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The Daily Progress

Lifestyles

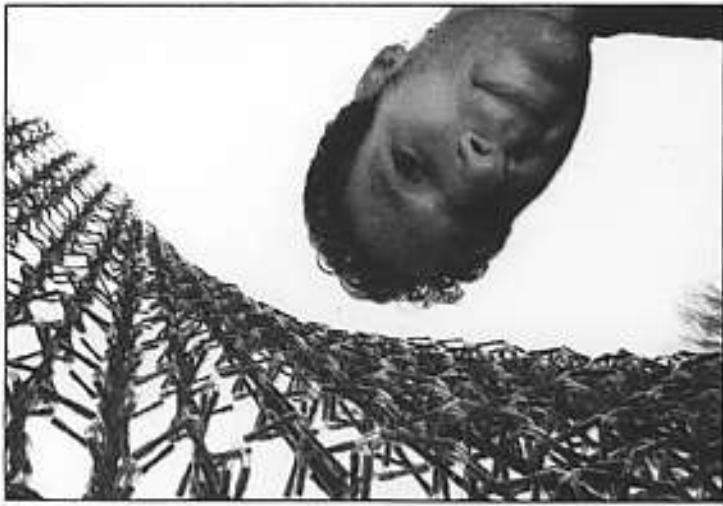
Charlottesville, Virginia

Section

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In the eye of the beholder ...

Daily Progress photos
by Andrew Shurtleff



Sculptor Aaron Fein says "The Transformer" makes a different impression on its perceivers at 40 mph.



Architect Rod Marshall-Roth created "Metallice Glosserous," an aluminum ArtInPlace contribution that's installed on Preston Avenue.

... and in the median, too,
it's art for the people

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By DAVID A. MAURIER
Daily Progress staff writer

Christmas came a bit early for Charlottesville this year. Here and there about town works of art have appeared where only open space existed before. There's a metal bike racer on McIntire Road, and a 9-foot-tall aluminum tree gracing the intersection of Harris Street and Preston Avenue.

Those traveling along Fifth Street will likely notice steel tennis players, and on Emmet Street stands a giant metal sculpture called "Man In Motion." On Monticello Avenue a graceful design dubbed "Arizona" greets people entering and leaving the city.

On the U.S. 250 Bypass near the fire station stands "The Transformer," a creation made of plastic tubing that forms a hyperbolic paraboloid shape.

These pieces of art represent the first installations in the city's new ArtInPlace project. According to Satyendra Singh Hujia, director of strategic planning in Charlottesville, the program has several goals.

First and foremost, it is intended to introduce a variety of public art for the community to enjoy. In essence the ArtInPlace project is turning Charlottesville into an art gallery.

"I've traveled all over the world and when I think of world-class cities I think of art, sculpture, beautiful gardens and beautiful architecture," Hujia said.

"Art is always a part of it. I think this

program will add that feeling to the community. Also art is a clean venture and will add vitality to our public places.

"And it allows artists to express themselves and give them a place to display their art. This is a creative outlet for the community."

According to ArtInPlace President Elizabeth Bredend, the idea for the display of public art first came up about a decade ago. She said it was the brainchild of brothers Blake and Charlie Hurt.

The idea fizzled when it came up against city regulations and the considerable amount of work necessary to get it under way.

Then about a year and a half ago the idea surfaced again.

"Blake came over and sat down at my table and said, 'Charlie thinks we should put up public art in Charlottesville,'" Bredend said. "By the time he got finished I was the president of ArtInPlace."

"There were only the three of us to start with. Charlie is good with construction, Blake is good with nonprofit status things and putting together proposals for the City Council and I'm a great organizer."

"We put the whole project together during the first year and only met three times. Everybody knew what to do and we went out and did it."

In the future it's hoped that artists from across the country will display their art in Charlottesville's public places. But initially only local artists were asked to submit proposals of their works for an eight-member jury to judge.

This first year six artists placed six pieces of artwork around the city. These works will remain in place for 11 months. Each artist is paid a \$300 honorarium that's intended to defray transportation costs. Some of the art can be purchased by citizens, in which case 25 percent of the price will go to the nonprofit ArtInPlace corporation to help it become self-sufficient.

The initial \$10,000 of the project was provided by the city of Charlottesville. This budget includes the cost of installation, publicity and a Web site. The city also donates the sites at no cost.

The project's Web site, www.artinplace.org, sets it apart from most other cities that have public art programs. The Web site address is prominently displayed in front of each piece of art.

Those who access the Web site can learn about the artists, their works and the project. They also can comment on the different pieces.

One of the goals of the program is to get people thinking and talking about art — and that has certainly happened.

"I've heard everything," Edward Pelton said, referring to comments on the "Man In Motion" sculpture he created with Dale Morse. The piece is located in the center divider on Emmet Street.

"I've heard people say it has gravity and weight, yet looks light and graceful. Then my father was getting his hair cut over at Staples and he heard someone say that it looked like something that fell off



Dale Morse (left) and Ed Pelton are the men behind "Man in Motion," a forged-steel work on display on Emmet Street.

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Art

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the back of a truck.

"I think it's neat that people are noticing it and it's making them think. Dale and I are trying to do something that will simulate people and will elevate Charlottesville. It thrills me to do stuff for individuals, but I especially enjoy doing things outside that gives back to the entire community."

Aaron Fein, creator of "Transformer," has heard that his piece looks like a section of chain-link fence stuck in the ground or some kind of weird backstop. Others who have seen it shimmering in the sunlight have offered more favorable observations.

"Overall, people refer to it as 'the fence,'" said Fein with an amused tone in his voice. "This is my first public piece so it's really fascinating to put something out there and have this wealth of comments come in."

"It makes me realize just how powerful art can be. One person said, 'Oh, I thought since it was opposite the fire station that it was a comment on 9-11.'"

"Someone called it a twisted bedspring. And then there was the letter to the editor that called it a visual abomination."

The reason why many people seem to be taking a dim view of "Transformer" might have as much to do with its location as the piece itself. It was placed in the divider of the U.S. 250 Bypass because it's somewhat delicate and it was thought that this site would protect it from vandalism.

Problem is, most traffic in this area is going too fast to catch the visual effect Fein intended.

"The overall effect that I was after occurs as you progressively pass the piece," Fein said. "When you see it from either direction it's essentially like a funnel shape or a fan resting on a single point."

"As you get closer it appears to turn in space so that your initial perception of what this was changes over time from one shape to another. As you're passing it you see it has depth and it's this other, more complex form."

"I feel the piece hasn't been so successful because of the high-speed nature of [U.S.] 250. I've learned that 40 mph is pretty fast."

Sites were chosen with care but, as Fein's experience shows, some shortcomings will become evident only after the piece is in place. As the project matures the pluses and minuses of certain sites should become apparent.

The Emmet Street site for the "Man In Motion" sculpture seemed perfect until it was in place.

"I thought it [Man In Motion]

would stand out and that you would see it from both tops of the hill," Breeden said. "I thought that you would gradually come onto it and wonder 'Ooh, what is this?'"

"But instead, because of all the other stuff going on on Emmet Street, you don't see it until you're heck out of me."

"So learning about the different sites is part of this too. My hope is that eventually we'll have about 10 sites."

Dr. Richard Whitehill's metal sculptures are on display at two sites in the city — "The Biker" on McIntire Road and "The Tennis Players" on Fifth Street.

The orthopedic surgeon has been creating sculptures since 1990 and recently open Red Barn Studio.

He's making an effort to spend more and more time in his studio working on his art.

"Sculpture is very much like surgery in that it's technically challenging," said Whitehill, who works at the University of Virginia Medical Center.

"It starts out as an idea and then you have to convert that into a three-dimensional structure which communicates that idea."

"The same is true for surgery. But with sculpture if you do it right, you're guaranteed to please your customer, and in surgery

you're not.

"It's really nice to know when I finish a piece of sculpture someone is going to be happy. When I finish up a day's work out in the studio my back is tired and I'm exhausted, but it's good, honest work and I feel good about it."

Whitehill said all the comments he's gotten about his work have been favorable. Some of his friends at the hospital have ribbed him by inquiring if one of his metal tennis players is ever going to serve the ball.

The biker, which originally was on display at Ivy Nursery, has also generated a lot of interest.

"At the time I did the biker I was attempting to do a few of the mini-triathlons around here," Whitehill said.

"I always thought the bicyclers were kind of cool looking, even though it was my least favorite of the three sports."

"A very nice man saw the biker and wanted to buy it, but when he realized the size he commissioned me to build a sort of mini biker, which I'm doing now. As far as the tennis players go, a friend of mine is a tennis enthusiast."

"He has a beautiful home in the country with a retaining wall and I originally built the tennis players for his yard. They'll go back there when this year's display period ends."

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The Daily Progress Archives Staff
Sarah Smith contributed "Arizona" to the ArtInPlace program. The welded-steel work is found on Monticello Avenue at Druid Avenue.



Dr. Richard Atkinson is the creator of "The Star" on Monticello Road.

The pieces of art will stay up for 11 months. Each year in September the cycle ends and new pieces will be set in place in October.

Currently the pieces in place are big enough to be seen from moving vehicles. Smaller pieces might be used in the future.

"Our judging process had to hold in mind the sites we had," Breeden said. "So sometimes even though the art was really good it wasn't good for outdoors, or it was too detailed and the traffic would be going by too fast to see it."

"Maybe as we get bigger and we get sites that have more pedestrian traffic as well as vehicular traffic, we can put up the things that you have to stand right in front of in order to get it."

"What we're building up is a history of showing and, we hope, a history of selling. When we have a history we hope to start getting national artists applying as well."

For now, local artists have the town to themselves and they couldn't be happier. Many citizens are also pleased to see interesting sculptures like Rod Marshall-Roth's "Metallice Glosserous" as they drive down Preston Avenue.

Sarah Smith, creator of "Arizona," thinks ArtInPlace is a "splendid" program and one that will help young artists become better known.

"This program stirs up an interest in art," Smith said. "The art is going to get different reactions from different people."

"There are those who think it's wonderful and those who think it's trash. Of course, there will be many people who won't even see it."

"With my piece I was basically

concerned with the sculpturing of volumes and spatial relationships, edges, shapes and, of course, color in this case."

Smith said she usually doesn't have a completely set idea of what she wants to create when she's starting a new work.

She said she starts out with a general idea that very often changes completely as the work progresses.

"As a piece is put together it presents different facets and I change my thinking about it," Smith said.

"I then change the way I put the rest of it together. Unfortunately one has to give titles to these things. Because of the shape of it, [Arizona] reminded me a bit of maybe the bones and horns of cattle. The coloring I chose to use was that of the southwest desert area, so I dubbed it 'Arizona.'"

Art has a way of growing on people, and this year's offerings from ArtInPlace have until next September to work their magic. Then, a whole new batch of artworks will take their place and inspire new discussions.

"ArtInPlace definitely adds an interesting dialogue," Fein said. "In the end I think all art that's relevant creates some sort of dialogue."

"I think both artists and the public will look forward to this on a yearly basis. The intention of the organization was to sort of make a stand and make a name for Charlottesville as a place that's willing to put up public art."

"I think this is a great thing."