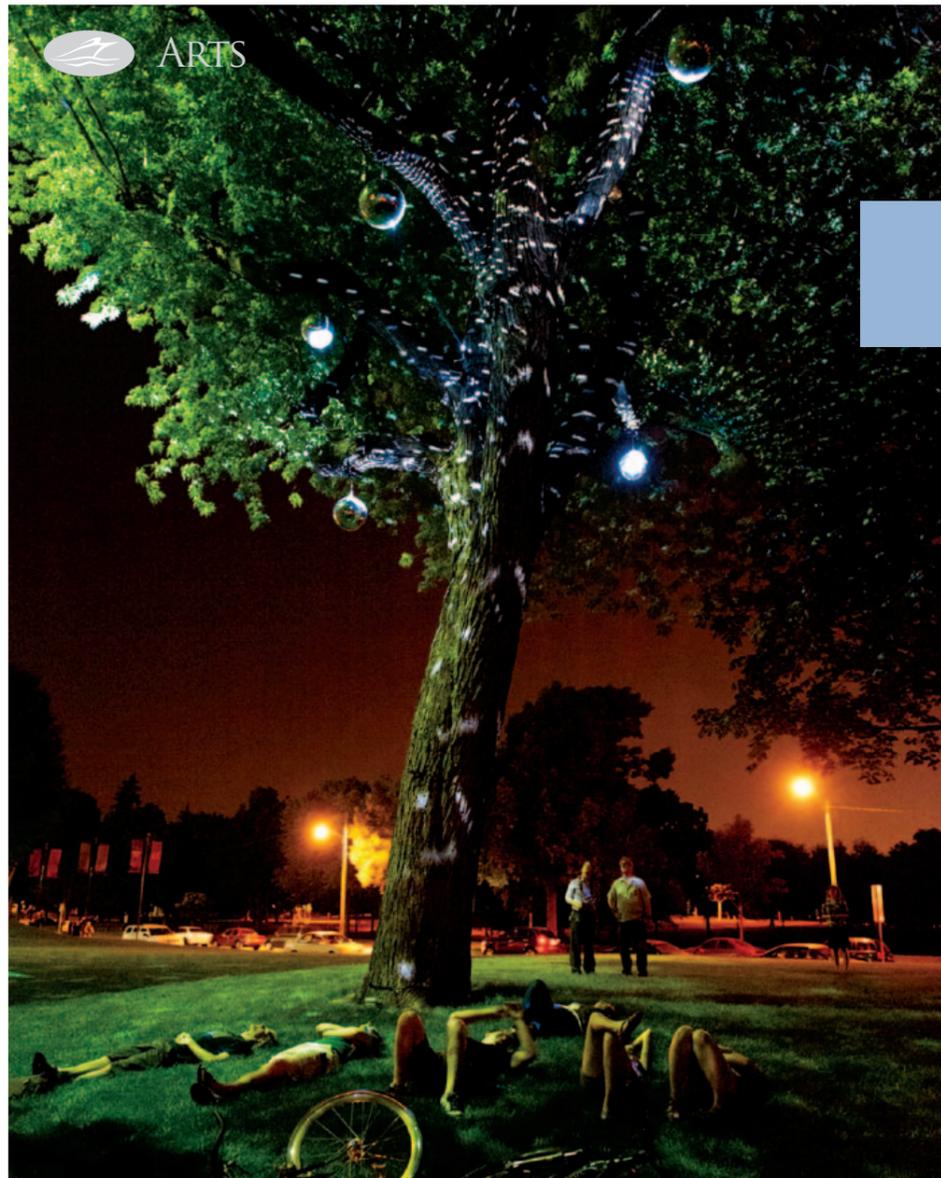




ARTS



PARK VISITORS GAZING UP AT AARON DYSART'S CELEBRATE INSTALLATION. [PHOTO BY JAYME HALBITTER]

Franconia Sculpture Park

WHERE ART AND COMMUNITY ARE FORMED

BY KRISTEN LOWE

Hot metal and pouring iron are just two of many things you can witness when you visit Franconia Sculpture Park about an hour northeast of Minneapolis. The Innovative Community Arts Organization is now in its sixtieth year and has moved from a roadside-attraction to a serious cultural establishment.

The park offers a lively schedule of programs and events for art lovers of all ages including the Kids Make Sculpture Workshops, Community Collaboration Hot Metal Pour, artist-led tours 3D Concert Series, the Fall Annual Art & Artists Celebration, and specific programs for at-risk youth. The 20-acre park, with

a rotating collection of more than 95 contemporary sculptures, reflects the creative talents of local, national and international artists and is free and open to the public 365 days a year, dawn to dusk.

History of the park

The original vision of the founder, CEO and resident of the park, John Hock, was to provide living and working space for emerging and established artists from all over the world. The idea was to foster a collaborative environment that prioritizes artistic exploration and innovation for sculptors who specifically wanted to work on a large-scale.

“Everything is considered a potential material,” says Carissa Samaniego, the park’s education and program coordinator. Placed throughout the park are a wide variety of recycled or fabricated artworks. Most will surprise you such as the near-building sized sculpture of boom boxes, by Bayete Ross Smith, or resin cats by Clive Murphy. You can see lyrical arrangements of found objects, wood and cement, arrangements of light and steel and almost anything else peppered throughout this landscape.

How does something so big and made of heavy metal defy gravity? Make one and find out is the philosophy at Franconia. Perplexed? One the twenty-six interns that help run the organization will happily come forward, guide you, or take you to the right workshop or artist in residence to get answers.

Meet one of the artists

In the middle ring of the park, Aaron Dysart, an artist from Minnesota is working in the 90-degree heat, under a tarp. He is applying thin layers of carefully mixed fiberglass on a 20-foot tree. The tree won’t go into a museum or gallery but rather be installed back into the natural environment.

He is looking to move from a dynamic of exploration to protection.

Dysart explained, “Changing the material of the object, the viewer can hopefully move past a preconceived notion about the form and see it anew.” His hope is to complete the sculpture in September and nestle it back into a wall of trees running along the outskirts of the park.

Dysart started to take classes at the Minnetonka Center for the Arts at an early age and continued taking ceramics classes there in high school. Receiving his BFA in sculpture with honors from the University of Montana-Missoula with a minor in philosophy in 1998, he later received his graduate degree at the University of Minnesota.

A day at the park

“These artists get up at dawn and don’t pack up until dusk,” says Samaniego. In the evenings there are community dinners where the conversation focuses on the events of the day. Many topics are covered, including – but not limited to – workshops, new materials, techniques and where to get the best supplies on the cheap.

Artists from China, Argentina, Minnesota, Guatemala and New York City travel to Franconia if they are awarded an artist-in-residency. Expressing her joy and passion for the energy of the place, Samaniego says sharing the same dinner table nearly every night means “everybody bonds very quickly and gets to know each other very fast; it’s almost on a spiritual level.”

Inviting every viewer into the creation of artworks in process is Modus Operandi at Franconia Sculpture Park. Dysart says it’s been very meaningful to him as an artist because “it’s about making a connection with the audience. Art doesn’t get made in a vacuum; it is made and is about the present day and the future.”

Franconia Sculpture Park is located 45 minutes northeast of the Twin Cities at the intersection of Hwy 8 (Lake Blvd) and Hwy 95 (St. Croix trail) in Franconia, MN.

For more information go to www.franconia.org.