

State of the Art

A PHOTOGRAPHIC TOUR OF THE HILL'S OUTDOOR SCULPTURES



An abstract bronze by one of the early twentieth century's leading sculptors. A larger-than-life statue of a mythical Greek hero made of repurposed car bumpers. An ancient-seeming stone cairn, crafted in modern times, situated in the midst of a bird sanctuary.

Those and many other works comprise Cornell's collection of outdoor art—more than two dozen pieces, sprinkled throughout East Hill, that delight the eye, surprise the visitor, and welcome the returning alum. “Good outdoor sculpture can enliven and punctuate the built environment of the campus—or in the case of the Botanic Gardens, it can encourage people to think in new ways about how they see and appreciate the natural world,” says Ellen Avril, the Johnson Museum's chief curator. “When you encounter outdoor sculpture, it's a different way of engaging with art; when you go to a museum you're seeking it out, but encountering outdoor sculpture can be an unexpected experience. It ranges from people who don't notice anything and walk right by, to those who say, ‘Oh, what's that?’ and want to find out more.”

During a recent stint as the museum's interim director, Avril co-chaired a committee that oversees Cornell's outdoor art, both permanent and temporary. Any member of the University community can submit a proposal to the committee—comprising a dozen members including the directors of the Cornell Council for the Arts, the Botanic Gardens, and the grounds department—detailing such information as the work's planned length of exhibition, estimated cost (and sources of revenue to pay for it), proposed siting, dimensions, and artistic intent. The committee's creation two years ago formalized a process that had long been somewhat haphazard; among

its aims is not only to curate new acquisitions in a more intentional and methodical way, but to ensure more regular maintenance of the permanent collection, including inspecting and photographing each piece annually. “I'm a true believer that as a campus, our landscapes should be part of our classroom,” says David Cutter '84, BS '85, who co-chairs the committee in his role as the University's landscape architect. “Art is an important part of that.”

A decade and a half ago, the concern that Cornell's outdoor art collection might be under-noticed and under-appreciated inspired Nancy Cooke McAfee '63 to undertake a methodical survey of its holdings. An art historian by profession—she spent eighteen years at the Cleveland Museum of Art—who was then living in Ithaca and volunteering at the Johnson, McAfee did extensive research, including contacting some of the artists. “There are some really wonderful pieces out there,” she says. “I wanted more people to discover them; a lot of them are hidden away in places you might not normally go.”

The following is a visual tour of much of Cornell's outdoor art. For space and logistical reasons, it's not a comprehensive one; at press time, for instance, a piece at the Vet college was in storage due to construction. And while the Arts Quad depictions of Ezra and Andrew (and the homage to Touchdown the Bear outside Teagle) are iconic, they're not included here, as we've made a distinction between art and memorial statues. “Outdoor art adds a whole other level to the campus,” Cutter observes. “You may just be passing, thinking about going to class or how cold the wind is blowing—and suddenly you see something and stop and spend time in the space. It makes you think differently about where you are.” >

← REMEMBRANCE (painted steel, 1988)

David Stromeyer

LOCATION: HOY ROAD, ACROSS FROM RHODES HALL

This brightly colored work, owned by the Johnson Museum, was commissioned by Alpha Epsilon Pi brothers in memory of fellow member Joseph Brender '55, a U.S. Navy pilot who was lost at sea during the 1958 Formosa crisis.



← **BARE BONES (Indiana limestone, 1980)**

Jeff Burtch '68

LOCATION: NEAR CORNELL HOSPITAL
FOR ANIMALS ENTRANCE

"As a sculptor, I work mostly with stone, wood, metal, and ferro-cement, creating allusions to the human figure, to bones, and to the physiology of living growth and movement," Burtch says on his website. "The inter-relationship of mass and space is always characteristic. What is not present becomes as important to the viewer's eyes as what is." Another Burtch work that's normally on view at the Vet college, the DNA-themed *Genetic Self-Portrait*, is currently in storage due to construction.

↓ **RED WINGS (metal, 1983)**

Student project

LOCATION: NEAR THE NORTHWEST CORNER
OF MARTHA VAN RENSSELAER HALL

The work, designed by architecture and fine arts students, was originally dubbed 521 after a fine arts course of that number.





↑ **SWOOSH (aluminum, late 1960s)**

Artist unknown

LOCATION: WEST OF MALOTT HALL

Legend has it that the piece was created by an undergrad fine arts major and installed over a summer without official permission; while some on campus were irked, the sculpture was allowed to remain.

→ **HERAKLES IN ITHAKA I (painted and chrome-plated steel, 1980-81)**

Jason Seley '40

BETWEEN URIS HALL AND
THE STATLER HOTEL

Seley, a longtime professor of fine arts on the Hill, was known for making sculptures out of discarded car bumpers. He donated this eleven-foot-tall homage to the mythical Greek hero to the Johnson Museum in 1983, the year he passed away; it soon became a Cornell icon with a place of honor on central campus. Time and Ithaca weather took their toll, and in 2016 *Herakles* underwent a months-long restoration—including removing rust and closing off eyeholes that had allowed chipmunks to nest inside.







↑ **NINE UNTITLED ABSTRACT SCULPTURES (concrete, 1961)**

Student project

LOCATION: BOTANIC GARDENS, NEAR ARBORETUM POND

As an interpretive panel notes: "This corner of the Cornell campus was an overgrown pasture when these sculptures were built as a class project in 1961 by architecture students. 'At the time, we had visions of people coming upon the pieces in the future, overgrown by vegetation, like the ruins at Angkor Wat,' said Stuart Carter '62. The students could not have guessed that their concrete monoliths would one day stand at the center of a lush arboretum." The project was conceived by fine arts professor Jack Squier, MFA '52.

← **BOOKSTACK, TSURA & MY SQUARE (chromium-steel, late 1970s)**

Jason Seley '40

LOCATION: BEHIND SIBLEY HALL

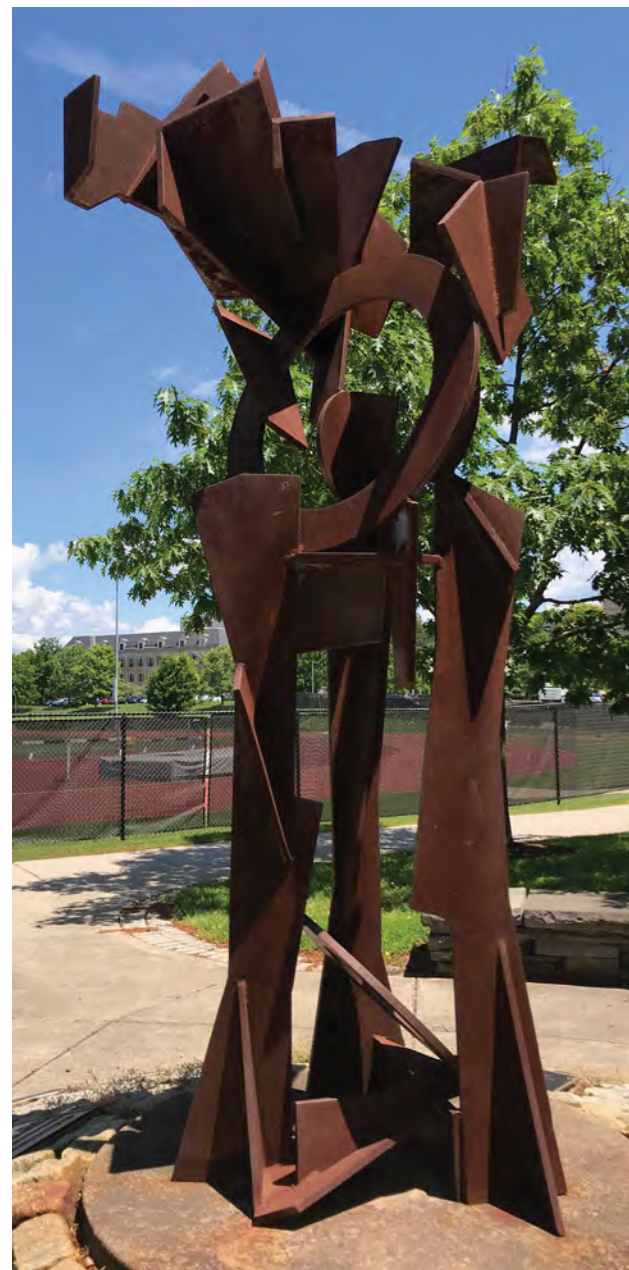
The three works by Seley, the faculty member who also created *Herakles*, grace a sculpture court named in memory of him and his wife, Clara. The plaza is also home to the popular Franny's food cart and large blocks that provide seating. "The three Seley pieces are sited to mingle with the students, faculty, and staff who regularly populate the plaza," Kent Kleinman, then dean of AA&P, said when the sculptures were installed in 2018. "Mounted directly on the concrete with only a minimal base, these are not monuments in any sense but rather more like old friends, slyly attentive to the life around them."

→ **DYNAMIS (steel, 1996)**

Joel Perlman '65

LOCATION: EAST OF FRIEDMAN WRESTLING CENTER

Perlman was asked to create this outdoor sculpture (whose title is the Greek word for energy) for the University's new sports complex by Charles Moore '51, an Olympic gold medalist then serving as Cornell's director of athletics. As McAfee observed in her survey: "While its abstract geometric forms suggest sports equipment such as balls, starting blocks, and goal posts, they also combine to convey movement."





↑ **HYPERBOLIC PARABOLOID**
(reinforced concrete, 1966)

Student project

LOCATION: BOTANIC GARDENS,
NEAR ARBORETUM ENTRANCE

Affectionately known as “the flying diaper,” the piece—made of concrete but having an air of weightlessness—was created by students of computer graphics professor Donald Greenberg '55, BCE '58, PhD '68, as an academic exercise in structures.

← **INVITATION TO THE DANCE (steel, 2017)**

Kent Ullberg

LOCATION: LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY,
NEXT TO SAPSUCKER WOODS POND

The sculpture of a whooping crane was unveiled in May 2018 in honor of George Archibald, PhD '77—co-founder of the International Crane Foundation and winner of the lab's Arthur A. Allen Award, which recognizes significant contributions to ornithology.

→ **SAPSUCKER CAIRN (local stone, 2008)**

Andy Goldsworthy

LOCATION: SAPSUCKER WOODS,
OFF THE HOYT-PILEATED TRAIL

The famed environmental artist created the work toward the end of his eight-year term as an A.D. White Professor-at-Large. At the time, cairns—piles of stones used from ancient times for myriad purposes, including denoting trails and boundaries—were a recurring feature in his oeuvre. As Goldsworthy observed: “They become like journey markers for me.”

↓ **HOMAGE TO MY FATHER AND THE SPIRIT
(stainless and painted steel, 1969)**

Melvin Edwards

LOCATION: NORTH CAMPUS,
NEAR APPEL COMMONS

The work is owned by the Johnson Museum and was commissioned for the University by its first director. According to the museum, it's a tribute to the encouragement that the artist received from his father; the steps are based on the design of a pyramid at Saqqara, Egypt, honoring the pharaoh Djoser.





← **FEEDING THE BIRDS (bronze, 1989)**

Bo Adlerbert '35

LOCATION: MINNS GARDEN

Cutter calls the sculpture one of his favorites, noting that it “expresses the connection between humans and nature.”

Students have been known to put objects in the nude figure’s outstretched hand—and even bundle her up in the winter.

→ **DOUBLE ALLIUM (metal and glass, 2019)**

Jenny Pickford

LOCATION: BOTANIC GARDENS, NEAR THE VISITOR CENTER

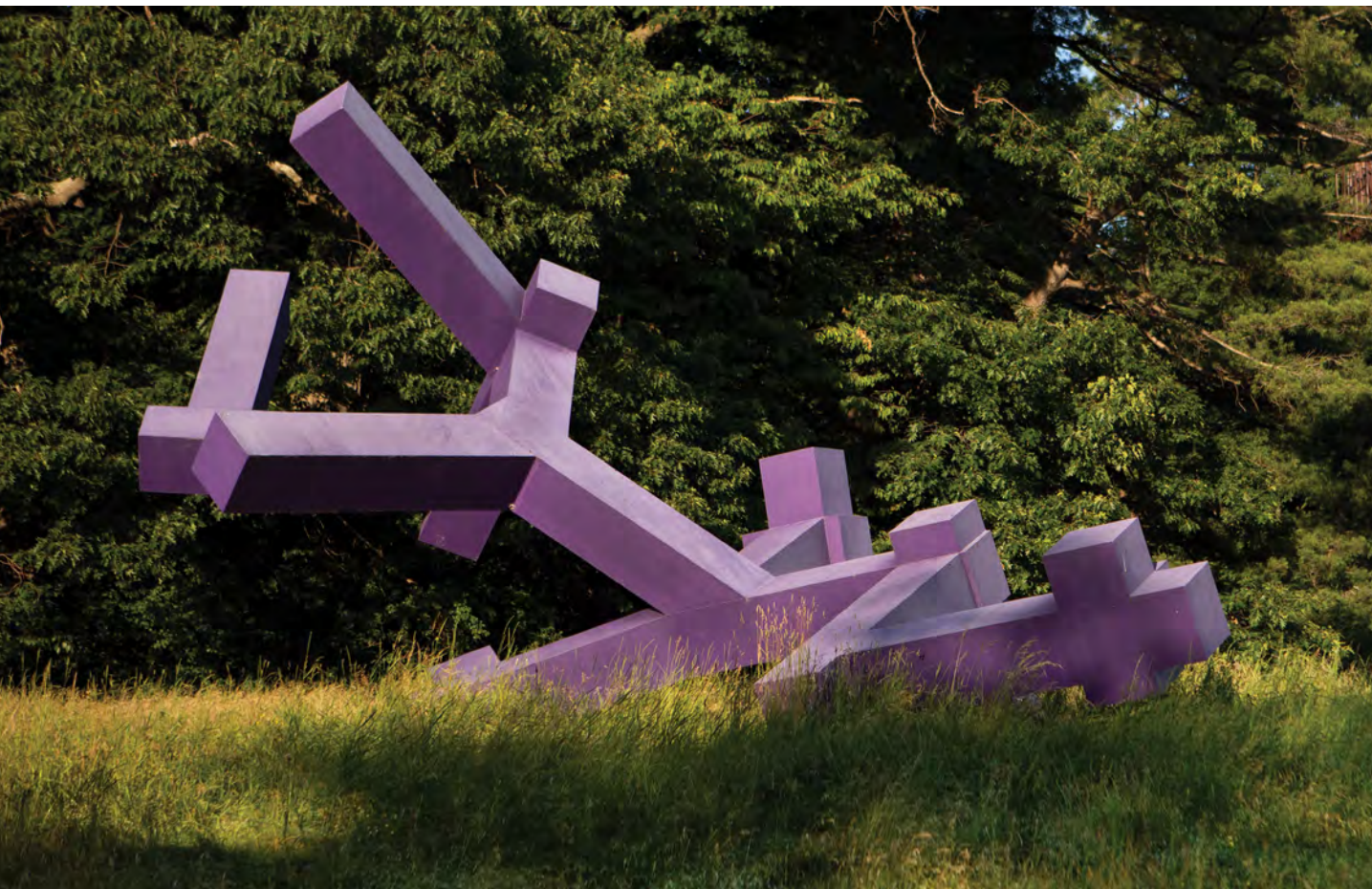
One of the newest sculptures to grace campus, the twelve-foot-tall work featuring metal leaves and purple glass flowers was inspired by Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*.

↓ **RICHARD EVANS, 2ND, NUMBER III (welded steel and paint, 1972)**

Daniel Ben-Shmuel Barrett

LOCATION: TRIPHAMMER ROAD, NORTH OF JESSUP FIELD

“Mr. Barrett begins all his sculptures the same way, by cutting flat steel plates and bending and folding the shapes like paper,” the *New York Times* said in a 1991 review. “He works cumulatively, additively—with an unfettered expansiveness that makes the welded steel seem to erupt and flower—putting one steel shape here and another there, gradually building out from a center more than in toward it. It is this mastery of an improvisational process with steel that makes it seem as if all the sources in the work are in the process of being transformed.”







↑ **DOUBLE VARIATION (steel, 1983-84)**

Anthony Caro

LOCATION: JOHNSON MUSEUM LAWN

As the BBC noted in a 2013 obituary, Caro “was widely regarded as the greatest British sculptor of his generation.” His works are held by such institutions as the MoMA, the National Gallery of Art, and London’s Tate Gallery.

→ **SONG OF THE VOWELS (bronze, 1931-32)**

Jacques Lipchitz

LOCATION: NEAR OLIN LIBRARY ENTRANCE

Cornell’s is the fifth of seven castings of the work by Lipchitz, a Cubist considered one of the finest sculptors of the early twentieth century; others are at Princeton, UCLA, and Stanford. (Its title refers to an ancient Egyptian prayer used to evoke the forces of nature.) The University acquired its version in 1962, and for decades it was located at the south corner of the Arts Quad. It was removed for restoration in the mid-Aughts, and in May 2007 was relocated to its current home in a redesigned plaza between Uris and Olin.

← **VENUS (painted steel, circa 1998)**

Arline Peartree

LOCATION: COURTYARD BEHIND THE LAW SCHOOL’S HUGHES HALL

According to the artist, this abstract geometric sculpture is designed to impart a sense of floating or dancing. Its heavy steel material, painted “Corvette Red,” is intended to seem fragile or even dangerously unstable, with small welds connecting one section to another.



OLIN LIBRARY



↑ **YARB WOMAN (bronze, 1980)**

Elfriede Abbe '40

LOCATION: BOTANIC GARDENS HERB GARDEN

Apropos to its setting, the statue depicts a traditional healer gathering her herbs ("yarb" means herb in Old English).



↖ **PASSENGER PIGEON (bronze, 2007)**

Todd McGrain

LOCATION: LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY,
OUTSIDE VISITOR CENTER ENTRANCE

The work is part of the artist's Lost Birds Project, which pays homage to extinct species; the series also includes sculptures (located elsewhere) of a Carolina parakeet, a great auk, a heath hen, and a Labrador duck. A former Cornell faculty member, McGrain served as an artist-in-residence at the lab in 2014.

← **DEPRESSION (bronze, 2000)**

Robert Dalton

LOCATION: RUSHMORE KNOLL,
NEAR MARTHA VAN RENSSELAER HALL

The work was donated by the sculptor, then a professor emeritus of child development in the College of Human Ecology.