

A DAY IN THE ARTS

Making art accessible to all

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SCULPTURE CAN BRING LIFE TO YOUR GARDEN

By Beau Smith

I should know: I've been a sculptor most of my life, and I have plenty of years behind me of experience. Most of my sculptures reside in the gardens and landscaped outdoors of residences. My work is also in public places such as parks and downtown areas. But in this article, I want to focus on residences.

I'm going to suggest what kind of sculpture to look for. Let me begin by saying that your garden and landscaped outdoors is a sacred place. But of course you know that, otherwise you wouldn't be reading this article. The outdoors of your residence, being a sacred place, deserves art that is exceptional. So you have to spend a little more for it. Listen, you get what you pay for. Further, you get the experience you pay for. The nice thing about original art is that, even though you pay more for it,

you get more. The life of a work of sculpture should be indefinite. It should be able to remain outdoors without withering away. So, the initial investment is more. But you get more, a lot more. I would go so far as to say that original art for the garden is the best outdoor art investment, if, of course, you can find work that is truly art and not junk disguised as art.



Beau Smith with one of his frog sculptures.

the cement casting of Saint Francis has moss growing on it. Ivy trickling over a retaining

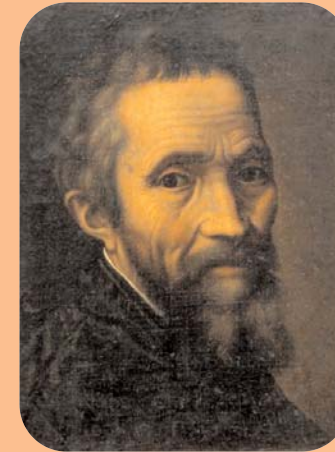
Probably, you will want to include, in your outdoor sanctuary, human-crafted items that are not art:

cement casts, gravel, building materials, and so on. Here, you want to integrate these items with the landscape. It is fine if

WORD OF THE DAY

CRACKLE

A condition produced in certain porcelain, fine earthenware, or glass, in which the glaze or enamel appears to be cracked in all directions, making a sort of reticulated surface.



"If people knew how hard I worked to get my mastery, it wouldn't seem so wonderful at all."
- Michelangelo

(Portrait of Michelangelo, by Marcello Venusti | 1535)

ART AEROBICS

Practice you drawing skills

Sketch the cover of the first magazine you can find. Represent the text also. Any medium. Ten minutes. ✉

wall is desirable. But when you put the art in this setting, you want to show it off. If you don't want to show it off, don't buy it. The sculpture should be the capstone, what brings everything together. The sculpture should enhance and amplify the life of your outdoor landscape. The sculpture should provide a doorway into the majesty of the garden and landscape. All you need do is look at the sculpture and you feel a connection to nature. You can be looking at the sculpture from a window inside your home, or you can be outside. Either way, the sculpture connects you to nature.

I don't, then, advise you buy works of craft to deposit here and there in your outdoor landscape.

Don't do that unless the work of craft has sentimental value or is in some other way exceptional to you. Craft is cheaper than art: cheap in price and cheap in **QUALITY**. Instead, buy less and get more. If you can only afford one original work of sculpture, do that rather than buy many craft pieces. Your outdoor landscape is not going anywhere and neither is the art, especially if you secure it, which you should, and which it is possible to do without making such securing



Beau Smith's Martini Frog 2 (above) and Bass Frog

You can find original art at a moderate and affordable price. You can find it on the Net and you can probably find it locally as well, especially if you live near a city. Many garden shops sell sculptures on consignment. That's one good place to look. But there are many. I

permanent.

Before you become worried that you will have to pay dearly for original art, let me reassure you:

don't suggest galleries because the work will be too expensive. If expense is not so much a concern, then go to the galleries. Go to the galleries anyway because here there is a weeding out process and you are more likely to find exceptional art and thereby have more awareness of what's good.

For deals, you might find one at the gift shop of a botanical gardens. I have my work in the Atlanta Botanical Gardens gift shop. There, my work is moderately priced and exceptional. But what you can also do is look around a botanical garden and see if you can find original sculpture that appeals. You can then inquire at the gift shop or at the front counter or call the gardens. Because botanical gardens and similar places of beauty are set up primarily as non-profit, they are not going to want a large commission for referring an artist. As you know, galleries are infamous for insisting on taking a large portion of the sale for themselves, as much as 60 percent. I suggest going to the expensive places to get a feel for good art (though not all of it is good, I have to tell you). Then shop around. The only danger here is that you



may find, in the galleries, a sculptor you like so much you just have to own his work. Well, that's the danger. If price is an issue, I don't think this will be too much of a problem.

How does one spot inexpensive-but-exceptional original sculpture? This is what you look for: Sculptures made with materials and techniques available to craftspeople and folk artists. The difference between craft and art should be evident. Art is of higher quality. You will also know when someone produces higher caliber work because that work sells for more than craft, but not so much more than you cannot afford it. A sculptor may have work that goes outside of your budget. Many who inquire about my large frog sculptures decide quickly that the price is too high for them. Even so, my frog sculptures are incredibly affordable considering that I am a highly skilled artisan as well as a professional sculptor with over 16 years of professional experience. Further, the large sculptures I produce are comparable to bronzes, at a fraction of the cost. But I also produce smaller work that is quite affordable. I do so because I want people to gain interest in possibly buying a larger work later.

Don't buy craft. A craftsperson makes the same thing over and over again. That's not art. It may seem that I produce the same thing over and over again. After all, I am making large human-size copper frogs. How different can each one be? Very. Each piece is incredibly unique. I learn something from each piece I build. An artist can focus on one theme and never repeat himself, even though his designs may seem or actually be similar.

A craftsperson who wants to make a living will often find he has to hire others to help him crank out his pieces. This is not art. This is moving in the direction of factory-made shlock. Even so, something made by hand does offer warmth and life that a factory-made item cannot. But wouldn't you rather have original art? Nature itself is so beautiful that it deserves only the best from us.

Very few materials can stand the test of time outside. Original art for outdoors will have to be made of metal, clay, cement, stone, glass, or a combination. Wood will not stand the test of time outdoors. Neither will synthetic resins. One sculptor friend of mine recycles old farm equipment and the like. He works primarily in stainless steel, and his work is exceptional. This is a method: Working with recycled metals. Not every artist is capable of achieving art through any given medium, this one included. I have seen plenty of sculpture that is unexceptional.

What makes a sculpture, or any other piece of art, for that matter, exceptional? Art has life. The sculpture lives, it breathes, it has substance and depth. You cannot help but to feel that it is a part of your landscape, a force just as much alive as the plants and the creatures that inhabit your outdoor landscape.

So plan for original art to live in your outdoor landscape. Look around. You can find a deal and get original art that's good. It is worth the effort. Once

you have the art, you enjoy it for as long as you decide to keep it, which may be for the rest of your life. Such a purchase, then, is worth taking time over. ➤

Beau Smith is a professional sculptor with 16 years professional experience sculpting large, human-sized copper frogs. He also writes about art. He has written and published one book on his sculptures, and written, designed, and published his web site, beautifulfrog.com. All works pictured were created and belong to Beau Smith.

