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Growing art at the farm

Story and photo by Abby Luby



Black Angus Cows in a sculpture called "Red Cabin."

It's the herd of Black Angus cows shuffling between pieces of sculpture that's so exhilarating. Undoubtedly, bovine mingling around art is a rare site, but not if you are at the 100 acre art farm run by Collaborative Concepts. The site is just a few miles from the Garrison Golf Club on Old Albany Post Road and the land is owned by farmer Sandy Saunders, an art aficionado who last year was inspired to open his pastures to sculpture installations.

Now in its second season at the farm, Collaborative Concepts, a non-profit arts group founded in 1999, has invited both national and international artists to exhibit at Saunders Farm.

"We've had artists from New York, England and France," says Eric Arctander, one of the founding members of the group. The upcoming show is planned to open September 1 with work by some 50 artists.

Placing the Art

Conceptually, the sprawling pastures, old stone walls and majestic oaks are more an outdoor studio than a museum. When the sky's the limit, where do you put the artists' work?

There is a certain approach that members of Collaborative Concepts say distinguishes them from other outdoor venues. "This is not the formal layout you see at Storm King," stresses Herman Roggeman, artist and member of the group. "There is a dialogue that happens between us and the exhibiting artist. Here, the art is more spontaneous."

Artist and board member Kristen Kucer works with artists in getting a feel for the expanse of rolling hills and vistas.

"Artists have to experience the farm before they place their work," explains Kucer.

"Some artists come up here and camp out overnight to get a sense of the site." Kucer is on a site team whose members act as mentors to help artists place their work, emphasizing such things as the line-of-sight from one work to the other and "framing" within the topography.

Inviting artists to show

Last year was the first year the Saunders' farm was used to display art and featured 35 artists.

"Artists we choose are usually those who have exhibited before and are serious about art," says Kucer, herself working on a hillside patch where she is braiding the grasses. One of the pre-requisites for a proposed installation is that it is "cow resistant."

Apparently the beastie bovines can get totally immersed with some of the work. "Last year there was a piece made of red material hanging from a tree that got totally eaten by the cows," recalls Arctander. "Another was an

environmental work with grasses—the cows just saw it as a salad bar.”

Varied Work

Some of the work is permanent, such as the collaborative piece by Roggeman and Arctander called “Red Cabin, Green Field, Sky Varies.” You can see it at the entry gate. Your senses are fooled when seeing cows “inside” the red outlined house that from a distance appears three dimensional. Only as you walk closer do you realize the work is flat and that the cows are merely behind it.

“Havens Gate,” by Alex Uribe, is a stone wall with small wooden logs tilting over at one end, a textural contrast with the stone wall, which is topped off with pointed stones every few feet. Some of the work has been integral to the land, accenting boulders, trees and special vistas. Last year, works included porcelain bells, a piano, clay, cement, and wood.

The outdoor art experience

The experience of freely walking the Hudson Valley hills, eyeing a piece of artwork that changes as you move closer or further away is a very different viewing experience from seeing art on walls; here, the sky is the ceiling and the fields of Queen Anne’s Lace and purple clover are the floor. Scenic high points overlook the Hudson River on one side, and valleys and mountains on the other. “The challenge in the first year was getting people out here to see how great a space it is for exhibiting,” said Roggeman. “As soon as they saw it, they got excited about it.”

Not only did artists start to imagine all sorts of outdoor art, but the community also stepped forward to show its support. “We have received a grant from the Putnam Arts Council, which has been very helpful,” said Arctander. Businesses from Cold Spring to New York City have made donations as well.

The upcoming show is planned for September 1, 2007 and will run through October. “We show from Labor Day to Halloween,” says Arctander. The exhibition is free and can be viewed from 10 a.m. to dusk, Sept. 1 until Oct. 31. Visitors should dress appropriately for a walk in the country.

**Art Exhibit Opening, Saturday, September 1, 2-6 p.m.
(Rain Date September 2, 2-6 p.m.)**

**Mid Run Art Reception Saturday, October 6, 2-6pm.
(Rain Date: October 7, 2-6pm.)**

*Collaborative Concepts at Saunders Farm
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