



Dessardo, top, is considering legal action to get compensation

■ John Burns

WEXFORD borough councillors may not know much about art, but they know what they don't like — and they most definitely don't care for what the Italian artist Marco Dessardo planned to install on their waterfront.

Even though the work had been picked by the council's own selection panel, the members present at a behind-closed-doors meeting described it as "awful" and voted unanimously not to proceed with it.

Alan Counihan, a member of the selection panel, said: "I'm disappointed at the hypocrisy and lack of integrity on the part of Wexford's local authorities in not accepting the results of a competition that they themselves instigated. I doubt they'd behave in such a cavalier fashion with submissions from professional architects or engineers."

The Paris-based Dessardo says his lawyer will be writing to Wexford council this week seeking compensation, and if he does not receive a suitable response, he may take court action.

He was one of eight artists invited by the selection panel to submit designs for a €125,000 work on the town's waterfront.

The panel, which included a sculptor, an architect, a councillor and two arts consultants, unanimously picked Dessardo's work, *The Drainage*.

This sculpture would have "required time to discover", according to the artist, who was planning to connect up materials gathered in Wexford harbour. They included steel pipes, an iron mould, a boulder, and a boat filled with concrete.

According to Dessardo's website, *The Drainage* is more than 500 metres long. It said: "Walking along Wexford wharf, we progressively discover the sculpture running under the city, under the bridge, then underwater. [It] appears sometimes on [the] surface. We cannot see it at once. We need to walk to discover *The Drainage* in its entirety."

The selection panel was happy with the way the work used everyday objects to tell a story, could be fabricated by local companies and took the public on a journey along the quays.

Having been informed that he had won the competition, Dessardo was then invited to address the council last December. In the absence of the press, councillors listened to his presentation, then, after he had left, voted not to proceed with his work.