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SECTION J

VIEW

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Art

Artfully altering
the arboretumBy Edward J. Sozanski
Inquirer Art Critic

Since they began in 1975, the outdoor sculpture exhibitions organized by Marsha Moss have become major summer art events in Philadelphia. This year, though, the show nearly turned into a non-event when the financially beleaguered Goode administration reneged on a \$20,000 pledge of support.

Moss managed to cover the loss from other sources so that the show could open on schedule today. She has applied for a Class 500 grant of \$10,000, but the grants are not expected to be awarded until later this month.

The city is listed as one of the exhibition's co-sponsors, along with the Fairmount Park Commission, the Cheltenham Art Center, Nexus Foundation for Today's Art, and Sculpture Outdoors, the organization that Moss created to put together these exhibitions. The total budget for this year's exhibit is \$40,000.

The show, "Altered Sites," consists of 25 sculptural installations placed about the Fairmount Park arboretum at Montgomery Drive and Belmont Avenue. Each piece is designed to physically alter the space it occupies or to modify the viewer's perception of that space.

(The show's title expresses an unintended irony—that nature, by inexorably reclaiming the arboretum's perimeter, is altering the site far more profoundly than any group of artists ever could do.)

The arboretum grounds are alternately open and wooded, level and hilly, manicured and overgrown, offering artists a variety of environments to manipulate. The 27 participants (two pieces are collaborations) appear to have exploited most of the possibilities available to them.

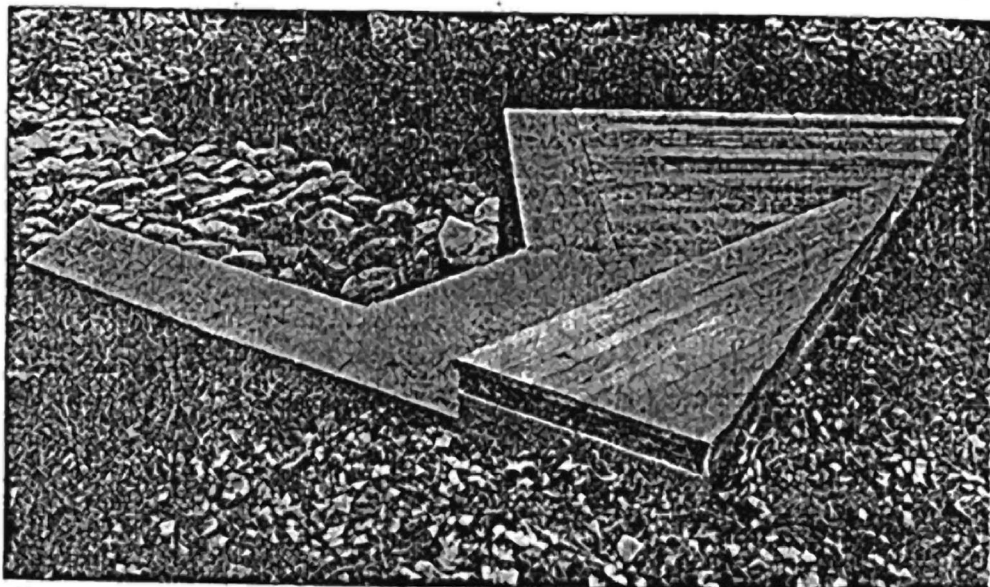
It's those possibilities that make the exhibition intriguing: How dramatically can the introduction of sculpture affect the way one perceives a familiar space? Are the effects lasting or transient? Does one perceive the sculptures as pleasing amenities or as curious intrusions on an otherwise naturally resolved landscape?

Much depends on how artists choose to address the park site—on the locales they select and on whether they opt for a strategy of integration or one of counterpoint.

As previous exhibitions in this series have shown, it isn't easy to achieve the proper equilibrium between sculpture and landscape. It isn't simply a matter of scale, color or materials; it's more a matter of attitude, of being sensitive to the nuances of the site and choosing an appropriate way to enhance that site without effacing its essential character.

A New York artist who calls herself Hera has accomplished this in a secluded and unlikely setting, by using a

(See SCULPTURE on 6J)



Hera's "Singing Rock Sitting Place" from the "Altered Sites" outdoor-sculpture show

storm-water drainpipe set into a steep hillside in the southeast corner of the arboretum.

This is the shaggiest part of the grounds, a place beyond the paved walkways, where only the intrepid and the curious might venture. Hera has constructed a small, angular, wooden platform that nestles into the concrete abutment that anchors the pipe, creating a place for a person to sit and contemplate nature.

Water coursing from the drain and rattling down a rocky channel, debouching into a stream that runs through this corner of the arboretum, provides the music (when it's running, of course), while mint and wildflowers that the artist has planted around the platform will supply, when they come up, pleasing visual and olfactory accents.

By embellishing an obscure and functional structure, Hera unobtrusively called attention to an area of the park that otherwise would be overlooked.