

A CLASSIC PARK / GIANT SCULPTURES, LIKE STONE OR STEEL DINOSAURS, INHABIT STORM KING ART CENTER, A SPRAWLING ESTATE IN NEW YORK DEDICATED TO PRESERVING A SPECIES OF LARGE ART

Gibbs, Al. **The News Tribune** [Tacoma, Wash] 21 Nov 1993: 15.

MOUNTAINVILLE, N.Y. - Alexander Calder greets visitors at the front gate.

Henry Moore urges them along a winding, uphill drive.

Siah Armajani stretches dramatically across a meadow, while Isamu Noguchi crowns a small knoll.

This is Storm King Art Center, a New York display of modern sculpture far removed from the helter-skelter of the midtown Manhattan gallery scene.

No honking cabs or unruly crowds here in the wooded, rolling hills of the Hudson River Valley. No elbowed ribs or stepped-on toes.

Rather, there is a sense of serenity in the 400 acres of bright meadows and dappled woods that contain nearly 140 pieces of granite, steel, bronze and aluminum artworks created by some of the world's greatest modern sculptors.

Located a few miles south of the Hudson River town of Newburgh, about an hour's drive north of Manhattan, Storm King is a sort of nature preserve for the metal horses of Calder's "Cheval Rouge," the granite curves of Hans Schlee's "Dying Swan," the stick-like forms of Forrest Myers' "Mantis" and Eduardo Paolozzi's "Icarus."

Some of its works, like Noguchi's "Momo Taro," were commissioned for a specific location on the grounds; others such as Calder's "The Arch" were placed for the dramatic effect they evoke in combination with the landscape.

The list of artists in the park's permanent collection is dazzling.

Anthony Caro and Mark di Suvero; Charles Ginnever and Gilbert Hawkins; Alexander Liberman and Tomio Miki and Louise Nevelson; Nam June Paik and Josef Pillhofer and David Smith - lots of David Smith, a prolific welder of bronze and steel who died five years after the center opened.

On extended loan are a half dozen Calder's and works by Moore, Claes Oldenburg and Ursula von Rydingsvard.

It is amazing that with all that talent gathered, the center is rarely if ever crowded. Annual attendance is around 45,000, barely more than a week's attendance in some of Manhattan's more famous galleries.

Storm King - named for a nearby mountain - was conceived in 1960 when the Ralph E. Ogden Foundation bought the 200-acre estate of a wealthy New York City lawyer, Vermont Hatch. Another 200 acres was added later.

The park didn't come to its current state of meadows and hummocks and wooded hills easily.

When the Hatch estate was purchased, the curators found a site laid waste by mid-1950s construction of the nearby New York Thruway. More than a million cubic yards of gravel had been excavated from the grounds, leaving unwanted ponds and sharp cliffs.

Greenwich, Conn., landscape architect William Rutherford was called in to supervise reshaping the land, molding the earth and planting trees and shrubs to create what amount to stage settings for the large-scale sculptures the park's directors had decided to pursue.

"One of our great satisfactions is to hear that visitors admire the 'natural setting' of the park," says H. Peter Stern, president and chairman of the foundation's board of trustees.

"If they only knew how much effort it has taken to plan and maintain this beautiful landscape."

Art - mostly smaller sculpture and paintings - is also displayed in the Normandy-style mansion that came with the grounds, but it is the outdoor exhibits that draw visitors along Storm King's paths.

A handful of Calder's stands like sienna sentinels on a flat swatch of grass near the mansion. The hacked and sawn cedar totems of von Rydingsvard rise permanently - if visually a little precariously - on its terrace.

From the edge of a steep slope, Armajani's seminal "Gazebo for Two Anarchists: Gabriella Antolini and Alberto Antolini" peeks into view through a trapezoidal hole in Ginnever's "Fayette: For Charles and Medgar Evers." Art seen through art. The effect is stunning.

Atop a knoll, Alice Aycock's stark white "Three-Fold Manifestation II" rises like the satellite antennas of an ESPN TV commercial, but closer inspection shows the dishes to be created of smaller delicate forms.

Nearby, at the edge of a cluster of tall oaks, Jerome Kirk's stainless steel "Orbit" turns slowly in the breeze of a sunny autumn afternoon.

Down a slope that resembles a golf course fairway, two lovers sit quietly holding hands, occasionally kissing, most of the time staring at "Suspended," Menashe Kadishman's two huge connected cubes that form an illusion of instability.

Back near the mansion, a youngster shyly runs a finger across Nevelson's "City on the High Mountain." A hundred yards away, an elderly couple sit on the granite of "Momo Taro," contemplating its gentle forms.

Visitors to Storm King clearly become engaged with the art there displayed.

The natural setting is itself something of a work of art.

In spring, dogwood and azalea bloom amongst the steel and aluminum forms. In fall, the gold and russet of maple and oak cover the hills of Storm King and nearby Schunemunk Mountain, a 2,300-acre nature conservancy acquired by the Storm King foundation to keep condominiums and fast-food outlets from marring the views.

"What keeps me fascinated is that Storm King is an ever-changing environment," says architect Rutherford. "Hour by hour, season by season, the park evolves.

"There is always something new to see."

(SIDEBAR)

If you go . . .

The park is open from 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily between April 1 and Nov. 30. Admission is \$5, \$3 for seniors and students.

Storm King is east of Interstate 87 on Old Pleasant Hill Road, but these back-country highways aren't the easiest to navigate, so a map is helpful. A recorded telephone message provides directions: call 1-914-534-3115.

A picnic area is available at the center. Docents provide guided tours in the afternoons. There are also lectures, concerts and special events through the summer.

The list of rules is rather longish: no touching or climbing on sculptures, with the exception of two that were designed for seating; no fires, flying discs, balls, kites or dogs; picnicking only in designated areas.

The major exhibit for 1994 will be a dozen sculptures and six drawings by Mia Westerlund Roosen. Westerlund Roosen works in bronze, lead, cast concrete and encaustic. The show will be open May 14 through Oct. 31, 1994.

For more information, call the center: 1-914-534-3190.

Illustration

BW PHOTOS/Storm King Art Center: 'City on the High Mountain,' a black-painted steel sculpture by Louise Nevelson, rises 20 feet above the surrounding meadow. -- David Smith's bronze 'Personage of May' stands 6 feet tall and was created in 1957. -- Alexander Calder created 'The Arch' in 1975 out of black-painted steel. It soars to 56 feet in height.