

VISUAL ARTS

Eclectic at the square

At the 'Garden of Artly Delights,' more is less, and most will be forgotten

BY RANDY GRAGG
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If there's one word to describe the "Garden of Artly Delights" in Pioneer Courthouse Square through the weekend, it's eclectic.

A giant pterodactyl flaps its wings in the air. A tiny, willow-domed native sweatlodge sports pucker-faced, whistling masks.

Large scale, industrial concrete molds create a huge altar. A colorful steel tower blares music. An old-growth stump sits

uncomfortably in square-central.

And cutouts from 19th-century French paintings spin in the breeze.

Something for everybody?

That's one way to look at it.

Artist Jerry Mayer has organized a potpourri of experiences by eight artists to go with landscape architect Doug Macy's annual design for the "Festival of Flowers" in the square.

Given that the garden is ostensibly part of the Rose Festival that draws hordes of denizens from the outlying areas into downtown, the art should at the very least be accessible if not fun. Most of the "Garden of Artly Delights" harvest succeeds at this.

However, this kind of art is also a rare and important opportunity. It's

REVIEW

Garden of Artly Delights

Where: Pioneer Courthouse Square

Hours: Anytime

Closing: June 11

Admission: Free.

the only chance that artists get to try out ideas in public spaces

without the specter of permanence (or self-annointed critics) hanging over their heads. It's also a chance for the public to be introduced to bold new ideas.

With more, fully realized temporary public art projects, we might get past the question of whether or not something like the new Pioneer Place's "Soaring Rocks" is art and get on to more interesting topics like what a sculpture like that means — especially how it relates to the architecture and people around it.

This is the fourth year Mayer has combined efforts with Macy to bring art and flowers to city center. Pioneer Courthouse Square has graciously anted up the money to pay the artists.



Linda Wysong's "Foundations" is an altar of concrete with signatures of local union workers.

The Oregonian/STEVE DIPAC

It's all nice and cooperative in that typical, Portland kind of way. But like a stomach full of hors d'oeuvres gobbled at different parties, nothing is particularly memorable.

Nearly all of these sculptures embody interesting ideas. Michael Bowley's series of five wind vanes are a quiet nudge in the ribs at the whole idea of a "Festival of Flowers." Each is a cutout from a 19th-century French painting, a period that saw artists gravitate to the idealized "Arcadian" landscape in the face of Europe's rapid industrialization. Bowley uses the square's imported potted garden as a backdrop for why commentary on historical representation still influences our perception of the landscape.

Similarly ironic is artist and furniture designer Gerhard Pagenstecher's "Stumpage: Redefining the Term." With no carving or painting or anything "artistic" about it, Pagenstecher has simply stuck an enormous

old-growth tree stump in the square.

Both are fascinating projects, but amid four other works by different artists, they become diffused. Had Bowley put his wind vanes throughout Macy's garden with nothing else around, his project would have more punch. If Pagenstecher filled the square with stumps, his politically loaded statement might not seem like it's waiting to be hauled away.

The same is true of the other projects. Lee Kelly's and Michael Sterling's wonderful "Shakuhachi II," a colorful steel tower that resonates with strange music and rhythms, should be in a forest of similar species.

Linda Wysong's altar of concrete forms bearing the signatures of local union members presents the unseen foundations of buildings — namely workers, both people and tools.

Temporary public art's only claim to longevity is how long it lasts in people's memory. The "Garden of Artly Delights" is a classic example of more is less.