The challenge of public art

A newcomer to downtown Rapid City adds richness to the visual landscape.

His face is solemn. It reflects the weight of struggle. Yet in the chiseled features of his body, there is strength.

His hands are bound behind his back, but they do not strain against the binding.

*Iye Na Oyate Ki* ("He Is Who We Are") took its place in downtown Rapid City with the recent opening of Prairie Edge, an Indian arts and crafts gallery and store. The 9-foot-9-inch bronze statue of an American Indian, sculpted by Glenna Goodacre of Santa Fe, N.M., stands tall in the middle of the sidewalk on the corner of Sixth and Main. His dark presence looms in stark contrast to the modern shoppers bustling around him.

One block south, on the corner of Sixth and St. Joseph, sits another distinctive figure. A giant Abe Lincoln, sculpted by Gutzon Borglum, often rests on a bench there, waiting for a child to crawl up and join him in his thoughts.

Works of public art add richness to the visual landscape of our community. Collectively, they communicate a message about our community. They say we care about culture. They say we value depth in our lives.

And each work communicates its own message as only fine art can communicate — a message that seeks fulfillment in an individual's subjective interpretation.

An inscription on a plaque at the foot of *Iye Na Oyate Ki* reads:

"The Sioux and the Plains Indians were removed from their homelands and placed on reservations. Though their 'hands are tied,' the dream of their homeland remains."

The words, however, are only the artist's interpretation. The wonder of art is that viewers can take their own beliefs and experiences and go exploring for their own meaning. A bronze sculpture of an American Indian with his hands bound behind his back, looming over a street corner in downtown Rapid City, can have different meanings for different people.

Not everyone will like it. That's OK, as long as they pause and ponder long enough to try to understand why.

That's what good art should do — challenge us to think and feel.

And our community is richer for accepting that challenge.