

## Humanities 101 B

### Review of an Artistic Event

#### Big Rock Garden Park

Located in a tucked away space in a primarily residential area of Bellingham, Big Rock Park is a public yet secluded sculpture garden. The park holds 38 different sculptures. Though the park has only been open since the early 90's some of the sculptures were created in the 1980's. Most of them were created by artists within the Pacific Northwest, but a few were created by international artists. The exhibits are permanent and are seamlessly integrated into the natural setting of the park. Most of the sculptures were crafted with materials that appear very natural, but even the sculptures that seem less organic elicit a sense of balance and symmetry. Many of the sculptures interact with their surroundings seamlessly. The negative spaces in both the man-made exhibits and the transparent leaves of the trees above transform the sunlight so that it is both diffused and purposeful. Even the paths that guide the viewer through the exhibits are organic in shape.

One of my favorite pieces is a new exhibit titled Swell. A hammered aluminum platform floats between two trees. Its edges are rounded and its body is curved. The artist, Aaron Loveitt, created it in memory of a Bellingham resident who loved Bellingham for its connection to both the forest and the sea. The sculpture itself resembles a shimmering wave. When I viewed it, I felt that it was less like a literal wave and more like energy. It seemed as though a universal connection between humans, balance, and the natural world, one that has always been there, had suddenly become visible. It elicited a sense of whimsy around the trees. I was very quickly curious about how mankind interacted with this wave, whether it be made of water or energy.

Close to Swell both in geography and principle, Positive Spirit also brought my relationship with nature into question. The sculpture is made of steel and cast glass, pointed and curved into an ellipse. The interior of the shape is steel with a cast glass center. The steel has had flying bird shapes cut out of it. A few of the shapes have been filled with cast glass birds, which mimic ice in their textures. The piece sits on a porch that overlooks a hillside covered with trees. At this particular point in the day, the sun was becoming low in the sky and was shining through the glass birds and center of the piece. Being an outdoor piece, the steel was rusted. Interestingly, the artist makes no mention of this piece on her website and I have been able to find little information on it. From my own experience with it, I can say that it might be in reference to the cyclical nature of the world around us. We are born, we die, and somewhere in between we hopefully shed light on those we are close to. We are made of the materials that exist in the earth and eventually we are returned. The use of the negative space to create the birds is in reference to the spirit. The birds are simple shapes made my negative space. We sense their presence even though they aren't physically there.

Endangered Species addresses humanity more directly than the other sculptures I have discussed. Geometric cut stones of different heights create a ring filled with white sand. Within the sand are multiple polished stone human heads. They appear lifeless and as though they are slowly sinking into the sand. This piece was produced by the Hungarian artist Georg Schmerholz. Once again, I was unable to find this artist's own interpretation of this piece of art or the date that it was created. That being said, I think that the piece clearly demonstrates that we are losing our own humanity. I feel that in any cultural context we can see how this sculpture may allude to human ignorance. Rather than being present, experiencing our feelings and our surroundings, we prefer to protect ourselves by burying our heads in the sand.

The Big Rock Garden truly speaks to the culture present in Bellingham. I consider myself to be fairly apathetic in regards to the outdoors, yet I couldn't help feeling the link between myself and my environment. I also found myself pondering the magnificence and significance of the setting we live in. With the advent of climate change, it seems that we often speak of the adverse effects of human interaction with the world. This sculpture garden, however, with each piece of art a site-specific mouthpiece of the natural world, speaks more to the power of positive contact between humans and the environment.