

# GREATEST HITS: COMMISSIONS IN THE MINNEAPOLIS SCULPTURE GARDEN

## A Self-Guided Tour

Age: College/Adult

### Overview

Since the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden opened in 1988, 23 works of art have been commissioned specifically for the site. From fleeting performances boasting live horses and people in flight to sculptures that have become synonymous with the Twin Cities (think cherry on a spoon), much creative and conceptual energy has been put into fostering an outdoor space of contemplation and wonder. This self-guided tour explores a number of the Garden's commissioned works.

### com • mis • sion

**1. vb.:** *an institution appoints an artist to execute a work in dance, music, video, film, sculpture, installation, architecture, new media, or design;* **2. n.:** *the work itself.*

The core of every commission is a unique relationship between the commissioning institution and the artist(s). Sometimes commissions are made for a specific site. *Spoonbridge and Cherry*, for example, is an example of a site-specific commission for the Garden.

**Find the artworks on this eight-piece tour. Visit as many or as few as you'd like in any order.**

1. Look closely at the artwork. Walk around it and see it from many angles. Think about how your body relates to the object in space.
2. If you're with a group, discuss what you see.
3. Read the bits of information about the artwork and consider the questions posed. Listen to the Art on Call stop for the work if available. *How does having a little background on a piece change or enhance your perception of it?*

**Note:** A hand icon next to a tour stop indicates a work that can be touched. Please refer to the map for the location of the stops on this self-guided tour.

### Stop #1

**Martin Puryear, *Ampersand* (1988)**

📞 Art on Call: 612.374.8200, code 1037

Begin at the main entrance. The artist created *Ampersand* as a gateway to the symmetrical Garden, which was designed by Edward Larrabee Barnes. (The brick portion of the Walker Art Center was also designed by Barnes.) Like a pair of classical columns, the 14-foot-high forms were made from large blocks of granite quarried in Cold Spring, Minnesota. Martin Puryear "shaved" the natural surface with a large lathe to create smooth conical shapes, leaving a pattern of scalloped curves that reveal the original texture of the stone.

Note that one of the columns is inverted. *Any idea why the artist chose to flip one of them? How would your experience of the sculpture change if the columns were installed identically?*

Consider this quote from the artist: "One thing I feel is really crucial in the work is a mediation between nature and culture, between organic form and cultural form and the life that things have. And I think that my work swings between these two poles."

### Stop #2

**Dan Graham, *Two-way Mirror Punched Steel Hedge Labyrinth* (1994)**

📞 Art on Call: 612.374.8200, code 1042

In Area 1 you'll find a room-size sculpture by Dan Graham that exists on the cusp between art and architecture. *Two-Way Mirror Punched Steel Hedge Labyrinth* combines stainless steel, glass, and rows of tall trees to form a geometric maze with walls that provide both transparent and reflective surfaces. As you interact with the sculpture, you view the surrounding environment and your own reflections. *What do you see in the sculpture's reflective surfaces?*

The piece conjures questions about inside and outside, about public and private spaces, and—as the mirrored components respond to the motion of clouds and sun—about nature and culture. *What if the walls of the sculpture were opaque and nonreflective? How would your experience of the piece change? How would the work's relationship to the Garden change?*

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### Stop #3

#### Frank Gehry, *Standing Glass Fish* (1986)

☎️ Art on Call: 612.374.8200, code 1041

Just east of Area 1 you'll find the Cowles Conservatory. Walk in and head to the center of the building where artist-architect Frank Gehry's *Standing Glass Fish* is installed. As tall as the palm trees that surround it, the body of the 22-foot fish is constructed of glass and silicone and supported by a wooden armature with steel rods. The sculpture went through a series of construction steps. First, based on Gehry's studies of fish, including their movement and physical features a sequence of plexiglass models was made. The wooden frame was designed, and various glues were tested. Finally, a team of California artisans came to the Walker to build the fish, which made its debut inside the Walker's lobby in 1986 for an exhibition of Gehry's work. In 1988 the sculpture was disassembled and reinstalled in its present-day and permanent habitat. *How is the sculpture like a building? How is it in dialogue with its surroundings?*

The fish is a personal symbol for Gehry. Consider this quote from him: "In Toronto, when I was very young, my grandmother and I used to go to Kensington, a Jewish market, on Thursday morning. She would buy a carp for gefilte fish. She'd put it in the bathtub, fill the tub with water, and this big black carp—two or three feet long—would swim around in the bathtub and I would play with it. I would stand up there and watch it turn and twist ... and then she'd kill it and make gefilte fish and that was always sad and awful and ugly." *Has Gehry offered us a liberated fish?*

Note: Frank Gehry is the designer and architect of the Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota.

### Stop #4

#### Sarah Sze, *Grow or Die* (2002)

☎️ Art on Call: 612.374.8200, code 1040

While an artist-in-residence at the Walker in May 2002, Sarah Sze created this installation especially for the Garden. Three viewing windows set beneath the floor in the Cowles Conservatory offer a glimpse of a vast and magical subterranean landscape populated by fake plants, found objects, and laboratory beakers spiraling downward. Animated by artificial lighting and fans, the underground tableaux allow viewers, in Sze's words, to "discover a site similar to the way an archaeologist uncovers layers of objects, monuments, and foundations." The artist chose random locations in the Conservatory to give the impression that if any of the bricks were lifted from the floor, a new view might be revealed.

With this description in mind, take a look around and locate Sze's "windows." *Why do you think she chose a subterranean location for her sculpture instead of a more traditional site? What if her tableaux were excavated and placed above ground on pedestals? How would your experience of the piece change?*

### Stop #5

#### Claes Oldenburg & Coosje van Bruggen, *Spoonbridge and Cherry* (1985–1988)

☎️ Art on Call: 612.374.8200, code 1036

Area 5 features the Garden's centerpiece. The spoon motif had appeared in a number of Claes Oldenburg's drawings and plans over the years, inspired by a novelty item (a spoon resting on a glob of fake chocolate) he had acquired in 1962. Eventually the utensil emerged—in humorously gigantic scale—as the theme of the Minneapolis project. Coosje van Bruggen, Oldenburg's collaborator and wife, contributed the cherry as a playful reference to the Garden's formal geometry, which reminded her of Versailles and the exaggerated dining etiquette Louis XIV imposed there. She also conceived the pond's shape in the form of a linden seed, a reference to the type of trees planted along the walkways in the Garden.

Since the early 1960s, Oldenburg has been making super-size art out of everyday objects found in daily life and popular culture. *What ordinary object would you love to see at monumental scale?*

Consider this reflection on artistic practice from van Bruggen: "One of the things that sculptors who work in an urban surrounding think of is scale, the object in comparison to the other things in the surroundings—buildings, the highway, the Cathedral, lantern posts, anything." *What strikes you about the ways this 5,800-pound spoon and 1,200-pound cherry interact with their surroundings?*

### Stop #6

#### Brower Hatcher, *Prophecy of the Ancients* (1988)

☎️ Art on Call: 612.374.8200, code 1056

In Area 5, beyond *Spoonbridge and Cherry*, you'll find a mesh dome resting on six classical-looking columns. Suspended within the structure of the steel dome is an assortment of disparate objects that suggest cultures both past and present. Brower Hatcher's *Prophecy of the Ancients* provides an environment for meditation and thought. It's a cross between a sophisticated puzzle for the mind and visionary architecture. Look up at the stainless-steel mesh. *What do you see? Where else have you seen domes used in architecture? What does a dome symbolize for you?*

Hatcher says, "I don't think my works have a meaning, but are structures that generate meaning ..." *Does this piece generate meaning for you?*

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# GREATEST HITS

## Map of the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden

