The big show
Columbia Museum of Art not large enough to contain eye-popping sculpture exhibition
Material Terrain | A look at some of the works

Dennis Oppenheim began his career as a pioneering conceptual and land artist. In the 1990s, he began creating sculptures that were big as houses—and literally were houses: houses on wheels, houses resting on their roofs, houses stacked on one another.

His work in "Material Terrain," "Digestion" (above) from 1988, takes the form of two deer made of cast fiberglass. They've been connected to a propane tank and spout flames from their oversized antlers. The piece refers to how all creatures use energy.

James Surls puts the human body, although in an abbreviated form, into the landscape. He has created his own symbolic language — flowers, knives, eyes — that are arranged in a manner that suggests something natural. "Me, the Flower and the Plow" (on E1 and below, from 2000), addresses the interaction between men and women.

Like Donald Lipski, John Ruppart was inspired by a plant; in his case, a 700-pound pumpkin. When he asked the people who gave him the pumpkin if he could make a cast of it, they told him to hurry because they were going to feed it to their sheep.

Ruppart was partially interested in the giant pumpkin because it was the result of hybridization — a man-made "improvement" on nature. "It's been engineered almost to the point of collapse," he said in an audio tour of the exhibition.


Inspired by natural forms, Wendy Ross makes her sculptures of material most often connected to industry: steel. But she handles the steel tenderly; it's welded together in delicate shapes or woven into an intimate pattern. Above is "Andraeum III" from 1998.

Ross' sculptures "reflect the microscopic regularity and repetition of living, organic structure, expanded to a monumental scale and reinvented into nature," wrote Glenn Harper, editor of Sculpture magazine.

Many years ago, Donald Lipski saw a magnificent hibiscus tree that seemed to be a natural, but complex, sculpture. He took that idea and began making resin sculptures that look like natural wood but are twisted into remarkable forms. At right: "Exquisite Corpse" (First Loop), 2000. His sculpture "blur the boundary between the tree found in nature and the sculptural object," wrote Carla Harzal, exhibition curator.

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IF YOU GO

Material Terrain:
A Sculptural Exploration of Landscape and Place

WHERE: Columbia Museum of Art, at Main and Hampton streets

WHEN: Friday through Aug. 26

COST: $5 for adults, $3 for students, free for museum members

INFORMATION:
(803) 796-3210 or columbiaartmuseum.org

Related events:
- "Impressionistic Angles," from 11 a.m. June 14 and Aug. 26
- "Henry Moore," Mon., 7 p.m. July 14 and Aug. 19
- Exhibition tour and slide talk, 6:30 p.m., July 19
- Andy Goldsworthy Rivers and Rocks," Fri., 7 p.m. July 24 and Aug. 11

Take a cell phone tour

It's usually being on the cell phone in a museum or a zoo, but not now.

You can take an audio tour of "Material Terrain" through your phone. Those interested should be charged only for the tolls used.

The number to call for the tour is (803) 796-3210. And you can leave a message at the end.

The tour also can be downloaded onto iPod and MP3 players.

Both are free for the museum.

Opening reception:
Carla Harzal, curator of "Material Terrain," will speak at 8:30 p.m. Thursday during the opening reception.

If the reception is a little "lively," turn from the windows on the left. There are more than most. It's free for museum members.

Admission is $5 for non-members or $15 if you're 30 or younger.
from ceilings and trees.

John Ruppert was inspired by a giant pumpkin he saw at a fair and recreated it several times in cast aluminum.

The large rough wood sculptures by Ursula von Rydingsvard are probably the heaviest works in the show.

"Painting Couch" by Valeska Soares is the opposite of rough; it's a stainless steel couch with an open drawer filled with fragrant lilies.

The artists are from throughout the United States, although several were born abroad (Japan, Brazil, Germany, and range in age from 46 to nearly 70.

"Material Terrain" is on a three-year tour, making stops at 11 institutions in California to Florida. And at each place, it's a different story.

"One of the more interesting aspects is that the works are placed radically changes how the sculpture looks," said Carla Banzai, who curated the exhibition and is contemporary art curator at the Mint Museum of Art in Charlotte. (The Mint is not on the tour; it has restrictions on outdoor sculptures).

Such a long tour with so many stops is unusual — especially for a show like this that proves many installation challenges.

"It was a big task for Arts and Artists and the institutions," Hanza said. "It's not just a show of paintings you can hang on the wall."

The Columbia Museum took this opportunity to install additional security cameras outside, at a cost of around $5,000.

When the exhibition was at the University of Arizona early last year, one of the artworks was vandalized — rolled into the street and destroyed.

Beastus's second-floor office overlooks the plaza at Main and Hampton streets, so she'll have a constant view of the installation.

"It will be fun to watch people interacting with the sculptures," she said.

Reach Day at (803) 771-8518.

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If you're on the Columbia Museum of Art plaza looking at "Material Terrain" sculptures, you don't have to go far to see some of the city's permanent public sculptures.

The museum has two works there all the time: Upright Motive No. 8, a 1961 bronze sculpture by Henry Moore, and Homage to Aubert Seger, a 1904 steel and stone piece by Nacha Halley.

Just across the street, the Blue Sky's "Newcastle" is a 25-foot-long chain connecting the Rising High and Sylvan Brothers buildings.

Blue Sky is the best-represented artist in public places around town.

His mural "Fence Vision" has been a city landmark for 25 years. It's on the back wall of the AgFirst Farm Credit Bank near Taylor and Marion streets. On the same block in his "Dusted Plug," a 9-foot high brick hydrant that spouts water. "Kawasakiful," another Blue Sky creation, is behind South Carolina Bank and Trust on Senate Street, between Huger and Pulaski streets.

In front of the State Museum are several trees and shrubs shaped by topiary artist Pinty Fryar. Also there is a cistern, a construction by Herb Parker.

For several years, the Cultural Council of Richland and Lexington Counties commissioned public artworks. Among them:

- A bronze statue of the late Kirkman Finlay, Columbia's former mayor, in Finlay Park.
- "Jubilaeus," at the Bank of America on Main Street.
- "Passages," at the Richland County Judicial Center on Main Street.
- "The Brook Sculpture," at the Richland County administration building at Hampton and Harden streets.

Further afield, the S.C. Botanical Garden in Clemson contains about 10 dozen sculptures made by artists from around the world. All created their art from materials found on site.

For information and images, go to www.clemson.edu/asc.

Pearl Fryar's home in Blyth- opville is surrounded by topiary sculptures he has created during the past 20 years.

To get there, take I-20 east to exit 116. Head toward Blyth- opville. Less than a mile from the interstate, take a left on Broad Acres Road. Fryar's garden is at 146 Broad Acres Road.

Brookgreen Gardens, near Litchfield Beach, contains hundreds of sculpture of people and animals. It was created by Archibald Huntington and Anna Hyatt Huntington, a sculptor, in the 1920s.

Among the important artists represented are Paul Manship, Carl Millet and Henry Cowles. Go to brookgreen.org or call (800) 849-1931.