

Comments from Diane Relf, Chair of Simply Elemental 2018

Each year Simply Elemental develops its own theme as the work is installed. One year it was full of interactive pieces, another found mushrooms popping up all over. This year Simply Elemental 2018 has evolved with two themes. One is environmental consciousness: concerns for the environment and how we use our resources are evident in much of the work. Pieces address the damaging impact of waste and both the need to and the ability to reuse and recycle materials to stop the waste stream that goes from our homes and offices to land and ocean. Others show how repurposed materials bring focus to the joy of life.

The second theme is music and motion. Music and motion are established by the performance artists, who have joined Simply Elemental for the first time. In addition, many of the installation pieces move gently in the breeze twisting and turning, fluttering and shimmering.

These two themes blend to make us realize deeply the value and joy of life surrounded by nature and the fragility of that bond if we fail to respect and nurture the life of plants around us.

Adjacent to the parking lot at the Pavilion, the Rain Garden contains "Cattails" by Dave Angle, that move in the wind. Made from discarded remodeling metals, they help us realize how many resources have been buried in our landfills when old houses are torn down or remodeled. In "Gazing Cube" by Terry Ellen Carter, we see repurposed glass and mirrors reflecting and intriguing viewers. "Bleached Floral Coral" by Diane Relf is made from draped cement-on-towels which were a practice piece at a workshop offered by the Hahn Garden. They bring to mind the impact of pollution on ocean coral, though others see acid rain as the killing culprit on this life form. "Courtship" by Michael Collver and his teen age daughter Lauren is a recycled, upcycled spider with arms in motion to attract a mate. "Birdie Badminton" is a charming piece with lots of motion and tremendous visual puns, that remind us how much we love our feathered friends and how important their role is in our living a healthy satisfying life. We have great responsibilities for taking care of their environment.

The works of Driving Force, a group of local artists (Judy Lindberg, Jennifer Lovejoy, Shelley O'Connner, Anne Panella, Terry Warthen, and Linda Correll) who have worked together for more that 15 years, shows the inspiration they provide each other and the unique and fascinating ways each shows her love of nature. In their own words, "Inspired by a dried seed pod and the representation of beginning/end, life/death, and hope for tomorrow," "Inspired by natural light on the forest floor and the abundance of colors," "TheTree of Life motif within a circle provides archetypal symbolism along with a colorful woven garden accent." Another group of individuals that work together to present art is the New River Gourd Society (Paul Zenner, Suzy Edlund, Anne Panella, Delbert Jones and Linda Correll) Their titles alone give the vision of music and motion "Singing the Winds Song", "Twisting in the Wind", "Minding the Wind."

Art brings awareness and with that change. In museums, galleries, and independent shows throughout the world, we are seeing the work of Trash artists and Junk artists join the ranks of Recycled artists to express modern culture by repurposing and reusing materials whether from a dollar store or the trash can.

The first piece installed this year, Passage was created by Joanna and Donald Sunshine, awarded artists who have shown throughout Virginia and Florida and from Chicago to Hawaii. Both past their eightieth birthday and married for 62 years, their work reflects both their name and their long and successful marriage. This repurposed piece is constructed in bright, delightfully-colored materials from many of life's daily sources: hardware store, dollar store, and fabric store. In their own words "It is intended that this installation, as a destination, will provide a joyful experience leading to a special place." We can all hope that a passage through this tunnel of color will transfer some of their special joy and sunshine to ourselves and bless us with long committed relationships.

Another work Alternate Universes by Diane Relf and Dave Angle consists of three giant wheels held aloft by connecting posts, each interpreting the evolution of an individual universe and how different, original, and beautiful each is. The rims of old wagon wheels hold discarded plate steel in shapes left from multiple cuttings and fabrications. Each giant circle carries the viewer into a different universe, constructed by rethinking refuse.

Trashy, by noted local artist Robbi Sallee, is according to the artist, "a creature born of the 'plastic trash islands' that we have created in our natural seas. I wanted to create a mythical creature using non-biodegradable trash, aka plastics. His body contains 2 weeks of plastic water bottles from my brother, bubble wrap from various packages and a year's worth of used coffee bags. I hope he makes you think about PRE-cycling as well as recycling." We choose to locate him a pond that is not functioning properly, to bring focus to the damage that can be done to our waters. This pond can and will be repaired, but the oceans cannot be repaired but rather must be protected.

Richard Hammer's work Grandma's Gorgeous Glass Gazebo is according to the artist "an upcycler's DREAM! We take the best of Grandma's fine glassware and crystal and attach it to a 4' wide by 4' deep by 12' high church cathedral gazebo" made from metal.

Discarded computer discs become Iridescence in the hands of high school students under the direction of teacher Laura Graham, a curtain of beauty shimmering in the breeze as it hangs from a tree.

The Power of the Purse by the NRV Master Gardeners led by Gwen Ewing, uses a tower of planted purses to make an environmental statement "Women have great control over how they use their financial resources to make the environment healthier and more beautiful and improve the quality of life in their community". This installation contains inspiration for recycling, sharing, and creative thought.

These and many other pieces will entrance, inform and inspire you. Open August 1 to Sept 30 at the Hanh Horticulture Garden on the Virginia Tech Campus. Artists Reception is August 5th from 2 to 4 PM with music by Panda Bag and performance by Bubble Man. Open to the public at no charge.