Reclaiming Our Nature

The Charles B. Hayes Family Sculpture Park

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME
Nationally-recognized landscape architect Michael Van Valkenburgh immediately appreciated the site’s serendipitous qualities produced from past neglect. It features rolling topography because it was once a landfill. Mature trees were likely planted to hide the dump and their lofty canopy was the result of aggressive pruning to clear sight lines to the Stadium. The water element is a retention pond for storm-water runoff from acres of adjacent parking.

The fortuitous evolution of this Notre Dame site from historic disregard to present-day allure suggested the overarching theme for both park and inaugural exhibition: reclamation of nature and self.

Indigenous trees, shrubs, and prairie grasses return the midwestern site to how it might have looked at the founding of Notre Dame. Van Valkenburgh carefully selected plantings to celebrate the campus’s natural beauty and indigenous plants have added benefits of not requiring irrigation, fertilization, pesticides, or annual pruning.

The inaugural exhibition title, Reclaiming Our Nature, not only calls attention to the natural beauty of the park, but also to individual and collective processes in our search to reclaim our spiritual nature. Sculptures were selected and commissioned to reflect these themes.

In this way, the Sculpture Park creates a public space for contemplating nature, spirituality, and art. Individuals may enjoy walks, conversing with friends, brown-bag lunches, as well as impromptu class sessions, poetry readings, and musical concerts. Future plans call for food trucks, an outdoor food market, bicycle tours, art making, botanical events, and so much more.

Insanely beautiful!
— landscape architect Michael Van Valkenburgh, upon first viewing the sculpture park site
The Charles B. Hayes Family Sculpture Park

1. Tale Teller VI, Jaume Plensa
2. Little Seed, Peter Randall-Page
3. Many Glacier, Deborah Butterfield
5. Two Lines Oblique, George Rickey
6. Griffon, David Hayes
7. Hanging Screen Sculpture #18, David Hayes
8. Single Winged Figure on Plinth, Stephen De Staebler
9. Maquette for Wing Generators, Richard Hunt
10. Life of Christ / Cycle of Life, Philip Rickey
11. Tracery, Deborah Butterfield
12. Red Throne, David Nash
1. TALE TELLER VI

Tale Teller VI is a conceptual artwork of a type Spanish artist Jaume Plensa calls “souls,” human figures or heads described by stainless-steel matrices of alphabet letters. The figure takes Plensa’s typical reflective pose: seated with arms clasped around legs and looking out into nature. The alphabet letters are of multiple languages (Arabic, English, Greek, Hebrew, and Japanese) and the artist ensures that they do not spell actual words or deal with specific concepts or topics. Rather, he chooses to underscore written language as the distinguishing feature of humans: specifically, our ability to distinguish between internal and external reality, to be aware of our consciousness, and to therefore interpret our lives through literature and poetry—a focus of particular relevance to a university.

In this way, Tale Teller VI quietly and elegantly underscores humankind’s unique relationship to the natural world: our ability to recognize being a part of nature while simultaneously perceiving our relationship to the external world from an intellectual perspective.

Tale Teller VI, 2014, Jaume Plensa (Spanish, b. 1955), stainless steel and stone, 91.75 x 47.5 x 55 inches. Acquired with Funds Provided by Mr. and Mrs. William C. Ballard, Jr., 2015.009

2. LITTLE SEED

Seeds are fascinating structures formally. The most important thing about seeds is that they are packed with energy—hermetic and discrete in themselves, like an unexploded grenade of organic energy.

I have always been fascinated by plant geometry; the underlying principles that determine botanical forms. One of the most interesting and pervasive of these geometric phenomena is spiral phyllotaxis, plants “use” it because of its ability to pack things together in the most efficient way possible, and on the whole nature loves economy. This packing system is most obvious in the arrangements of seeds on the head of a sunflower, but the same numerical principles apply to most pine and fir cones, pineapples, daisies and many other fruit, seeds and seed heads.

Peter Randall-Page

Little Seed is a proto-type for Randall-Page’s 70-ton Seed, which is on permanent display at the Eden Project in Cornwall, England within the Core education center. Randall-Page’s Seed series continues his exploration of the ways natural forms can be described by mathematical formulas such as the Fibonacci sequence, which, when graphed, describes a spiral like those seen in sea shells, pine cones, sunflowers, seeds, etc.

Little Seed is the perfect symbol for the Notre Dame Sculpture Park, which seeks not only to reclaim the natural beauty of the park site, but also to call attention to cycles of the growing season and, metaphorically, to cycles of human life.

Little Seed, 2007, Peter Randall-Page (British, b. 1946), granite, 26 x 51 x 33 inches. Purchased with Funds Provided by the Miss May E. Walter Estate, 2012.028

Little Seed, 2007, Peter Randall-Page (British, b. 1946), granite, 26 x 51 x 33 inches. Purchased with Funds Provided by the Miss May E. Walter Estate, 2012.028
3. MANY GLACIER 11. TRACERY

When I look at her horses, I see something important that perhaps Butterfield is too modest to acknowledge—if there is a feminine strength and receptiveness to her horse sculptures that are made of old steel letters and car fenders and rebar and pieces of signs and barbed wire and other detritus of industry, it is Butterfield who has put it there. If crooked sticks and thorns and pieces of fencing and pieces of driftwood have been bent and brought to order, it is Butterfield who has accomplished it. To my mind, she has done a particularly honorable thing that other falls to women—she has rescued up the ugly messes that others have left behind, she has found beauty in the discarded and revealed it. Is this an artistic vision? You bet it is, because it is a valid and necessary response to one of the identifying features of our era—the realization that we have nearly destroyed the world we live in, along with the natural part of ourselves, and are still in danger of doing so. Her horses are, after all, about regeneration.

—Jane Smiley, Deborah Butterfield

Deborah Butterfield has sculpted horses for her entire career. She fabricated early works from found (reclaimed) steel and wood. More recently, found branches, twigs, and driftwood are first cast in bronze and then assembled into a preliminary armature; with some bronze elements then cut off and repositioned and some real wood branches added. Once Butterfield is satisfied with the form it is photographed; then the wood branches are removed, cast in bronze and welded to the sculpture. Finally, the bronze branches are chemically patinated to faithfully represent the colors of the original branches.

Mary Giving (detail), 2011, Deborah Butterfield (American, b. 1949) bronze, 98 x 115 x 42 inches
Acquired with Funds Provided by the Humana Foundation: Endowment for American Art, 2011.041

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4. **FERN TEMPLE IV**

For the past fifteen years I have been working on a series of sculptures entitled **The Temple Series**. The Series continues to be the product, largely, of a trip I made to Haiti some years ago. While in Haiti I encountered numerous works of art, which expressed the deep spiritual, cultural, and political struggles that Haiti has undergone over the course of the twentieth century. But these works also revealed how art can transcend the everyday, can lift one above the rawness of brutality and social strife, and can offer a space governed by calmness that can, in turn, allow for the kind of reflection that leads to social awareness and social change. In other words, what became clear in the Haitian works I observed was how sculpture can lift one out of the immediacy of his or her context not as pure escapism, but for spiritual, social, and political effect. One was lifted out and offered the contemplative room to see and imagine how things could be different.

My hope in **The Temple Series** is to capture this same process of produced reflection, which can invoke in the viewer a sense of sacred space, of the need to take active charge of his or her destiny.


**Fern Temple IV**, 2012, Austin Collins (American, b. 1954), steel, 27’ x 6’ x 6’

On Loan from the Artist

Father Collins is a professor of sculpture at the University of Notre Dame.

5. **TWO LINES OBLIQUE**

Rickey’s works can gently heighten viewers’ awareness of time, actually passing and, in a way, subtly and quietly, persuade them to recognize the beauty of that abstraction.

Valerie Fletcher, *George Rickey Kinetic Sculpture: A Retrospective*


Gift of the Artist, 2003.012

South Bend-native George Rickey added time and motion to sculpture. At this moment, his kinetic sculptures are in motion around the world, activated by indoor or outdoor currents or powered, outdoors, by the whim of the wind. In their silent, graceful movements his hypnotic sculptures reveal the play of natural forces—such as gravity and wind—upon works of art that have carefully considered physics to control the time and limits of their movements.

They are, indeed, poetry in motion: once-solemn totems to the passage of time, now also markers of time that pass in our midst.

The Snite Museum of Art’s George Rickey Sculpture Archive features over 150 sculptures and maquettes by the artist. In addition, Rickey’s engineering drawings, scholarly papers for his book entitled *Constructivisme: Origins and Evolution*, business correspondence, photo and video archives, and the workshop’s database describing all his artworks are being transferred to Notre Dame archives. That is, a visit to Notre Dame is required for all scholars and aficionados of this modern master of kinetic art.
6. Griffon

Viewers might be surprised to learn that the 27-foot-tall, commercially-fabricated, Rustoleum-flattblack, steel Griffon sculpture has roots in nature, as initially captured on an intimate scale by the human hand. The preparatory drawing for the sculpture shows contour lines that take their curves from outlines of leaves—favorite shapes within Hayes’s visual vocabulary. Leaf shapes were captured in quick gesture drawings and then repeated in three-dimensional steel shapes that created visual rhythms pleasing to the artist.

Despite its origins in plant forms, Hayes titled the work Griffon after it was fabricated and installed, because it reminded him of the mythological figure with head and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion. Therefore, the work can be interpreted as a sentinel guarding the University of Notre Dame.

Hayes graduated from Notre Dame in 1953, after which he undertook graduate study at Indiana University, Bloomington (MFA 1955), where he studied with celebrated American sculptor David Smith.

My sculptures should feel like they belong in nature.
— David Hayes

7. Hanging Screen Sculpture #18

While Hanging Screen Sculpture #18 was likely inspired by the shape of leaves (a common Hayes’ motif), as installed within the Sculpture Park it appears like a large spider dropping from a tree limb.

His sculptures share affinities with Alexander Calder’s playful stabiles (he met Calder in Paris) and with shapes and colors found in Matisse’s paper cutouts. That is, his artworks are firmly rooted within Modern artists’ interests in abstracting nature, in utilizing consumer and industrial materials, and in fabricating art by both hand and machine processes.


8. SINGLE WINGED FIGURE ON PLINTH

I want to express the quality of erosion in the loss of limbs over time and the rooting of the figure into the earth in time, so that it becomes in its way an extension of earth, which we are. We only exist by the grace of the earth’s nature. So what you see here is this feeling of an eroded separation from something larger in time . . . I hope for the person who isn’t too literal this will also have that connotation of being connected in time to creation.

— Stephen De Staebler, Matter + Spirit, Stephen De Staebler

De Staebler’s clay and bronze sculptures depicting the human figure juxtapose the frailty and transience of individual lives against the remarkable resilience of mankind. Their forms are rooted in the ruins of Western sculpture (here, Winged Victory of Samothrace), memorial stele, and architectural friezes. Classical sculpture’s defiance of absolute decay became De Staebler’s metaphor for mankind’s yearning to connect with eternity—our shared quest for transcendence. This particular sculpture fabricated in the artist’s last year from castoff ceramic fragments reclaimed from past kiln accidents is perhaps De Staebler’s elegy to time he passed on earth.

Single Winged Figure on Plinth, 2010, Stephen De Staebler (American, 1933–2011) 
bronze, ¾, 112.5 x 30 x 30 inches 
Acquired with Funds Provided by the Humana Foundation Endowment for American Art, 2012.016

9. MAQUETTE FOR WING GENERATOR

Hunt infuses his art with symbolism and metaphor. Most apparent in his African-American commissions, his sculptures express positive attributes of human character—fortitude, perseverance, vision, regeneration, tenacity, and freedom.

— Sharon S. Patton, Richard Hunt: Extending Forms

Wing Generator presents one of Hunt’s major formal themes—the hybridization of the Greco-Roman winged Nike/Victory with bird forms found on African iron staffs. This study for a gravesite monument, commissioned through the will of a deceased friend, is rich in Western and African mythology. Robert Taylor, Jr., whose grave Wing Generator marks, achieved victory through a successful private and public life as a Civil Rights/America lawyer: an attorney for the City of Detroit, a member of President Lyndon Johnson’s staff for the enactment of Civil Rights legislation, and a successful corporate lawyer. The winged victory motif also symbolizes the Christian victory of life after death.

Maquette for Wing Generator, 1982/2010, Richard Hunt (American, b. 1935) 
Corten steel, 59 x 48 x 60 inches 
Acquired with Funds Provided by Judith H. Kinney, 2010.030
Everything I've done up until now has prepared me for working on a project of this scale. When I first saw the site for Life of Christ/Cycle of Life, it felt sacred—very different than other spaces at Notre Dame. It was located right on the edge of the classical, formal campus, but this wild bit of nature seemed like it was a world away. For one hundred years, it was a landfill for the University. Native grasses grew among berms and gnarled oak trees.

My creativity thrives when I can merge art with the intrinsic beauty of nature. And I knew I was about to embark on a journey as I endeavored to tell the story of Christ in this eight-acre space. I create sculpture environments in rough, naturally broken stone. With these “megaliths,” I channel our human desire to make a mark on our landscape, following our ancestral sculptors, creators of sacred spaces like Stonehenge. For this project, I carefully chose each stone to represent a character in the narrative. They were carved and polished in Minnesota, then carefully lifted by cranes and transported to Notre Dame.

It is designed so that you find yourself participating in the Passion, and at the same time, discovering links between Christ’s journey and your own. Each person, whether they are Christian, agnostic, Muslim, Jew, or atheist, will experience Christ’s story in their own way—moving and deeply religious for some, or for others, perhaps a spiritual connection with the land.

For me, Life of Christ/Cycle of Life is particularly poignant. During the discovery and design phase of the project, my wife Mary was diagnosed with cancer. The metaphorical journey I have created, tracing Christ’s life, has become analogous to my family’s journey... just as it may be analogous to others, who are in the midst of personal challenge, bearing illness, or also experiencing the death of a loved one.

It is my hope that these standing stones speak to a visitor’s soul, connecting our lives with the earth in an ancient narrative that is still relevant today.

— Philip Rickey

Life of Christ/Cycle of Life (detail, during construction), 2017, Philip Rickey (b. 1959), basalt
Gift of Anonymous Benefactors
The sculptural practice of David Nash is full of allusions to the human uses of wood. As Marina Warner writes, his bowls, spoons and vessels, steps and ladders, hurds and stoves “point to the common artifacts of daily life and to the craft work of survival.” His work also harks back to a time when the country was a working environment, not empty except for the passing hiker or weekender, but full of people carrying on their daily affairs. In his pieces one senses the presence of the forester, charcoal burner, the farmer, haying trees, pruning trees. Gathered from a lifetime of research into traditional methods of woodmanship from all around the world, his work evokes those agricultural skills increasingly lost in an industrial age.

In their very physicality, his pieces bring to mind the potent symbolism of wood hidden within our shared cultural imagination. As Warner elaborates in her essay ‘Wood in Mythology’ in David Nash: Forms Into Time: Red Throne, 1991/2012, David Nash (British, b. 1945), patinated bronze, L 136 x 34 x 16 inches. Acquired with Funds Provided by the Miss May E. Walter Estate, 2014.033.
The Charles B. Hayes Family Sculpture Park is a project of the Snite Museum of Art Advisory Council, University of Notre Dame. Phase-one construction was funded by generous gifts from Advisory Council members. Phase-two, final construction was made possible by a generous gift from Mr. Charles S. Hayes ‘65.

Additional information is available at sniteartmuseum.nd.edu.