

The Sculpture Mile

Various locations around Madison. Free. (860) 762-2624; hollycroft.org. On view until next summer. Walking tours Saturdays at 11 a.m. beginning in Scranton Park.

Imagine a museum with no walls and no admission fees, where you can touch the objects on display—even caress them if you're so moved. Imagine that this museum is open 24 hours a day and 365 days a year.

Since 2001, Madison has hosted an outdoor exhibition collectively known as The Sculpture Mile. Around Madison's town center you'll find sculpture by such renowned American artists as Tom Doyle, Elliott Offner, Gilbert Boro, Philip Grausman, James Caudle, Masaru Bando and Carol Kreeger Davidson. In the seven years the mile has been installed in Madison, 182 pieces by 82 different sculptors have been placed on view.

Thirty-five new pieces have just been installed on traffic medians, in residents' front yards, in front of banks and drugstores and libraries. They are as big as water towers and as small as stuffed animals, made of bronze, lead, brass, plastic, stainless steel and wood. Some are as beautiful and organic as nature itself. Others are, well, slightly kitschy (misshapen dogs and a chain saw sculpture of a chainsaw). Others are baffling.

The best part about Madison sculpture mile is that there's so much of it, and so many different riffs on the medium itself. Take Old Saybrook-based Irene Neal, whose free-form colorful plastic work hangs on the wall outside the venerable town library. Though it looks at first like a gigantic wad of chewed-up psychedelic bubble gum, it's oddly compelling. Then there is Anthony Padovano's white marble "Narcissus," an elegant take on traditional and classical forms that adds the freakily Freudian touch of a sculpted image staring back from the

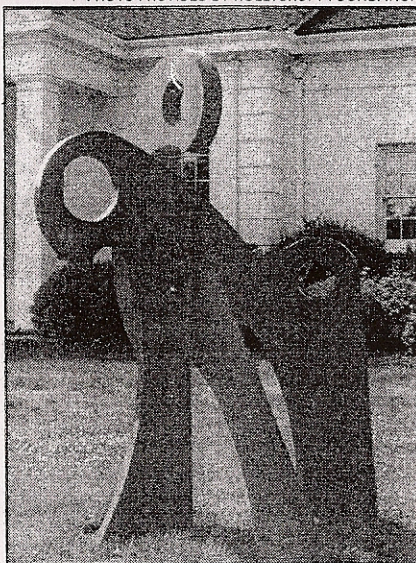
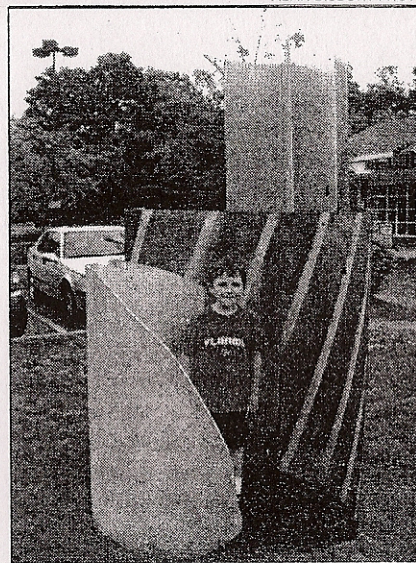


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ALAN BISBORT PHOTO

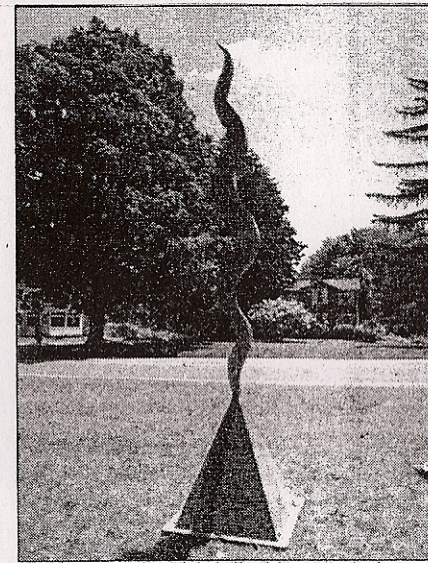


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The Madison Sculpture Mile, where you can touch the art.

water at the longing gaze of its subject.

If you want to see the most sculptures in the shortest amount of time, the largest concentration are found at Scranton Park. All of this artwork is courtesy of the wonderfully quixotic Hollycroft Foundation, an Ivoryton-based nonprofit.

What began in 1991, when Bill Bendig displayed a few pieces of sculpture on his property in Ivoryton, morphed into a donation-sponsored and volunteer-run foundation. Bendig and his kindred spirits have, over the past two decades, staged a mile's worth of sculpture in Ivoryton, Middletown, West Haven and, for the past eight years, in Madison.

The Madison Mile's profile has steadily grown, so that artists whose work is selected pay for the cost of having their work displayed. (Most of the displayed art is, in fact,

for sale). The quality of the work has improved dramatically, as a result, too. Among those who are currently on view are Roxbury-based wood sculptor Tom Doyle, one of the rising stars of the sculpture world, whose massive works require careful installation; and Anthony Padovano, a Guggenheim fellow who has three remarkably different pieces in Madison. Old Lyme-based Gilbert Boro, who's lectured at Harvard and RISD, created the red stainless steel Calder-like "Tres Gatos," the first thing you notice upon driving into town.

Joan Baer, a docent who leads walking tours beginning in Scranton Park, is particularly fond of James Caudle's work, whose unique hammered-lead "Quartet" hangs outside the town library, and Elaine Godowsky, whose ceramic totem "Ramblin' Roses" is one of Scranton Park's showpieces. "She has figured out a way to mix and fire

her clay so that it can withstand outdoor New England weather. It keeps water from getting in cracks and then freezing and breaking the piece."

The Sculpture Mile in Madison is varied enough for most people to acquire at least an appreciative taste. It certainly did that for me.

editor@newhavenadvocate.com

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