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Outdoor Sculpture Parks

Offer the Best
of Both Worlds

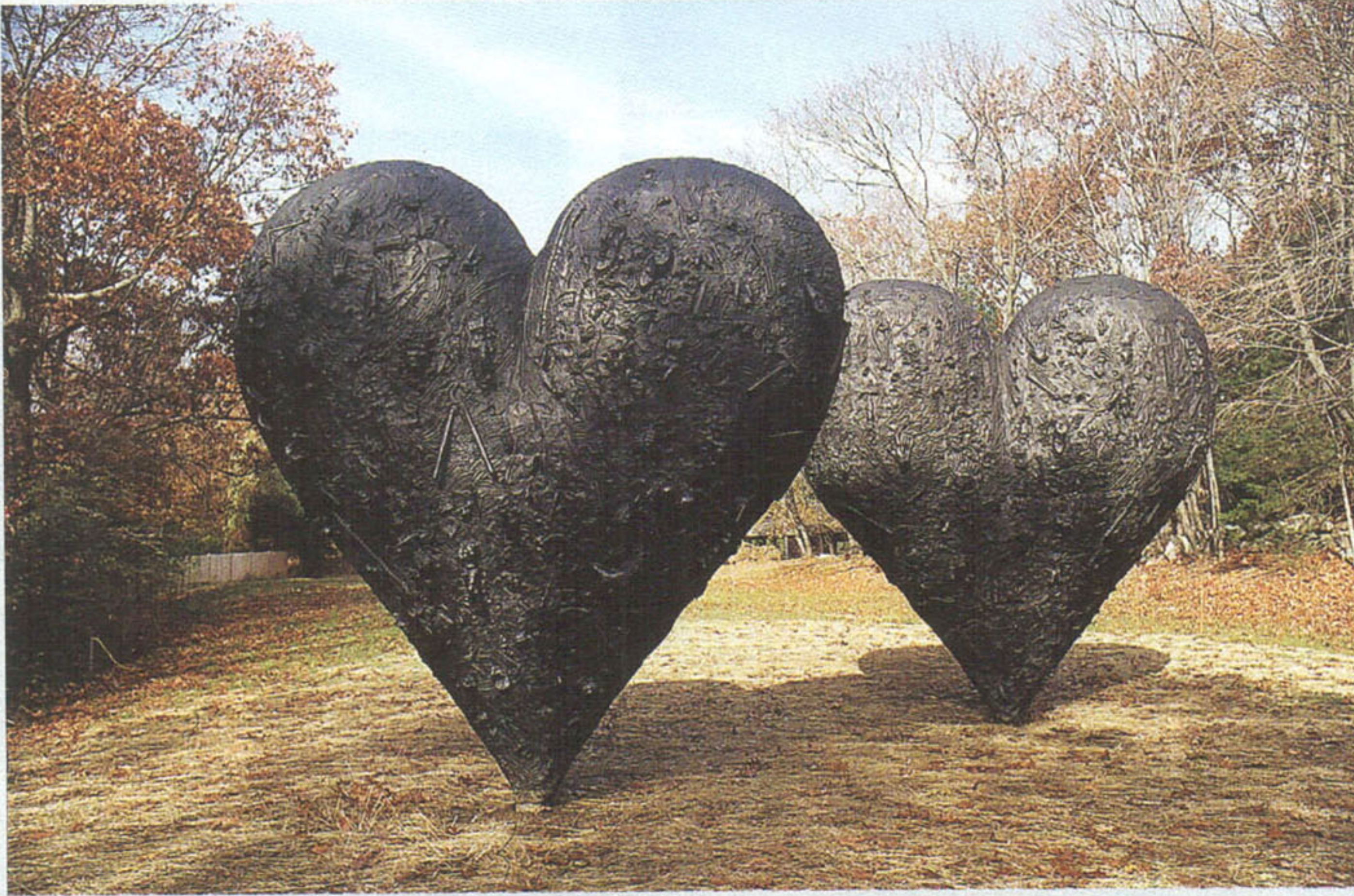
With the earth as its floor and the sky as its ceiling, sculpture displayed outdoors in park-like settings has become a natural alternative to traditional museums.

▲ The expansive fields peppered with monumental sculpture at Storm King Art Center attract visitors from around the world. Pictured are three sculptures by Mark di Suvero, including "Pyramidian" (1987-98), "Mon Père, Mon Père," (1973-75) and "Mother Peace" (1969-70).



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▲ "Study in Arcs" (1957) by David Smith, a steel sculpture at Storm King Art Center



◀ “Two Big Black Hearts,” bronze sculptures by Jim Dine, 1985, are on view at the DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park.

▼ “Listening Stone” a granite sculpture by Joseph Wheelwright, 1995, is featured in the current exhibit, “Joseph Wheelwright: Stone Heads and Tree Figures” through May 16, 2004 at the DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park.

BY JULIE MEHTA
ABN Contributing Editor

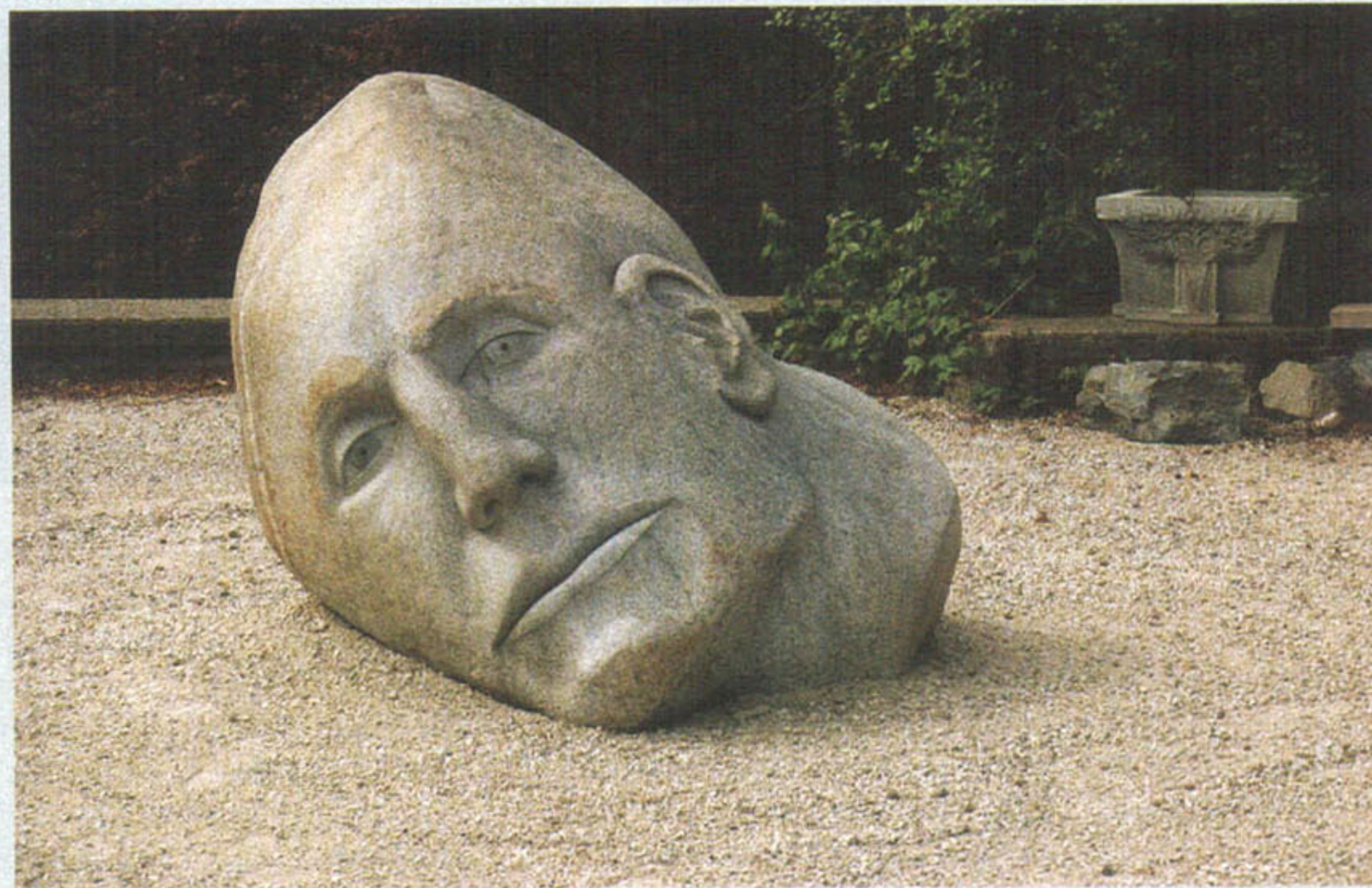
Summertime. For many, a visit to a museum or gallery can't compare to the lure of basking in long-awaited warm weather. Outdoor sculpture parks bring these worlds together, allowing visitors a way to soak up great art along with the sun's rays.

“Sculpture parks are growing in popularity in a big way,” said Nick Capasso, curator of DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park near Boston. “First, there are more artists working outdoors these days. Also, certain museums have open land attached to them and have found this is a good idea for programming those lands. And some municipalities have seen they can give an economic jumpstart to a neighborhood through beautification. Outdoor sculpture is a very visible way to do that.”

Thousands of outdoor sculptures are on display all over the country at privately owned parks, public art museums, universities, corporate headquarters and annual shows, featuring works ranging from antique to contemporary, figurative to abstract, miniature to monumental.

A Sampling of the Best

As its name implies, Storm King Art Center in Mountainville, N.Y., is royalty among sculpture parks. About an hour north of New York City, Storm King features more than 100 sculptures set on 500 acres of sprawling farm fields surrounded by the Hudson Highlands. “Our collection is post-1945, mostly abstract, mostly American artists,” said Director and Chief Curator David Collens. “Historically, American artists have been the ones who have reacted to vast landscapes like Storm King. European artists have been more formal. This is a wild, natural landscape especially suitable for artists like Mark DiSuvero and Alexander Calder.”



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A temporary exhibit of 18 of Calder's later works is in its third and final year at the park. Calder's “The Arch,” a 50-foot-tall black-painted steel structure, is in the permanent collection, as are works by Louise Nevelson, Isamu Noguchi, Barbara Hepworth and David Smith, whose 13 metal works kicked off Storm King's sculpture collection back in 1967. Though they compose only a fraction of Storm King's holdings, site-specific works make the most of the stunning terrain. A site-specific 2,278-foot-long stone Storm King Wall by Andy Goldsworthy snakes through the woods, and the four giant steel plates of Richard Serra's “Schunnemunk Fork” rise out of the gently rolling grasslands.

Site-specific works are the core of the collection at Laumeier Sculpture Park in St. Louis. “Mary Miss's Pool Complex: Orchard Valley” is a series of wooden pavilions and paths set around an abandoned pool, which visitors can

experience directly by walking through it. Beverly Pepper's “Cromlech Glen” is a sort of earthen amphitheater planted with trees.

“The topography here is dramatic with an upper ridge cutting across from north to south and then the land dropping off in layers,” said Director Glen Gentele. “It's a very different kind of museum—the earth is our floor, the trees our walls, and the sky our ceiling.”

The park's land belonged to Henry and Matilda Laumeier, who bequeathed the property to the people of St. Louis with the stipulation that the natural setting be kept intact. Laumeier opened to the public in 1976 and today displays more than 80 works on its 100 acres at any given time. A two-year exhibit of four monumental steel sculptures by Mark DiSuvero opens this October. “You can see rabbits, birds and trees at the same time you look at the art,” said Gentele. “These

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OUTDOOR SCULPTURE PARKS



► Ursula von Rydingsvard's "Untitled" (1988-89), is situated on a nature trail at Laumeier Sculpture Park.



▲ "Hats Off" by Alexander Calder at the PepsiCo Sculpture Garden in Purchase, N.Y.

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works are not behind Plexi-glass. They have the natural lighting of the sun and are exposed to the elements 365 days a year. They withstand rain, wind and sleet."

One thing outdoor sculptures are usually protected from is human contact, since visitors are asked to refrain from touching most sculptures. Not so at DeCordova. "If sculptures can stand up to what winter does to them, they can certainly withstand what people do. Gently touching the sculptures lets people experience them tactilely as well as visually," said Capasso.

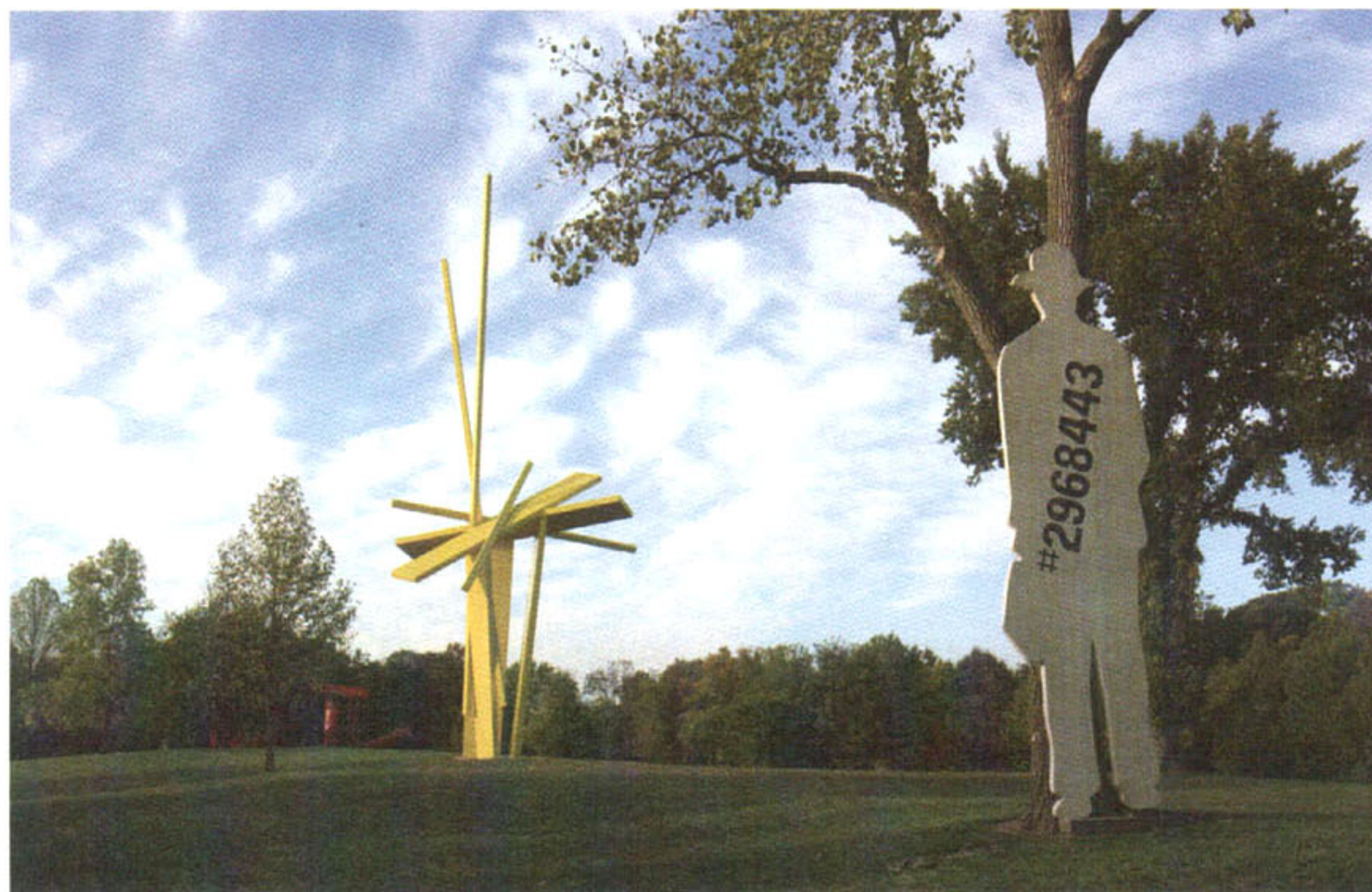
A collection of more than a dozen monumental stone heads and tree figures by New England sculptor Joseph Wheelwright opened in June. There is also a smattering of permanent holdings by artists like George Rickey and Alexander Liberman, as well as site-specific works. "Coming to the park is a form of outdoor recreation that's aesthetic instead of athletic," said Capasso.

It is especially aesthetic at Brookgreen Gardens in Pawleys Island, S.C., where the world's largest display of American figurative sculpture is set among centuries-old live oaks and more than 2,000 kinds of native plants. "There are so few places like this where you can forget about your cell phone and e-mail and just listen to the birds and look at the flowers," said Helen Benso, vice president of marketing. "It's a great place to come and refresh your spirit."

The oldest sculpture garden in the country, Brookgreen has more than 550 pieces dating from the 19th century to the present. Highlights include sculptures by Anna Hyatt Huntington such as "Joan of Arc," wildlife sculptures by Marshall Fredericks and the angel figure of "Benediction" by Daniel Chester French.

Sculpture Park Fever

Even established indoor museums like the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., have found adding sculpture parks often draws a new audience. The Seattle Art Museum will join these institutions with the opening of Olympic Sculpture Park in 2005. The nine-acre park will offer



◀ John Henry's "Tatlin's Sentinel" (2002) is flanked by Alexander Liberman's "The Way" (1972-80) (I) and Jonathan Borofsky's "Man With Briefcase at #2968443" (1986) on Laumeier Sculpture Park's field.

access to Puget Sound and views of the city skyline and Mount Rainier, in addition to a constantly changing roster of contemporary works.

It's not just museums that benefit from having a sculpture park. The Donald M. Kendall Sculpture Gardens at the PepsiCo corporate headquarters in Purchase, N. Y., boasts one of the most impressive collections of outdoor sculpture in the country. "In the late '60s when PepsiCo decided to move from New York City to Purchase, the image of corporations was smokestacks. Kendall wanted to create a dynamic and uplifting space that all the employees and the public could enjoy," said Manager of Corporate Information Elaine Palmer.

Today, the public can still obtain visitor's passes and view the 45 sculptures by artists like Auguste Rodin, Henry Moore and George Segal. "The gardens are designed to set off the sculptures," continued Palmer. "Calder's bright red "Hats Off" has blue spruce planted behind it. Sculptures and gardens work in tandem to create a beautiful space."

Universities too have found sculpture gardens to be a welcome addition. The Franklin D. Murphy Sculpture Garden at UCLA displays about 70 works by Rodin

and Smith, among others, in a highly landscaped environment. "You can see students having lunch or studying there any time of year," said Curatorial Associate Claudine Dixon. "You don't feel like you're in L.A. when you're there. It's an oasis."

In Chicago, the annual Navy Pier Walk exhibit offers not an escape from but an enhancement to the urban environment. More than 7 million visitors will view an assortment of sculptures throughout the Navy Pier this summer. In 2002, more than \$1 million worth of sculptures were sold.

Another major showcase of new outdoor sculpture is the annual Loveland Sculpture Invitational Show and Sale in Loveland, Colo. More than 300 artists will converge there this Aug. 8 to 10 to display their work. "The sculptures range from small to monumental and come in every medium you can imagine—bronze, wood, stone, marbles," said Assistant Show Coordinator Teri Armstrong. More than 25,000 people attended last year, from collectors and gallery owners to corporate buyers and universities.

Clearly, artists who think outside the museum box are gaining more exposure and acceptance as they take their art to new heights. "Some artists simply want to build things that are too big for a museum. Or

they want the viewer to interact with nature instead of architecture," said Capasso. It's an interaction that many find compelling enough to continue long after the warmth of summer has faded, drawn by the dynamism of art placed against an ever-changing backdrop.

"In winter, there are bare trees, in spring the flowers bloom, in summer it's all very green, in fall the leaves are changing," said Gentile. "You'd have to paint a gallery a different color every day to have that kind of constant change." **ABN**

SOURCES

- Storm King Art Center, (845) 534-3115
- Laumeier Sculpture Park, (314) 821-1209
- Decordova Museum and Sculpture Park, (781) 259-8355
- Brookgreen Gardens, (843) 235-6000
- Donald M. Kendall Sculpture Gardens at PepsiCo, (914) 253-2000
- Franklin D. Murphy Sculpture Garden (at UCLA), (310) 443-7003
- Loveland Sculpture Invitational, (970) 663-7467
- Seattle Art Museum, (206) 654-315

For a listing of outdoor sculpture parks in the U.S. and abroad, visit www.artnut.com/usa.html.