

‘Trails of Showing Sculpture in Park’ The Brooklyn Phoenix, October 1988

On the Lullwater’s northern bank stand two bare pedestals and the third lone survivor of Deborah Masters’ “Three Pond Virgins,” an ambitious series of classical figures inspired by Hadrian’s Villa near Rome. Masters says she wanted to relate the classical figures to the landscape, including the Italian-style Boathouse, and to make time go away a bit.” “It was a wonderful piece to make, and the most successful installation I’ve ever done; people really loved them,” she says.

ALMOST FELL INTO POND

Masters set up the plaster molds on the site, and poured the bases on the spot. The figures were poured nearby, and the Brooklyn Forestry Division of the Parks Department helped out with the precision lifting for the installation when the exhibit opened in June.

“I almost fell into the pond, removing the molds,” she laughs, recalling the set-up process. The piece was eventually vandalized, two of the virgins knocked off their pedestals and tossed into the pond. Now, only one remains. “It was pretty well-integrated,” she says of the tri-part piece, concluding, “but it was a dangerous piece to make here” because of the vulnerability of the figures.

“Step One” has been plagued by vandalism right from the start, with problems ranging from graffiti to outright destruction and theft. “I designed these so they couldn’t be pushed over,” says Masters, tapping gently on the one remaining Virgin; the statue itself rests on a sturdy, ornamented column atop a poured concrete base. “But they must have had a sledge-hammer,” she adds ruefully. The sculpture cost a few thousand dollars just to make, she says, but it is the emotional loss that is most damaging.

LEDISFLAM

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The Deborah Masters sculptures, "Pond Virgins", when they were placed earlier this year

Trials of Showing Sculpture in Park

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water's edge. Officially titled "Wind Vane, 2," the work sits on a tall black steel pole which nurtures the thin saplings which share the locale.

ATOP A LONG, STEEL POLE

Neal says she likes to do works for public spaces and enjoyed the process for this show. "I think people are enjoying it; it's nice out here on the point," she says. "I've seen people playing out here." The abstract fish basks atop a long steel pole; it is a fully functional weathervane made of welded steel and horseshoes.

Across the Lullwater bridge and under a canopy of leafy trees, Stephen James' "Bird House Invention with Ellipse" is also elevated on a pole. James says he had been working both with poles and with "the idea of entering and leaving in a metaphysical sense," and the bird house idea suited both the setting and his own technique. "It's nice to have something out here," he says, "it's a great setting." Up in the boughs, the colored steel riddled with holes projects life and fecundity.

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STOLEN FROM ITS PERCH

"It's a very public space, in a public park," Florence Neal says philosophically, of the problems with vandalism of the works on the walk. Curator Bisson affectionately

refers to Neal's fish windvane as "the Survivor"; its counterpart, an abstract bird, was stolen from its perch. She considered restoring the piece, she says, but then the pole itself was bent by later vandals. "There are so few places for an outdoor show," she says, "It's so disappointing to see it happen again and again."

"It's amazing, the destructive energy in this city," agrees Stephen James. His first piece, "Bird House Whimsey," was spontaneously plucked from its base near the remaining sculpture. The steel base of the latter was then attacked with graffiti, which

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the Parks Department Brooklyn Monuments Crew steam-cleaned and sandblasted away. But James is undaunted. "When something gets vandalized," he says, "I get energy to try again." Deborah Masters has the same attitude: "I will do it again next year, but with an eye toward more permanent sculptures."

SEEK VANDALISM-RESISTANT FORMS

All three artists interviewed for the show was a great success, despite the vandalism. But they are each sure to do their work in sturdier, more vandal-resistant materials and forms for next year's project.

Does this mean that next year's show, already dubbed "Step Two" will consist solely of massive concrete cubes fixed to the bedrock? Not at all, says Curator Bisson. "We're planning five pieces; one of them will even be floating," she says, insisting "next year's show will be wonderful."

The sculptors still agree that concrete, steel, and wood, work well outdoors, but say that some imagination is all it takes to create work that will stave off the acts of unappreciative visitors armed with sledgehammers. "You make the piece so it can't be vandalized, or so it can be maintained," says Neal.

Bisson says the series next year is likely to be located closer to the Boathouse where the Urban Park Rangers are headquartered and where they can help keep an eye on it. She may expand the walk along the Lullwater and into the woods sometime in the future.

The Boathouse itself, a Neo-Classical-style terra cotta structure designed by Helmle and Huberty, was built in 1906. It is the headquarters for the Urban Park Rangers, who patrol the park and also offer public tours. Recently, Bisson has created a series of shows in a new ground floor gallery space. The current show, "The Bridges of Prospect Park: Art and Architecture," features paintings by Harvey Dinnerstein and photographs by Millie Hur

STEP ONE: The Sculpture Walk in Prospect Park. Boathouse Visitor Center, Through Oct. 7. Curated by Adriella Bisson.

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It's Not Easy to Bring Art to the Park

BY BEN FISCHMAN

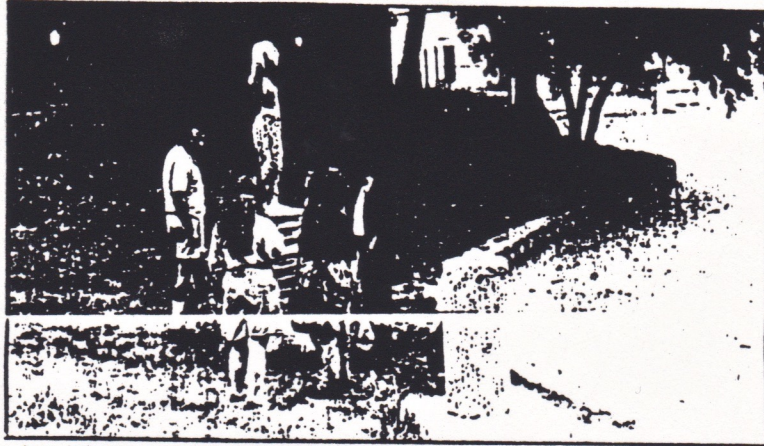
Green, sprawling Prospect Park is now the home of "Step One," one of the few outdoor sculpture walks in New York City. This is the first year of the show, which offers visitors to the park the chance to enjoy works by experienced artists in a natural setting. Although the works of art themselves have been plagued by vandalism, both artists and park officials still believe the project has been a success, and they are now planning "Step Two," a brand new show for next year.

"The art program is very much a part of the park," says Step One curator Mariella Bisson, who is also Arts Coordinator for Prospect Park, as well as a landscape artist. Bisson originated the idea of a walk along the shore of the Lullwater, which connects with Prospect Lake; the whole circuit of the sculpture walk is in sight of the handsome Neo-Classical style Boathouse.

The artworks a visitor encounters rise from grassy promontories, hunched by the shore, and nestled in the shade of lush trees. Bisson consulted on the landscaping with the Prospect Parks Horticulture Crew, which gave advice on how to make pieces appear to come unobtrusively, out of the ground.

The sculptors who created work for the show were selected for their skills in creating art that would relate to the Boathouse area in different ways. RESPOND TO THE LANDSCAPE.

Deborah Masters and Tom Bulls, for example, were commissioned to do works



Artists look at remaining statue, empty pedestal of another one is in foreground. (Phoenix/Fischman Photo)

in cast concrete, in recognition of the ongoing restoration of the nearby Cleft Ridge Span. (The bridge, designed by Calvert Vaux in 1871, is the first bridge in America built of poured concrete blocks). Stephen James and Florence Neal were asked to do pieces in upright metal responding to other facets of the landscape.

"I see a lot of shows, and I meet a lot of

people; I look for who's up and coming," says curator Bisson. She works mainly with emerging artists. Although all the artists in this first outdoor show live in Brooklyn, she stresses that the show is not only for Brooklyn artists and says, future shows are planned to include artists from farther afield.

Bisson says she encouraged "site-

The piece was eventually vandalized, two of the virgins knocked off their pedestals and tossed into the pond.

responding" sculptures for this show. In setting out to do their work for "Step One," the sculptors each made a site tour, chose a location, and constructed a piece specifically to relate to the surroundings.

Out on a wide peninsula carpeted with windswept grass, Florence Neal's "Fish" rises dramatically into the sky from the

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SECTION 2

It Isn't Easy to Make Art for The Park, But They're Learning



Deborah Masters with her remaining "Pond Virgin".



Stephen James with his Bird House invention with Elipse (left Above). Deborah Masters with the remaining one of three of her "Pond Virgins". Right, Florence Neal with Wind Vane 2. (Phoenix/Fischman Photos)

Artists Talk About Lessons Learned From This First Outdoor Park Show; Page 9

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