

C4 — Wednesday, August 24, 2005

'Contemporary Sculpture at Chesterwood 2005'

Fresh sculptures without flash

By Charles Bonenti

Special to the Eagle

STOCKBRIDGE — While the grounds at Chesterwood are kept much as they were sculptor Daniel Chester French lived there, they still get a new look each summer.

It comes with the installation of the contemporary outdoor sculpture exhibitions the National Trust property has been hosting for the last 25 years.

Sculpture, by its presence alone, can change the look and, therefore our experience of the environment. It can draw attention to a land feature, give narrative meaning to a site, activate a space with color, movement or composition.

That's what these artworks do — with surprisingly varied degrees of success. Over the years, here have been wide swings in inventiveness, boldness, incisive thinking and responsiveness to the site. That may be partly because of the work that's entered, but mostly it's the juror's eye.

This year that eye belonged to Donna Hassler, director of the Rensselaer County Historical Museum. And she chose well.

Hassler rejected two-thirds of the 75 submissions and put together a show of mostly human-scaled works that are fresh without flash; and often subtly thoughtful.

What's particularly unusual this year is the number of installations made up of multiple pieces — hugging the ground or hanging from the trees or clustering in family groups.

Stephen Fabrico, for example, has a group of columnar pieces in high-fired stoneware that resemble Oriental lanterns in a garden. Robert Markey fabricated four mixed-media spheres, meant to suggest planets of color, life and destruction, and suspended them from trees.

Geraldine Marcenyac scattered mixed-media "growing stones," coursed with fracture lines, under the trees, in a reference to stones cleared for farming and civilization.

And Matthew Weber has created an homage to wood with a half-dozen biomorphic-shaped tree chunks, carved so their rings form steps like a topographic map, and scattered on the forest floor.

Other singular pieces include William Bergman's steel truss arch bridge high up between two trees, the arches not quite meeting in the



Photo courtesy Chesterwood

Robert Markey's 'He Who Kills Another Destroys a World' consists of four hanging mixed-media spheres — one a charred skeleton, the other three representing worlds of life, movement, growth and color. The work is part of Chesterwood's 2005 outdoor contemporary sculpture show.

Art Review

Contemporary Sculpture at Chesterwood is on view daily 10 to 5 through Oct. 10. Admission to the museum at 4 Williamsville Road in Stockbridge is \$10 for adults, \$5 for students under 19 and free for children under 6. Tel. 413-298-3579 or visit www.chesterwood.org

middle to create a spatial tension.

William Brayton has an elegant flat composition of bronze, wood, aluminum and concrete solids and lines in that resemble a Klee or Picasso drawing.

Anthony Garner created a sensually colored study of closed and open spaces in polychrome wood called "Kimono."

Jim Henderson composed an ode to a fallen tree by arranging slices of trunk horizontally and vertically in a glass case like a pipe organ.

And Bob Keating comments on the absurdity of royalty in a steel/stone tree-shaped composition of

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precariouly balanced crowns.

Using more conventional forms, Sandra Osip equates a nautilus shell with a machined form in her bronze "Helio" and Matthias Alfén blurs the distinction between the human body and nature by allowing the viewer glimpse the landscape through the hollowed form of a leg.

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In her catalog essay, Donna Hassler said she had no theme in mind when she chose the work other than how well the sculptor conceived and executed it, and how it would look in the Chesterwood environment.

While the placement of the pieces, with exceptions like Berg-