

sculpture

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SHORT HILLS, NEW JERSEY “Art in Nature”

Greenwood Gardens

Art and nature coexist very well amid the sumptuous scenery of Greenwood Gardens. Once under private ownership, Greenwood has been made available as a public site since 2003. Originally home to two wealthy families, the grounds of the house were decorated first with lush annuals and perennials, later with evergreens and sculptural flourishes, and now with native plants and new, low-maintenance greenery. In the midst of this exquisite natural collection, noted critic and curator Karen Wilkin, with the help of Studio Montclair, put together the group show “Art in Nature.” Some 32 artists were included, their work ranging from the figurative to the abstract, and all the pieces were carefully sited among trees and plants.

Some of the pieces merged perfectly with their settings, while others stood out in contrast. The relations between art and nature thus developed an ongoing conversation. Wilkin’s placement of the works made it possible to think about how outdoor sculptures might be integrated with vegetation nothing short of spectacular. The brightly colored *Modern Dance* (2014), by

Elizabeth Knowles and William H. Thielen, consisted of wire fencing covered with poly flagging tape; the partial circles of tape, whose pastel hues varied widely, meandered over the ground and through a line of trees, close to the drive leading to the house. *Modern Dance* highlighted both its own construction and its vernal surroundings. Many of the other works were also steadfastly abstract, but exceptions did exist, such as Bruce Gagner’s *Eddie* (2009) and *Rose* (2010), bronze works located in a small circle of grass. The figures, paunchy renditions of a naked man and woman, are full of bulges and crevices, making them memorable versions of physical vulnerability.

Paige Pedri’s remarkable *Animal* (2011), roughly constructed in wire mesh, fiberglass, and resin, balances on two points. The whiteness of the piece strengthens its informal abstraction based on curves and hollows, but it nonetheless remains recognizably a creature. In contrast, John Clement’s *Hot Tamale* (2012) is purely nonrepresentational; the bright red sculpture circles tightly, giving the impression that industrially welded steel-pipe can indeed be made elegant. Lisa Sanders’s *Anamorphosis* (2014), made of bronze, works both abstractly and as a rough presentation of some imaginary stick-like creature. In contrast, John Monti’s neon-yellow resin *Flower Cluster VI* (2014) forms a highly realis-

tic mass of stalks and flowers whose energies are close to surreal in their spiky intensity.

William Tucker’s *Horse X* (1986), a large, robust bronze, seems nonrepresentational when looked at one way, only to appear horse-like when viewed from another angle. Its massive clumsiness is its greatest strength. Karin Malpeso’s steel *Helioptrix* (2014) recalls David Smith’s “Voltri” series with its geometric forms and frontality; it is an elegant work that felt particularly at home in the gardens. *Eminence* (2006), Mia Westerland Roosen’s gray, resin-coated industrial felt work, could be a prayer shawl or an entryway to a sacred space; its spirituality made it memorable. Finally Don Porcaro’s *Talisman 2* (2012) asserts itself as distinctively figurative; its composition of marble rings bulges and diminishes, looking nearly human. Porcaro has always used humor to capture the viewer.

As these works suggest, “Art in Nature,” which was Greenwood’s first foray into presenting sculpture, was a terrific and intelligently planned show. One hopes that Greenwood Gardens will continue this program of placing art on its grounds with future exhibitions.

—Jonathan Goodman

