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WAVE HILL

SCULPTURE IN THE GARDEN

by Jonathan Goodman

One of New York City's most beautiful estates, Wave Hill has a long and distinguished history. Wave Hill House was originally built in 1843 by the jurist William Lewis Morris. Theodore Roosevelt's family rented Wave Hill during the summers of 1870 and 1871, when the future president was 12 and 13. (Roosevelt's stay there is said to have increased his feeling for nature.) Mark Twain rented Wave Hill from 1901 through 1903, and Arturo Toscanini lived there from 1942 through 1945. Today the visual impact of the landscape remains remarkable: visitors walk along the Great Lawn and view the Hudson River and the Palisades beyond.

Willie Cole, *Everything and Anything*, 2001. Mixed media. Site-specific work installed at Wave Hill.

In 1960 Wave Hill was given to the City of New York; five years later it became a nonprofit organization. At this moment Wave Hill is an institution dedicated to examining and creatively enabling an exchange between nature and people. Its 28 acres include gardens and greenhouses, and it sponsors diverse programs in horticulture, environmental education, land management, and the visual and performing arts. Early in Wave Hill's public history, it was used as a sculpture garden; art from the collection of Joseph Hirshhorn was installed on the grounds. Later, contemporary art programs were set up; until recently, these were fairly short lived. The current visual arts program, curated by Jennifer McGregor, is composed of three venues: the Glyndor Gallery, where thematic exhibitions of contemporary artists

are shown; generated@wavehill, for which an on-site artist produces a landscape project every summer; and Wave Hill House Gallery, where four shows of emerging artists occur each year.

The most recent installation, Willie Cole's *Everything and Anything*, was the third generated@wavehill project (earlier installations were by Laura Anderson Barbata and Sylvia Benitez). Cole's installation is located on the lawn next to Wave Hill's aquatic garden; anything but natural, the work consists of five rows of 10 white PVC turnstiles. Two of the turnstiles are missing in the center, enabling participants navigating the rows to pause and consider their position in a poetic, chance-filled maze.

The turnstiles are both a reminder of city life—as McGregor points out,



Above: Sylvia Benitez, *Beneath the Bark, Under Leaf and Log* (detail of *In the Hemlock Grove*), 2000. Opposite, top: Roberley Bell, *Arcadia Bell*, 2000. Opposite, bottom: Joan Bankemper, installation view of sherd pottery sculptures, 2001. All works shown at Wave Hill.

city dwellers use turnstiles to take the subway and to enter certain buildings—and a maze with metaphysical meanings. Participants make their way through the turnstiles, which bear in total almost 200 phrases beginning with “everything” or “anything”: “everything you considered,” “everything you think of,” “anything believable,” “anything fought for,” and so on. A kind of poetry ensues, in which one makes a series of choices through a life maze. The piece does not reference the garden grounds; it is an urban piece sited in a green environment. Asked why *Everything and Anything* is so much at variance with its bucolic

WAVE HILL IS A PLACE FOR ARTISTS DOING EXPERIMENTAL WORK—WE’RE RESPONDING TO THE WAY ARTISTS ARE WORKING NOW.

surroundings, McGregor responds: “Since we’ve had really wonderful pieces done with natural materials, we were looking more for an artist who would work with industrial or man-made materials. The earlier projects enabled visitors to experience the grounds, whereas Cole’s work is an entirely different type of project.”

Cole comments further: “I surprised people by requesting permission to dig holes in the ground. I wanted to do a whole field of the turnstiles; I also wanted a space in the middle so visitors could reach a clear spot and contemplate—even lie down so as to get a different view. But an entire field of turnstiles wasn’t allowed.” In fact, all of the pieces done for generated@wavehill must pass approval by the horticulture department, which in this case limited the piece to 50 turnstiles. McGregor explains: “When people come here and the grounds are beautiful, they think it’s the perfect environment for sculpture. But it’s really very challenging; the horticulture department







Opposite, top: Luis Castro, *Ese botero es mio (recordando Felipe Pirela)*, 2001. Maple. Opposite, bottom: Robert Lobe, *Rocky High*, 1999. Anodized aluminum, 94 x 103 x 34 in. This page: Ming Fay, *The Return of the Flaming Butterfly*, 2000. View of site-specific installation. All works shown at Wave Hill.

sees the landscape in a certain way—for example, they see the way the curves of the foliage lead to the seating area of the grounds where Cole's piece has been placed. Part of their conception is based on the space surrounding the installation. Anything we put in the middle of the field is going to change the grounds, so what we're doing has to be temporal, has to come in and come out without a trace."

WHAT WE'RE DOING HAS TO BE TEMPORAL: THE WORK HAS TO COME IN AND COME OUT WITHOUT A TRACE.

Members of the different departments are also involved with the artist-selection process. McGregor does some initial research and selects three artists to be interviewed by representatives of different departments, including, in the case of Cole, a member of the Forest Project Summer Collaborative work-study program for high

school students from the Bronx (10 worked with Cole on his project), and, often, someone brought in from the outside. The artist talks about his or her idea for an outdoor piece, and then the group chooses the artist based on initial impressions. McGregor strongly emphasizes the cooperative nature of the generated@wavehill project: "I was really looking for a way that the visual arts program could interface with other departments; obviously, we're working with the education department really closely on this, as well as with the horticultural department."

Indeed, education is a major part of Wave Hill's mandate. The education program includes outdoor-based workshops for school children from the Bronx as well as other boroughs. There is also a learning center, used for school groups on weekdays and family projects on weekends, which acts as an indoor interactive museum; other programs include craft projects, nature walks, and literary workshops. One of the most important and challenging interactions for the artist working at Wave Hill is the Summer Collaborative. Cole acknowledges the complexity of the experience: "It was a bit challenging to work with students. They are teenagers, so they weren't always driven by the same

sense of urgency as I was. But, even so, several became very excited." As it turns out, the students' contributions were not only physical—they thought up many of the phrases used on the turnstiles.

Asked about her audience, McGregor replies: "We have about 110,000 visitors a year. Many people come because they are interested in gardens. However, we also averaged 3,000 visitors a month in the Glyndor Gallery. I want Wave Hill to be a place for people to think about artists doing experimental work. We have a living environment that is always changing with the plants, and so there is no reason to have the sculpture hold us back. That's what I love about the way we're showing artists—we're responding to the way artists are working now." McGregor feels that maintaining permanent works on site fixes the collection to a particular moment in time, something she doesn't wish to do. As she says, "I can walk to Cole's installation and see how people respond. For me as a curator, that's really important, especially because it's a non-art audience. We're introducing people to really interesting concepts and artists, and I've been knocked over by how much people embrace them."

Jonathan Goodman is a writer and editor in modern and contemporary art.