

# ART PAPERS

## ATLANTA

Atlanta's Freedom Park teems with vitality, especially at its margins. Graffiti, trash, industrial cast-offs, a homeless village obscured by a clump of trees, abandoned storage sheds newly adorned with unauthorized murals, jerry-rigged skateboard ramps, and a variety of other urban detritus greet visitors who explore its periphery. With Atlanta artist Evan Levy acting as project director, **Art in Freedom Park** [May 1—September 15, 2005] sought to reorient the perception of locals and tourists alike by bringing a variety of artworks into the heart of the park, to create a new, more inviting environment.

Freedom Park, a helpful marker explains, was once a battlefield; the neighborhood's Augustus Hurt House served as General William Sherman's headquarters during the Battle of Atlanta, and was razed by Union forces in 1864. One hundred and twenty years later, the park was the site of the struggle between the community and the Georgia Department of Transportation. Thanks to the perseverance of local organizations and neighbors, the four-lane highway that was to



Linda Stern, *Art Reinterprets Barriers: Hammocks for the Homeless*, 2005, installation, dimensions variable (courtesy of the artist; photography: Diana Mulhall)

have plowed its way to Stone Mountain was abandoned—but not before a four-lane swath was bulldozed through historic neighborhoods. This is how Freedom Park, the green space created by the shoulder of the highway and the land cleared in anticipation of the thoroughfare, was born.

Through *Art in Freedom Park*, which aspires to grow into a recurring event, the organizers sought to build public awareness of both the green space itself (at 210 acres, one of the largest city parks in the country) and the potential of public art. Consequently, works that embraced the park's tumultuous history were the most successful. **Karen Tauches'** *disappeared houses*, 2005, evocatively marked the absences of homes destroyed to create the park, painting their surviving concrete steps black with ground ash from burned houses. She also installed a funereal black door in the place of one absent home to stand for the lingering ghostly presences. **Judy Rushin's** *Construction of Memory*, 2005, detoured park signage with beautifully rendered plaques blending anecdotes, history, and fiction with maps, drawings, and photographs to document the Edgewood neighborhood "bulldozed" [an excellent misspelling] to make way for the golf course and park. **Linda Stern's** *Art Reinterprets Barriers: Hammocks for the Homeless*, 2005, a collection of seven hammocks made from plastic netting, PVC pipes, and other construction materials familiar to Home Depot shoppers, wryly commented on gentrification and the accompanying displacement rapidly transforming the area. The orange hammocks waving in the breeze also echoed this year's most famous public art installation (sorry, Christo, I meant saffron), while framing Stern's reflection on the role of public art more humbly.

Freedom Park's most prominent feature is, of course, the parkway that runs through its center. Several pieces addressed the project's drive-thru aesthetic. **Duane Georges' Stars** (*Spica, Rigal, Sirius*), 2005, spelled out the name of the stars in the constellation Virgo in wire-mesh letters. Positioned like a billboard alongside the road, it evoked Las Vegas' Stardust neon as much as the astrological navigation to which it alluded. **Michelle Lance's Arabia**

*Mountain*, 2005, a photographic image mounted on seven sequential aluminum plates, transplanted a panorama of the nearby mountain to the side of the highway, with reflections of cars whizzing by its shiny surfaces creating a pleasant disorientation. **Jeff Mather** collaborated with kids from Atlanta's Grace Lutheran shelter and Grady High School to produce *Horizonish*, 2005, a parallelogram sculpture tilted to suggest motion, and made of detailed, wildly colored beams designed to blur horizontally from inside the windshields of passing cars.

Lest drivers found themselves too distracted by the art to pay attention to the road, two works warned of the dangers of lackadaisical motoring. **Meshakai Wolf's** series of road-crossing signs featured silhouettes of critters (chipmunks, squirrels, etc.) often doomed to end as roadkill in *f.o.r.d.: found on road dead*, 2005. **Daniel Upton, Rick Kemp,** and **Lydia Walls** cartoonishly rendered the perils of careless driving with cheery malevolence in *Happy Accident*, 2005, a fabric replica of the collision of a 1967 Impala and its occupant into a telephone pole.

Although a few unfortunate examples of generic Plop Art were included in the project, they were countered by several site-specific works. In **George Beasley's Farm at Freedom Park**, 2005, an abandoned lifeguard chair bearing the names of destructive agribusiness multinationals overlooked six flowerbeds planted with vegetables and herbs. If perhaps a tad too didactic, Beasley's project translated his indictment of runaway profiteering into an arresting image. **Pandra Williams** celebrated local flora with *Incognae v2*, 2005, an installation that used plants native to the Atlanta Piedmont to establish a fungal colony in the park. **Emily Fisher** and **Bryan Rasmussen's** earthwork *Heal*, 2005, was a model of simplicity resulting from an evocative gesture that encapsulated the entire Freedom Park project. The two artists tore a gash into the earth alongside the highway, mirroring the swath the road cut through the neighborhoods. By the time you read this review, the wound will have grown back over with weeds and grass, while the injury sustained by the community will still be more slowly on the mend.

—Phil Oppenheim