



Choosing Art for Your Garden

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY CHERYL CORSON

Experiencing art outdoors can be very powerful. In changing natural light, with space to move around and physically engage with a piece, one can have a fuller dialogue with an art object, and by extension, with one's own creative spirit.

Many of us have visited the Smithsonian sculpture garden or other wonderfully abundant outdoor art venues in Washington, but encountering art in a private garden setting can be particularly evocative. This is especially true when the garden and art work reflect the owner's sensibilities. Creating such spaces can be exhilarating in ways that make a kitchen makeover pale by comparison.

Outdoor art can be two- or three-dimensional. It may serve solely as a work of art, or it may be functional, such as seating, a sundial, bell, fountain, gateway, screening wall or a shelter within the garden. Pieces may be built to withstand winter conditions or need to be seasonally moved indoors. They may be permanently integrated into the space or capable of being relocated. They may even be temporary installations, meant to gracefully degrade with the seasons and eventually be replaced.

Scale is an important outdoor art consideration. Too often, people select or build work that is too small for an outdoor space. A piece that works well in a large living room may be far too small for an outdoor space the same size, where spatial percep-

tion is very different.

Sight lines from within the house to outdoor art are another factor. The sad fact is that most people spend 90 percent of their time indoors, so when locating a piece, make sure you can experience what can be a sizable investment, more than 10 percent of the time. This includes considering night lighting needs.

How to find art?

Once you start looking, you will see art everywhere. But here are four ways to approach the challenge of finding artwork for your garden:

Make your own. There are classes all over town, or you can fly solo with the help of some good books, like "The Complete Pebble Mosaic Handbook" by Maggy Howarth, "Making Rustic Furniture" by Daniel Mack, or "Design Sourcebook: Mosaics," by Martin Cheek. For inspiration you can visit public art, including a relatively new gem, the Annmarie Garden, a public sculpture park near Solomon's Island, Maryland (www.annmariegarden.org).

Work with a design professional (interior, architect or landscape architect) with fine art expertise. These professionals can narrow the field by preselecting artists or artworks they feel will resonate with you. They can show you images of work and possibly arrange studio visits, saving you lots of time. Once selected, they will deal with the artist during fabrication and installation on your behalf.

Work with a gallery owner whose curatorial eye is compatible with yours. Despite being a "company town," Washington also boasts a lively gallery scene. Over the course of a few weekends, you will find some galleries that consistently appeal to you, even if you don't care for all the work or even every exhibition. Seek out these gallery owners and their personal network of artists to help you find or commission something for your garden.

Have fun investigating art on your own through local arts organizations. Besides making your own art, this option involves the most time and decision making on your part. But it may also be the most fun and the greatest learning experience. You may find artwork that can be adapted for outdoor use, or work with an artist who may not have previously created outdoor work. Collaboration between the artist and owner can be positive learning experiences for both. This list should not be considered exhaustive:

Washington Sculptor's Group, currently showing "Sculpture Now 2009," Feb. 2-May 1;

ABOVE: Cheryl Corson found sculptor Aaron Kramer at the Smithsonian Craft Show years before he created this piece for the Raben garden on Capitol Hill in 2008 (www.urban-objects.com).

OPPOSITE: In New York's Central Park, a 16-day art installation in 2005 by Christo and Jeanne-Claude called "The Gates" cast a spell on the city and those who moved through thousands of saffron portals.

1050 Connecticut Ave. NW, DC (www.washingtonsculptors.org).

The Torpedo Factory Art Center, 82 artist studios and six galleries with ongoing exhibitions on the waterfront in Old Town, Alexandria (www.torpedofactory.org).

The Art League School, with galleries for member and faculty work in Old Town, Alexandria, affiliated with, though separate from, the Torpedo Factory (www.theartleague.org).

niversary. Show dates are May 29-July 5, on Washington's redeveloping Capitol Riverfront, at 55 M St. SE (www.artomatic.org).

Smithsonian Craft Show, a high-end, juried show featuring 120 craft-artists, this year celebrating its 27th anniversary, April 23-26, at the National Building Museum (www.smithsoniancraftshow.org).

It's worth investing time in the art selection process, because in all



The Washington Glass Studio, features artists affiliated with the Washington Glass School in nearby Mount Rainier, Maryland, who have special expertise in architectural glass suitable for both indoor and outdoor applications (www.washingtonglassstudio.com).

Artomatic, a month-long, non-juried, multi-media art event that included 750 visual artists in 2008. This year is Artomatic's 10th an-

likelihood, you will be living with the art you bring into your garden for some time and will experience it differently throughout the seasons.

Cheryl Corson is a local landscape architect in private practice. She is former director of public art for the Colorado Council on the Arts, and public art project manager for the Maine Arts Commission. www.cherylcorsan.com. ★

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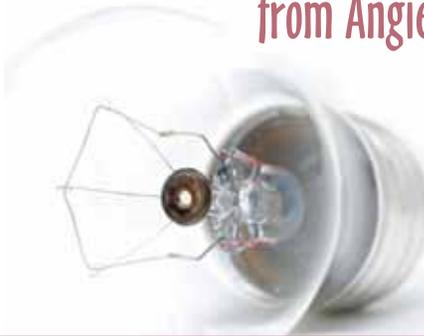
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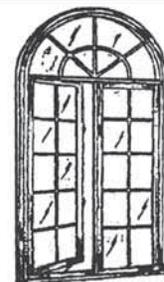
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