

Art of Olive Green

Towards Art, an Ethics & a Laugh

Archives

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Museum: Grounds for Sculpture (NJ)

Posted by *getraer* on *December 31, 2014*

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New Jersey's Grounds for Sculpture truly has something for everyone—even people you wouldn't like at all. As such it's a wonderfully provocative stroll through eclectic aesthetics, certain to swing you from rapture to riposte with only a bit of manicured nature as a buffer between. Bring someone who makes you laugh as there will be quip-bait behind every shrubbery.

Founded by J. Seward Johnson of Johnson & Johnson fame, its original purpose was to showcase his schmaltzy, derivative works, like Impressionist paintings rendered in 3D and poker-players around a table with a chair empty for a visitor to mug in. Here he prefigured participatory art and its invitation to the selfie. Not far from this stand-in, or sit-in, is my favorite work on the grounds: Peter Lundberg's splendid "Where is Geometry?", two hulking interleaved gyres in concrete and stainless steel. It spins such playfulness from weighty and unyielding materials that it deserves a careful 360° survey, ideally with the sun at different points along its arc. (Though I struggled to photograph this properly, for once I may have done better than the [museum's site](http://www.groundsfor Sculpture.org/Artwork/Where-is-Geometry) (<http://www.groundsfor Sculpture.org/Artwork/Where-is-Geometry>.)

Elizabeth Strong-Cuevas' (<http://www.sc-sculpture.com/sculpture/index.html>) hollow fabricated aluminum spaces were another high point, but they don't give much sense of her [stylistic breadth](http://www.arttimesjournal.com/art/Art_Essays/Spring_13_Elizabeth_Strong_Cuevas/Thoughts_on_Creation.html) (http://www.arttimesjournal.com/art/Art_Essays/Spring_13_Elizabeth_Strong_Cuevas/Thoughts_on_Creation.html). The plaques label her work without her first name, a curious decision in a male-dominated venue and field.

There are a few kinetic pieces like a swinging totemic bell that rings somewhat reluctantly and some steel plates mounted on a vertical rack that you can clang vigorously (and have a weird headache for hours after...I'd have called it "Headplate"), but the predominant presence is that of Johnson and his protégées, like the coyly-named India Blake who it turns out is his daughter. Sneak around them to find Christoph Spath's "Fluxus" in serpentine, concrete, plexi and LED illumination and Jay Wholley's "La Casa de Bernarda Alba", which bronze with its black patina references the black worn by the all-female cast of Lorca's play of the same name. It's clearly a lost-foam casting, making much of the torn-away Styrofoam corner where the beading of the raw material is unmistakable.

Zero Higashida's "Sinjin" is a painful-looking angular node of sputtery-welded stainless plates with hammered contours. Having worked stainless with a hammer, I can only hope he used a pneumatic planishing hammer, even if he has very good health insurance. Though thinking about the workmanship hurts, the gnarled texture is fascinating.

Labeling was an issue at Grounds, with some of the pieces' plaques missing and the maps difficult to read, with certain landscape features missing even where the sculptures were numbered. Numbering was not sequential, so you couldn't find plaques by area; "187" could be by "7" or "291". Some visitors cursed their maps and I finally gave up. A great mobile app would provide GPS-based directions on which pieces you were near and how to get to those you want to see. Because of the labeling issues, I never found out who made what we called "Virginia Woolf, by Ayn Rand."

There were quite a few fun pieces of riverstone played against steel stock, like John Van Alstine's "Stone Pile", Kevin Lyles' "Passage", and a huge steel-stock "S" filled with riverstones and Tesla coil-like structures, seemingly secured by ropes and belted by an



(<https://artofolivegreen.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/lundberg-where-is-geometry.jpg>)

Peter Lundberg: Where is Geometry?

incongruous fiberglass donut painted to seem skylike. I found a few stone works, of which Ernest Shaw's "Sumo" was my favorite, but I think I missed several and saw others but in the distance.

I may snoot at the Johnson & Co. works, but their creator set up a strong foundation for sculptural arts, and the work does appeal to people who like figurative sculpture they can recognize. Since sculpture, so often outdoor and public, should be for everyone, it would be a slight to the commons to exclude such pieces. Themes aside, anyone who objects to the painterly coloring of the sculptures would do well to remember that the canonical Greek sculptures of antiquity were themselves brightly painted (<http://io9.com/5616498/ultraviolet-light-reveals-how-ancient-greek-statues-really-looked>), originally more germane to a state fair than a museum.



<https://artofolivegreen.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/strong-cuevas-two-face-telescope.jpg>

Elizabeth Strong-Cuevas: Two Face Telescope



<https://artofolivegreen.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/wholley-la-casa-de-bernarda-alba.jpg>

Jay Wholley: La Casa de Bernarda Alba



<https://artofolivegreen.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/higashada-sinjin.jpg>

Zero Higashida: Sinjin



https://artofolivegreen.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/john-van-alstine_s-stone-pile.jpg

John Van Alstine: Stone Pile



<https://artofolivegreen.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/ernest-shaw-sumo.jpg>

Ernest Shaw: Sumo



<https://artofolivegreen.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/lyles-passage.jpg>

Kevin Lyles: Passage



(<https://artofolivegreen.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/harrison-mirage.jpg>)
Ekaterina Harrison: Mirage