

Artist draws her own line in the sand

By RANDY GRAGG

of The Oregonian staff

Artist Linda Wysong wanted to see if Portlanders would cross a line in the sand — or, actually, a line of sand.

Early Tuesday morning, she and several other local artists bisected the Pioneer Courthouse Square with a six-inch-wide line of fine-grained sand.

Indeed, if metaphors are our first line of defense in Iraq, we may be in trouble. As they strode across the square, most of the business-suit-clad morning commuters barely broke their gait, or even their eyes-ahead gaze, for Wysong's line.

But a few did. Some walked along the line before crossing it. Some hopped it. Several purposefully stepped on it. One person drew a peace sign in it. An older man walked up to it, stared down and then turned around and walked away. A little boy being tugged along by his father gave it a good, swift kick.

To Wysong, who thought of the idea late Sunday night while reading about the imminent war in the Persian Gulf, her "A Thin Line of Sand," is about boundaries. "I wanted to see how people would react to a visual and metaphorical line that didn't actually constrain them," she explained.

Wysong's own toughest boundaries, not surprisingly, were raised in her five-hour negotiations Monday with the Pioneer Courthouse



The Oregonian/BOB ELLIS

A passer-by encounters artist Linda Wysong's "A Thin Line of Sand" in Pioneer Courthouse Square Tuesday morning.

Square's administration and maintenance supervisors and the Portland Police.

The square is rented out in fractions, and Wysong's artwork spread across them all — what would have cost, in her words, a small fortune. But given it was merely sand and just a line, the Square let her pay the cost of just one of the fractions.

Of course, should a wind come up, the sand might get into the square's drainage system. Consequently, Wysong had to cover the various grates around the square's fountain.