

## Out In The Open @ Riverway Park

May 19, 2014



**Text Written By Maria Napolitano**

To visit the Studios Without Walls' Out in the Open exhibit, all you need to do is take the Green D Line to the Longwood stop, cross into the Riverway snaking next door, and open your mind to the installation in the park. However, for some of us the T can be a bit confusing. I mistakenly took the Green E line to Longwood Medical Center, a completely different stop. Fortunately, it's still within a short walk of the Riverway – and that quick jaunt from the busy Medical Area to the calm Riverway makes the creative oasis in the midst of the city especially poignant.

Out in the Open meanders through a short stretch of the Riverway's paved path, but each artist's piece has a distinct space within the exhibition. Complementary but distinct, the elements of the installation show a mindfulness and awareness of their location, as well as a shared conscience. Seen/Not Seen, Bette Ann Libby's contribution, makes use of the Riverway's trees to question the space through a selection of mirrors affixed to their trunks. Libby took care not to damage the trees by attaching the mirrors to fine netting wound about the trees instead of to the trees directly. Not a Chance also hides in a small grove converting its space into a stage for silhouettes that incorporate, but do not alter, the Riverway's form. Wendy Wolf plays with both form and title in her taut piece, Brook Lines. The cotton threads she strings between tree branches are fragile and ephemeral and yet are a distinctly human imposition on a natural space. The yarn could be incorporated into a bird's nest or may simply disintegrate when battered by Boston's weather but it will never be mistaken for a purely natural element of the landscape.


Some parts of the installation invite the viewer to participate, which adds a crowd-sourced and modern twist to the exhibit. A Tree Enhanced asks the public to use one of the provided twist ties to add a wish to a tree adorned with the hopes and dreams of other visitors. Suggestion Boxes collect recommendations from the park's visitors: a practical piece of the installation. However, balancing this interactive side of the show are some impositions on the space and the viewer that, while physically accessible, act more as an exercise in internalizing and analyzing additions to the landscape rather than participating in it. Set in Stones and Zigzag Over Essence place sculpture atop a small, grassy knoll, tempting the viewer to touch the pieces. However, the works play to the common viewer's museum training in that the viewer understands to carefully sidestep the art as it is fragile and solely meant for visual consumption. The stones Sally Fredkin arranges on the mossy ground may still be arranged as she intended, but any viewer could easily have shifted their design, and left a small revision for the next passer-by. Maria Ritz zigzags about idea of juxtaposition and contradiction with eggshell-like fragments that command more attention than Fredkin's piece, and questions with their brokenness the concepts of new birth and fragility.

Out in the Open is a modern installation, one that attempts to engage the viewer whether they stumbled across the pieces on a stroll through the park or if they deliberately attended the show. In today's world, the interactive show is worthwhile and is one that can be justified in a public space. It begins with pre-meditated pieces, but relies on its viewers to grow into its own: a mission that can find extraordinary success in participatory communities, but that can cast aside the vision of the pieces' first creators as more and more minds join the effort. This compromise and risk can be a difficult one to accept, but in an installation like Out in the Open that brands itself as "responsive sculpture," participation and trust, as well as awareness of others, is key. An installation that reflects on its presence in an open space, reliance on a fragile natural background, and impermanent status is suited to the evolution that interactive art invites. As it enhances a bend in the Riverway, Out in the Open grows with the community it encounters and creates, linking together passive viewers and excited participants. With each passing day, the installation becomes less of ten separate elements, and more of a cohesive collaboration between its original artists, the artists who join in its refinement, and nature herself.

**GET THERE:** Take the Green Line to Longwood.

**SEE IT:** On view through May 18th.

**MORE INFO:** <http://www.studioswithoutwalls.org>

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