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Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens summer show alive with sound and motion

CANDY WILLIAMS | Thursday, April 26, 2018, 10:36 a.m.



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Candy Williams

The entrance to Phipps Conservatory is flanked by large wind sculptures created by renowned artist Lyman Whitaker. The summer show features 20 pieces of his artwork.

Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens invites visitors to look at – and listen to – the beauty around them at its summer flower show, "Gardens of Sound and Motion," opening April 28 for a five-month run through the end of September.

Jordyn Melino, Phipps associate director of exhibits and show designer, continues the sensory theme that she began with the Victorian glasshouse's nod to scents and fragrances during the spring show.

Creating the motion in the summer show is a selection of copper wind sculptures with blue patina designed by Lyman Whitaker, a wind sculpture artist from Utah. A total of 20 large pieces spin gracefully, powered by natural air currents both inside the conservatory and outside, where 14 examples of art in motion line the entrance to Phipps' welcome center.

WS Lyman Whitaker Interview



Whitaker says that since plants often are the inspiration for his artwork, arboretums and botanical gardens are the ideal home for his wind sculptures.

"I find that the work is most comfortable in this setting. The work comes from plants, and to return to an environment where plants are the focus, the work just seems to be at home," he says.

In addition to the Phipps exhibit, which is presented by Leopold Gallery of Kansas City, Mo., Whitaker's kinetic sculptures are on display this summer at the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden in Texas. He recently completed an exhibition at Morris Arboretum of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

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All of the pieces displayed at Phipps are for sale, with prices starting at \$650. His more elaborate sculptures include a "Double Spinner" priced at \$22,000 in his online gallery.

Creating the sound portion of "Gardens of Sound and Motion" are Jesse Stiles, a professor in the School of Music at Carnegie Mellon University; Jakob Marsico of Ultra Low Res Studio in Pittsburgh and 24 students from an Experimental Sound Synthesis class at CMU.

An interactive "Fountain Composer" installation by Marsico in the Victoria Room gives visitors the power to create their own "dancing water fountain" show complete with a musical soundtrack. Colorful plantings of 'Sonic Mango' New Guinea impatiens, 'Mainstage Blueberry' petunias, firecracker flowers, fuchsia and lime green 'Fishnet Stockings' coleus add to the vibrant vibe in the room.

"This piece, both the sound and physical components, feels very futuristic," says Marsico. "Compared to the lush nature and Victorian architecture, it acts as a fitting contrast."

Stiles created two installations for the show, in the South Conservatory and the East Room.

In the South Conservatory, his sound elements also are also extended into the visual realm through a canopy of lights installed among tree branches. Six umbrella flower sculptures below are surrounded by umbrella plants and plantings in pinks, purples, peaches and yellows.

"As sounds swell and move throughout the room, we see that motion reflected in light-forms that move throughout the tree canopies," he says. "Both of the pieces I'm creating are generative installations, meaning that sounds and light-forms evolve continuously, without any looping patterns."

Melino worked with the CMU students throughout the semester to create two installations, in the Serpentine Room, where she says the feeling is "very surreal and immersive, like the forest is coming alive," and in the Butterfly Forest (Stove Room), which features their 11-part composition, "Kaleidoscope."

Candy Williams is a Tribune-Review contributing writer.

'Gardens of Sound and Motion'

When: April 28 through Sept. 30, 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m. daily and until 10 p.m. Fridays

Admission: \$17.95, \$16.95 for seniors and students, \$11.95 for ages 2-18; free for members and children under 2

Where: Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, Oakland

Details: 412-622-6914 or phipps.conservatory.org (<http://phipps.conservatory.org>)

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