

A Sliver of Sidewalk Nature

The Aspen Art Museum welcomes birds and a mini-meadow

BY MITZI RAPKIN, TIME OUT WRITER

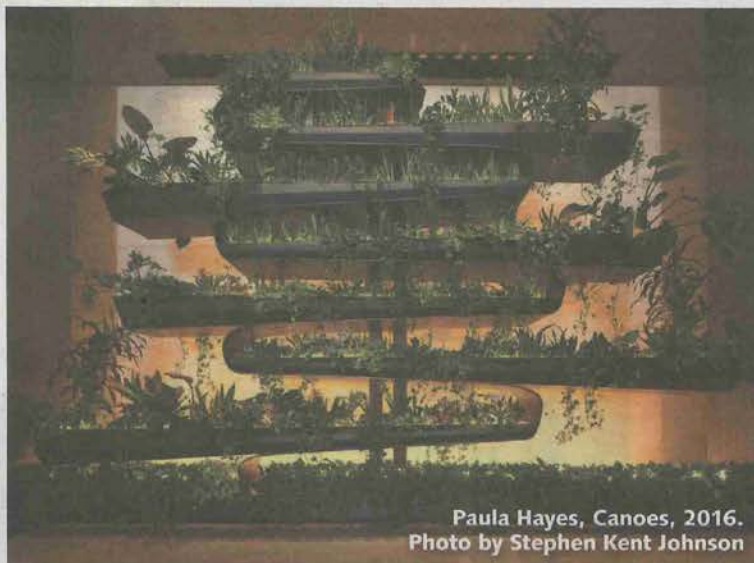
Artist and designer Paula Hayes grew up in reverie of the outdoors. "It was impossible to keep me inside," she notes. "I feel more related to plants than humans."

As a child she spent most of her time outside in upstate New York, and when she went to graduate school to study fine arts at the Parsons School of Design she worked as a horticulturist to make ends meet.

"I grew up in such a rural environment and always interacted with the natural world. That was important to me when I came to the city, and that's how the link between sculpture and the horticultural arts became linked."

Hayes is best known for her terrariums made with blown glass, botanic sculptures and interactive spaces, which blend the urban and natural worlds. That is what her exhibit on Crown Commons in front of the Aspen Art Museum is meant to do. It's a combination of a sculpture called Bird Nesting House and Tree, a steel sculpture of tree branches with a bird house on it, surrounded by planters she designed filled with native vegetation. She calls the look that will take shape "a sliver of a meadow."

"It's actually going to attract certain pollinators and birds. It's very real, and that's what I hope people come away with," she explains. She's



Paula Hayes, *Canoes*, 2016.
Photo by Stephen Kent Johnson

been consulting with local horticulturists to ensure she plants the right greenery. But in addition to being ecologically correct, she also wants to offer people something on a human scale.

"I'm overcome by the incredible feeling of the trees, mountains and sky in Aspen. Some of the best experiences of my life have been on Aspen

Mountain. So to peer into this piece that is at the human scale is to help acclimate oneself to the grandeur of the wildlife and the culture in the Aspen environment. I love that the scale there overpowers the human drama, but this piece brings the art into the scale of the human drama."

Part of that human drama is the idea of mortality, which is evident

when art includes plants, something that has a visible lifespan. Hayes' materials are both natural and man-made, like grass or industrial materials, which she considers durable and a positive sign of human inventiveness. However, as she ages, she is finding new meaning in her work.

"When I was younger I thought that durability was good, and now that may be shifting to mortality and something having a cycle is good, and it's not so much about remaining forever as being something valuable and good, but allowing that element of mortality as relating to human beings or plants is not a bad thing."

Plus, she says, the idea of what lasts does not have to be her physical art. "What remains of the past is not always obvious. It could be ideology, it could be what is described as truth, and that can change over time, so it's all pretty ephemeral. Maybe you are passing on an idea and not an object, and sometimes the greater aspect of what you pass on is certainly ephemeral, and to see the difference takes a lot of courage."

*Paula Hayes Installation on Crown Commons, Aspen Art Museum
Opening reception -
Thursday, May 31, at 5:30 p.m.
On display June 1-Oct. 14*