

Beyond Boundaries: Public Art in the Upper Falls Greenway

An underappreciated benefit of preserving land for community access and enjoyment is its role as a stage for public art, shown most recently in an exhibit called “Beyond Boundaries” at the Greenway in Upper Falls.

In a display of 15 pieces of sculpture along the greenway from the Depot Café on Green Street to National Lumber, the N-Squared Innovation District partnered with the artists collective Studios Without Walls from June to September over the summer.



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY

A young visitor places flowers in the a cup held by Qwglak of the Upper Falls, a giant mythical monster made of moss, wisteria pods, haliconia flowers, bark, wood, and fungi.

As described by Newton-Needham Regional Chamber President Greg Reibman (<https://bit.ly/2LJyYsE>): “We want the greenway to be a place where ‘happy accidents’ happen this summer as artists, arts lovers, area employees, shoppers, dog walkers, cyclists and others converge. By joining the arts community with local residents and businesses, the N-Squared Innovation District initiative aims to activate the greenway as a gathering point for everyone.”

The Upper Falls Greenway has long been a focus of Newton Conservators’ interest.

On what was once a railway track from Needham to Boston’s Back Bay to provide fill for swampy areas around Boston Neck, the Upper Falls Greenway is a mile-long path of crushed stone where walkers and bikers can enjoy nature and escape nearby and busy Needham Street.

This summer’s Greenway sculptures ran a gamut of subjects ranging from tree-branch-suspended mobiles and a welded steel sculpture entitled Swan Lake, to an array of multi-colored pom poms called Make Paradise Meet, and

Qwglak of the Upper Falls, a giant mythical monster made of moss, wisteria pods, haliconia flowers, bark, wood, and fungi.

Qwglak drew special interest. Created by artist and educator Anne Eider, the sign that accompanies her sculpture describes her intent. “Monsters are at once foreign and familiar, and they perform a good deal of cultural work reflecting to us our monstrous side as well a representing ‘otherness.’ Protectors or destroyers they elicit reflection on the complexities of our nature. The materials used suggest the role played by the natural world in shaping our core mythologies.”

As to why she does public art, Anne offers the following: “For my entire career I have been concerned with increased access to the arts for everyone because I feel like economic factors exclude a lot of people.”

That view is echoed by the Association for Public Art <https://www.associationforpublicart.org/what-is-public-art/>

“Public art can express community values, enhance our environment, transform a landscape, heighten our awareness, or question our assumptions. Placed in public sites, this art is there for everyone, a form of collective community expression.”



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY

This sculpture of pom poms by Stacey Piwinski is called “Let’s Make Paradise Meet.” Each puff of yarn represents something positive and uplifting, your paradise.

Anne fondly recalls the comments she has received about her work. “Responses by the website feature a lot of parents writing on behalf of their kids, telling me stories of their kids’ reactions to my big monsters. Among my favorites was someone who said they walked by it every day, and her father was convinced that when they weren’t around, it got



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY

The sculptures called "Soaring High" by Janet Kawada line the trees of the Upper Falls Greenway.

down and walked around. One day he stole a little moss of his leg because he wanted to grow one of them himself?"

She also noticed how viewers kept putting things in Qwglak's cup such as an acorn or a penny. "I hear from people all the time," she says. "And it is so validating; you don't get that kind of immediacy with gallery shows."

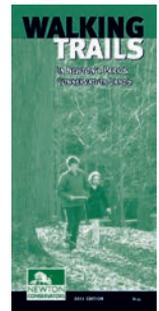
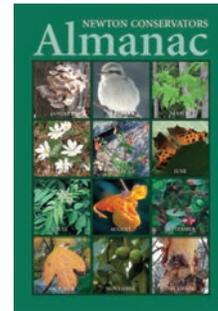
The Upper Falls Greenway exhibit is a happy reminder of a similar display of public art that appeared some time ago in Cold Spring Park. <https://bit.ly/2LKN8d3>. A temporary installation by artists Mags Harries, Ross Miller, and Marty Cain, it was funded by National Endowment for the Arts and was placed in various locations in Cold Spring Park during the summer of 1993. ♦

☛ Ken Mallory

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MISSION

Newton Conservators, Inc.

The Newton Conservators promotes the protection and preservation of natural areas, including parks, playgrounds, forests and streams, which are open or may be converted to open space for the enjoyment and benefit of the people of Newton. It further aims to disseminate information about these and other environmental matters.

A primary goal is to foster the acquisition of land, buildings and other facilities to be used for the encouragement of scientific, educational, recreational, literary and other public pursuits that will promote good citizenship and the general welfare of the people of our community.

The Newton Conservators was formed as a not-for-profit organization 57 years ago in June 1961.

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We welcome material related to our mission from any source. Send proposed articles or letters by email in MS Word or rich text format to bethwilkinson@mac.com. Digitized photographs, maps and diagrams are also welcome.

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