

## Where nature and art intertwine

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*'Cosmic Inflation' by Henry Richardson gleams in the sunlight at The Mount in Lenox.*

After 35 years of group outdoor sculpture exhibitions, Chesterwood in Stockbridge has turned its grounds over this summer to the work of a single artist -- Albert Paley. Known mostly for his institutional and corporate site-specific installations, Paley, based in Rochester, N.Y., has enjoyed a successful, even distinguished, 30-year career as an artist and teacher, but his is not a familiar name to most viewers.

I was skeptical that his work alone would enliven the National Historic Site the way multitudes of sculptures -- fabulous and forgettable -- by different makers have done in the past.

The wide-ranging approaches I saw over many years often pushed the boundaries of how we define sculpture and led us to ponder the many ways it can complement, disturb and enrich the relationship between art and the outdoor world. I am thinking, for example, of Adam Frelin's "Narration (Amy Hempel Tumble Home)" last year. In it, photographs of a performance piece presented in a billboard format became both object and view.

Paley's pieces -- there are 11 in the show, mostly recent -- fall within a more conventional sculpture format. That means they don't climb trees or march down hillsides or camouflage themselves as something other than three-dimensional objects on pedestals.

Fashioned of steel -- painted, weathered or stainless -- they are big, complex constructions made of geometric and organic shapes flattened, folded and twisted into tight packages of self-contained energy. Although abstract, they refer to the real world in both name and design and are easily readable. "Interlace," for example, resembles an exploded jigsaw puzzle; "Equilibrium" has cutout shapes balanced on points; "Jester" -- in red -- is an amalgamation of antic, juggling gestures.

Before turning to work like this in steel, Paley trained as a figurative sculptor in clay. He had an early affinity for the monumental work of 19th-century sculptor Daniel Chester French, who built Chesterwood in 1901, the site's director, Donna Hassler told me. Those parallels with French, who also produced metal sculptures for outdoor display, made Paley a logical fit for this year's shift to a solo format, one that allows for deeper insights into an individual sculptor's thinking.

His artworks may not be as inventive as some that I've seen in past Chesterwood shows. Last year's "Locating," by Elizabeth Knowles and William Thielin, a parade of tiny, brightly colored flags snaking down a forested slope, is another that comes to mind. But they are masterfully crafted and have an assertive presence that commands attention.

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Novelist Edith Wharton, like Daniel Chester French, built a Berkshire workplace for herself, The Mount in Lenox, in 1902.



*Albert Paley's "Common Ground: Where Art Meets Nature" appears at Chesterwood in Stockbridge.*

It, too, is a National Historic Site, and for the second year it, too, has hosted an outdoor exhibition of contemporary sculpture. This one, "Common Ground: Where Art Meets Nature," is sponsored by SculptureNow, a Becket-based nonprofit that has been presenting outdoor sculpture exhibitions around the Berkshires since 1998.

The Mount's grounds are ideal for outdoor art. More formally landscaped than Chesterwood, its paths and drives lead viewers through cathedral groves of pines whose needled floors are shot with bolts of sunlight and past grassy glens and gentle rises that act as natural niches and pedestals for art. Any

sculpture would look its best in these shaded and sun-dappled spaces.

Anthony Garner's "Kimonos for Edith," for example, a painted wood-and-steel piece of brightly colored kimono shapes climbing a pole like flags, becomes all the more energized when sunlit against a dense, dark pine grove. Fritz Horstman's "Framework for Lily Creek," meandering curves of reclaimed construction boards, reprises the sinews of a nearby sandy gravel washout. And Robin Tost's "Yo?!" a vertical clutch of wiggly black-and-red metal rods, finds a rightful place among clumps of streamside daylilies.

This year's show has a tad less energy and inventiveness than last year's "Confluence" exhibition, which included striking pieces like Paulette H. Carr's "Longcoat," a ghostly burlap-and-resin garment caught in a beam of light against a dark grove.

Peter Barrett's "Segment Figures I, II, III" this year lacks the playfulness of his giant aluminum "Paper Clip" dancing atop a rise last year. Gary Orlinsky's "Gathering," a clutch of wooden spears, hasn't the dramatic presence of his luminous painted-wood "Proscenium in Green" last year.

Allen Williams's granite, tomb-like "Highland Lair" is the same he entered last year under another name. It is back by invitation.

Beyond this year's entries mentioned earlier, some were especially notable and inventive -- Henry Richardson's "Cosmic Inflation," a giant sphere of laminated, chiseled glass; Constantin Simun's "King, Queen and I," a trio of seatless, bentwood-style chairs with legs crossed; Chris Plaisted's "Nexus," which holds a variety of shapes and materials in poised balance; Lydia Musco's "We Have Mapped a Lot of Walls," four towers of concrete slabs evoking geological sediment; and Philip Marshalls' "Fruits of Fancy," a tree-hung piece.

If you go ...

**What:** 'Contemporary Sculpture at Chesterwood: Albert Paley'

**Where:** Chesterwood, 4 Williamsville Road, Stockbridge.

**When:** Through Oct. 13.

**Hours:** Daily, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**Admission:** \$16.50 for adults, \$8.25 for children, 13 to 17, free for children under 13

**Information:** (413) 298-3579, [chesterwood.org](http://chesterwood.org).

**What:** 'Common Ground: Where Art Meets Nature.'

**Where:** The Mount, 2 Plunkett St., Lenox.

**When:** Through Oct. 31.