

The Dallas Morning News



SEE THE MASSIVE LED SCULPTURE THAT WILL LIGHT UP THE DALLAS COWBOYS' NEW HEADQUARTERS

Michael Granberry | Aug, 4, 2016

FRISCO -- Artist Leo Villareal transformed the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge into a spectacle of light that continues to draw international acclaim. And now he's doing the same thing here, at The Star, the Dallas Cowboys' lavish new headquarters.

Villareal, 49, worked into the wee hours Wednesday morning putting the finishing touches on what the Cowboys see as an iconic piece, the signature element of their 91-acre, \$1.5 billion facility.

Villareal's creation contains 19,200 lights embedded in 160 rods made of mirrored stainless steel. Each of the sleek vertical rods is 40 feet high, suspended from the ceiling and hovering above the floor in the atrium that serves as the entrance to The Star. Each rod supports 120 white LED lights visible from miles away.

“The most exciting thing about my work is how it brings people together,” said Villareal, who admits that the phenomenal light show illuminating the Bay Bridge marked a career-defining turning point that led directly to *The Star*.

Gene Jones, wife of Cowboys owner, president and general manager Jerry Jones, and the force behind the Dallas Cowboys Art Collection at AT&T Stadium, said Villareal’s work is “something we have followed and admired for some time now.”

“We know his vision will be a perfect fit for this space because he has such a great understanding of how art can be brought to life through technology,” she said.

“This is a piece that will be enjoyed by those who move around it, and under it, inside the atrium, and it will also be distinctly visible, and able to be experienced, from a great distance.”

In an exclusive interview with *The Dallas Morning News*, Gene Jones admitted being awestruck by Villareal’s Bay Bridge creation during a February visit to San Francisco for this year’s Super Bowl. There, she said, his work provides “a stunning accent to the evening skyline of San Francisco and the surrounding bay.”

“That piece really convinced us that he was the right artist for this space,” she said, “and we know he will provide a beautiful focal point of attention and appreciation for *The Star*.”

Cowboys officials disclosed in 2013 that they spent \$13 million on Anish Kapoor’s *Sky Mirror*, which serves as the outdoor centerpiece of the art collection at AT&T Stadium. They have yet to disclose how much they paid Villareal.

Villareal is no stranger to Dallas. For the 50th anniversary of NorthPark Center, he created *Buckyball*, 2015, his homage to Buckminster Fuller that remains on view in the mall’s CenterPark Garden. After seeing Villareal light up Madison Square Park in New York, Nancy A. Nasher and husband David Haemisegger, the owners of NorthPark, commissioned Villareal for NorthPark’s 50th.

Dubbed one of the world’s premier light artists, Villareal uses LEDs and computer-programmed imagery to create monumental sculptures. Most notable of those is, of course, *The Bay Lights*, which extends for 1.8 miles. It was up for two years, at a cost of \$8 million, then taken down when the permit expired. By popular demand, it was back up Jan. 30, in time for the Super Bowl, at a

renewed cost of \$4 million. These days, it's illuminated nightly, from dusk to dawn.

In that respect, it's different from his creation at The Star, whose lights will glow 24 hours a day, with 225 levels of brightness controlled by a computer program that Villareal designed.

"The important thing is that it doesn't loop, it doesn't repeat," said Villareal, who compared it to the "shuffle" function on a smart-phone that plays music. "It's always a different progression of sequences. It's very sculptural as well, because there are so many different ways of seeing it."

He calls the piece at The Star the largest "volumetric" piece he's created; hence its official title, Volume (Frisco). The New York Times describes his Bay Bridge creation as "the world's largest LED light sculpture," whose 25,000 undulating white lights have elevated the bridge, as the newspaper notes, "from drab gray to glowing," giving it a higher profile these days than even its long-celebrated harbor neighbor, the Golden Gate Bridge.

Based in New York, where he lives with his wife and two children, Villareal grew up in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, and El Paso. His dad hailed from nearby Chihuahua and his mother from a ranching family in Marfa. He graduated from Yale University and completed his graduate work at New York University. His pieces are showcased in venues all over the world, including the National Gallery of Art in Washington.

His latest now appears on what once was pasture land in a city that has grown exponentially, from a rural outback into a suburb whose population now exceeds an estimated 152,000. Frisco was designated in May as one of the nation's 10 fastest-growing cities.

Villareal lists among his influences the artist Christo, whose extravagant outdoor pieces have given new meaning to "public" art. Villareal calls his newest "a major light sculpture" that is visible from portions of the Dallas North Tollway but is powerfully, abundantly visible from Warren Parkway, the street leading to the complex from the Tollway.

The Cowboys expect thousands of passers-by to be lured by Villareal's light sensation, which, despite its 24 hours a day of illumination, is much more vivid at night. It's sure to be captured often on NBC, when the Cowboys appear on Sunday Night Football.

"Everyone seems very happy about it," Villareal said.