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Art Commentary



SCULPTURE AT SOUTHAMPTON COLLEGE AND LONGHOUSE

As different as the campus of Southampton College and the gardens of LongHouse Reserve are, their current installations are oddly similar. From a formal perspective, we can certainly compare John Sanders' shovels stuck in the ground at the College to Dale Chihuly's thin glass rods protruding from the earth: both configurations are vertical, linear, and lacking dimensionality.

Sanders' installation, "Grove," is more conceptual, however, somehow recalling the rows and rows of gravesites at Arlington National Cemetery. Or the rows and rows (groves) of trees planted in Israel commemorating the dead. At least that's the immediate, instinctual impression created for this critic. This impression is not as unusual as one might imagine: the shovels, gravesites and trees are all established on hallowed ground. There are differences, of course. The graves and trees are places where life is celebrated by honoring the dead. We're not sure that the shovels are celebrating life and learning, which the College represents. In fact, the installation does the opposite, suggesting death and destruction to academia, not the renewal and building which shovels often represent.

There's no doubt, however, that the sculpture at LongHouse Reserve signifies life, with its glorious flowers, sparkling ponds, and meandering paths. The diverse, contemporary works are scattered throughout the grounds in such a way that it's an inspiring act of discovery when we come upon them.

Consider Roy Lichtenstein's "House," a 1999 fiberglass piece that literally "hangs out" in the woods, attached seemingly to tree branches. It also seems incongruent in the natural setting, but then again, that's the LongHouse's strength: providing surprises in a meditative setting.

Louise Nevelson's "Frozen Laces – Four" offers another contradictory diversity, with its corten steel material and unusual geometric design. It's a "busy" work, compared to Lichtenstein's piece, and may also appear out-of-place in the wooded setting. Another sculpture by, Lynda Bengliss, attracts our attention as well, although it's not a new piece. Again, the work looms in front of us, like a huge monster on the march. While Ms. Bengliss' big and bold sculpture is at odds with the delicate nature that surrounds it, the contradiction is stunning and effective.

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