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Thursday, July 28, 2011

Open-air art exhibit transforms Elm Park

The open-air exhibit a challenge for artists, a laid-back alternative for art audiences



Matt Weber installs his sculpture "Untitled Topographies" at the Art In the Park exhibition in Elm Park, which officially kicks off Saturday. (T&G Staff Photos/CHRIS CHRISTO)

By Nancy Sheehan **TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF**
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Elm Park has undergone its annual transformation into an outdoor art gallery.

Earlier this week, 19 artists from throughout New England installed 20 large-scale works in the park for the fourth annual Art in the Park exhibition. The show officially kicks off with an opening celebration from 3 to 6 p.m. Saturday with artist tours, food vendors and music by Hat on Drinking Wine. The rain date is Aug. 6. The exhibition will remain on view through Oct. 2.

The popular exhibition has become an event park-goers look forward to.

"As we were installing it people were coming up and saying, 'Oh, it's Art in the Park,' " said artist Catherine

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Evans of Maynard. Evans' piece, called "Thistle," dresses up several park trees, placing a festive flamingo pink collar around their trunks. The adornments give the northern hardwoods, including a leafy birch, a tropical look for the summer season. The collars are made of hundreds of bright cable ties attached at close intervals to mesh hardware cloth, which then is wrapped around the tree. At first Evans had to spray paint the ties to achieve a colorful effect but eventually she was able to locate a supply of neon ones.

"The Internet is wonderful," she said.

Artist Carrie Crane of Boylston created a site specific painting called "Bridge Work" on a large piece of Lexan. It takes advantage of the park's signature wooden pond-spanning walkways. This is Crane's first creation for Art in the Park. "Working outdoors is new to me and requires planning for conditions I do not otherwise have to think about, like wind, rain and over enthusiastic park-goers," she said. The fabrication of the piece uses exterior sign materials, and Crane was given advice on how to use them from the pros at the Worcester Public Works sign shop.

Crane's piece and the 19 others in the show were winnowed from among 47 submissions by a panel of three jurors: Susan Stoops, curator of contemporary art at Worcester Art Museum; Andy Moerlein, sculptor, teacher and gallery director at the Derryfield School in Manchester, N.H.; and Dean Snyder, a sculptor and professor at Rhode Island School of Design.

"I worked with a team of very experienced jurors," Moerlein said. "We all had very different perspectives. In a brief discussion of each submission we easily decided on works that would have value to the community, survive the public setting and add to a show that we hoped would have diversity of media, scale and style."

This year, Art in the Park is being presented by a committee of volunteers who wanted to keep the project going. "There was such positive response to it and it's a good project and good for the city," Gloria Hall, a member of the committee, said.

Art in the Park had received major funding from the Worcester Arts Council to the tune of \$15,000 a year for the first two years. The arts council's regulations, however, prohibit it from funding a project at the same level for more than three years, Hall said. Fundraising events were held to help make up the difference, and other funding agencies stepped in, notably \$7,500 from the Greater Worcester Community Foundation, \$2,500 from the Fletcher Foundation and \$2,000 from the Stoddard Charitable Trust, all moving the project toward its \$30,000 budget this year.

"We're close," Hall said.

The popularity of the annual exhibition may be due in large measure to the informal park setting. "When the public experiences Art in the Park, they see sculpture in a familiar setting," Moerlein said. "Museums have seriousness and put such responsibility on the viewer to seek an understanding. In a park, a viewer is at their own discretion to enjoy, dismiss or ignore art."

Crane also likes the park venue's art-for-all feel.

"Art in the Park is so democratic," she said. "It encourages everyone to look and comment. It is the antithesis of the intimidating art gallery."

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A bicyclist rides past part of Catharine Evans' work "Thistle."

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