

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

ART EXPLORATIONS

Outdoor sculpture gains prominence

Guided tours
ongoing every
Tuesday

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Salt Spring is famously well known as an artistic community, but with most art viewed inside galleries and studios, its consumption has often been an indoor experience.

In recent years outdoor sculpture installations have started to take that experience into gardens, fields and even parking lots, sponsored by private owners yet placed where anyone can see and enjoy them.

Bonny O'Connor, who owns the Hastings House with partner Jerry Parks, has overseen the inclusion of sculpture both in the hotel's private grounds and in a public-access trail on the property. She explained via email why they have found it important to support the expansion of art into the outdoor realm.

"We have always been interested in promoting the artists on Salt Spring, and have exhibited local artwork



Ben Goodman's Homage to the Land.

in the rooms and public rooms since we bought Hastings House in 1995. The grounds are beautiful in their own right, but the woods, pastures and meadows have been under-utilized," she explained.

O'Connor said those areas have been increasingly enjoyed ever since a suggestion from local artist Morley Myers to develop a sculpture garden and a trail, which links up to more outdoor exhibitions at Salt Spring Woodworks.

"It was Morley's original idea that large sculptures could eventually be installed all over Salt Spring, and that is happening to some extent, as in Grace Point Square," said O'Connor.

Positive response from hotel guests and

the island community will likely bring more sculpture out into the open, as O'Connor said Myers is working on bringing in new artists and promoting the island as an arts destination.

For any outdoor sculpture, the environment plays an enormous part in how the artwork is seen. The outside world provides the space and a backdrop that's not available indoors, as Ben Goodman, a curator of the Hastings House sculptures, explained during a recent tour of the grounds.

The context of outdoor space can work to suggest or change the meaning of a piece, while the elements enact physical changes over time. For someone who works

with wood or metal, there's an allure to the undirected and gradual changes to patina, wearing and shape.

Goodman's installation Homage to the Land is an example of how the outdoor context informs the meaning of the work.

His small table, set for two diners, sits within a fenced area of the herb and flower garden. The piece is meant as a metaphor for the land as provider, "providing food for the body, as well as food for the soul," Goodman said. Placed indoors, the installation would lose its meaning; outdoors, it becomes the focus of contemplation and discussion.

Ian Thomas is another artist whose conceptual work gains new layers of meaning through its outdoor setting.

His piece Swallow's Meadow is an old, rusted bed frame with mattress and coverings, placed under low alders on the public sculpture trail. Thomas has exhibited the bed as part of a larger installation many times within the gallery space, in a series of work that addresses his parents' deaths and his complicated relationship with them through his lifetime.

Thomas said he chose to include this piece partly because

the existing theme of change and decay would be underscored by its exposure to the elements.

"I liked the idea of it being outside, on the basis of it being a big metal structure that will gradually change as the years go by," Thomas said.

The placement also represents the soul's release into the outside environment, after confinement in the nursing home.

For pieces that are not as conceptual, the outdoor space provides the setting to appreciate larger pieces with enough distance.

"Best of all is the space allowed, which is not possible in a gallery. It gives the art its due," Goodman observed.

Pieces like David James' Heaven and Earth are perhaps best appreciated outside. The Quebec-based artist has set a highly polished stainless steel globe in a heavy base of black granite. Reflecting the sea, sky and sun, the sculpture almost looks like a mirror into a magical dimension.

Goodman conducts weekly public tours of the private sculpture garden (by reservation), while the sculpture trail is open to the public from 9 a.m. to dusk every day from March to November.