

# you know you're in washington when...

## ... "Freedom to be peculiar" is the motto

The self-proclaimed Center of the Universe is Seattle's most eclectic neighborhood. The Republic of Fremont once declared its independence from Seattle, but no shots were fired.

Fremont has a trio of edgy artworks, but the least quirky is the most cared for in the city. The Interurban sculpture shows five people and a dog under a shelter, patiently waiting for the light-rail that no longer runs to downtown. The statue inspires sometimes artistically mischievous residents to dress up the riders, celebrating causes, holidays, and university teams.

A statue of Lenin has a home in Fremont, too. Slavic artist Emil Venkov ditched the idea of a traditional Lenin; instead, his Lenin is surrounded by flames and guns. The seven-ton statue was toppled in Poprad, Slovakia, during the 1989 revolution that broke up the Soviet Union.

Lewis Carpenter, an American teaching in Poprad, mortgaged his house and brought Lenin back to the United States. If a statue of a dictator would look good in your yard, this is your lucky day. It's for sale. Meanwhile, Fremont claims it as proof that art outlives politics.

For the really peculiar, walk under the Aurora Bridge and stand in awe of the 18-foot Fremont troll crushing a Volkswagen

Beetle in one hand. Don't get too close, though. He looks very hungry.

Fremont residents debated what would be the proper landmark for the Center of the Universe (an anonymously donated sign at Fremont Avenue and North 34th Street marks the spot) before settling on a dismantled 1950s Cold War rocket fuselage.

Eventually the 53-foot structure was erected, with the community declaring the rocket its armed forces, complete with a Fremont family crest that incorporates the local motto: *De libertas quirkas* (roughly translated, "Freedom to be peculiar").

Oh, and about that Center of the Universe thing? The King County Council actually declared that Fremont is the Center of the Universe.

### Fremont:

Seattle's artistically eccentric neighborhood is known for its VW-eating troll and statue of Vladimir Lenin.

