's gone down there than the Physical Sciences Library. Everybody's done the maze."

But, as it happened, such use took its toll.

With thousands of visitors each year, the maze's myriad paths began to settle. The turf compressed under foot; frost heaves came into play. That led to worse. The concrete pilings of support poles pushed out of the ground. Poles tilted. Vines grew. In time, the stern straightness of the structure no longer looked so stern, so straight.

When 18 months ago Fleischner saw the damage, he was "very disappointed." As he explained by telephone from Los Angeles, "The crispness of the thing was a real important part of it, but that was gone completely. It totally lost its integrity as a work of art."

To his mind, the dilapidated project required either destruction or complete reconstruction, which he estimated would cost \$40,000, more than twice the project's original price tag.

## Agreement: Destruction

About a year ago, the sculptor gained Posner's agreement: destruction. One attempt was already made, but halted by a snowstorm.

Posner predicted removal within the month.

Now, however, the controversy appears to have entered the advocacy stage, a period of politicking that finds many sides trying to save the maze from an oblivion that nevertheless looks inevitable.

On the one hand, Rabinowitz awaits the campus referendum that must be held now that he's gathered signatures from more than 10 percent of the student body. He talks about the "pulse of the campus" and "a show of student support," and estimates that when the students vote, no more than 2 percent will oppose his initiative, which poses the question; "Should the Administration rebuild The Maze which is located next to Warren B. McGuirk Stadium?"

He regrets only that his referendum remains non-binding.

On the other hand, while both Fleischner and Posner regret the impending destruction, they protest that their hands are tied. Fleischner, for his part, argues that public art is "a two-way street."

"While it's great thousands have gone through the sculpture, other people are involved, namely me, since I created it." He steadfastly defends his "prerogative" to determine the fate of a project he feels has declined.

As for Posner, she states there's simply no money for such reconstruction.

to that, Rabinowitz counters that "there's always money," while Fleischner suggests removal followed by fund raising.

"If the students want The Maze, they'll have to put up the money themselves," he says.

Meanwhile, a drive past the stadium the other night found the subject of such concern looking forlorn in its field.

Cold and deserted, its once pristine form slouches now, while in front lie a few odd rolls of miscellaneous chain-link fencing, some metal struts, an old post. The straight walls are caving in, like torn curtains of wire. Only a solitary set of footsteps marked the snow.