

Foggy Bottom goes a little bit wild

BY MICHAEL O'SULLIVAN

Sculpture that sits in someone's front yard is, more often than not, only a notch or two above the garden gnome. It's pleasant, frequently whimsical decoration.

Not so with "Sculpting Outside the Lines," an installation of contemporary sculpture — augmented with a bit of video and multimedia — on the lawns, patios, facades and walls of several homes and businesses in Foggy Bottom.

Organized by the Foggy Bottom Association and smartly put together by local curator Laura Roulet, the show includes a couple of large-scale, architectonic works of the sort one might expect to see in front of an office building, along with smaller, more conceptual pieces. Some are a little hard to find. Download a map before you head out, or pick one up from the sidewalk stands along the route. The southwest corner of New Hampshire Avenue and I Street NW is a good place to start. And bring your cell-phone. An audio tour is available at 202-595-0094.

The show's title works on several levels. The art is outdoors. But it's slightly transgressive, too; in some cases, breaking rules about what art — especially public art — should look like and what purpose it should serve. In a few instances, the sculpture seems to be bursting out of its flower box, so to speak, like a weed.

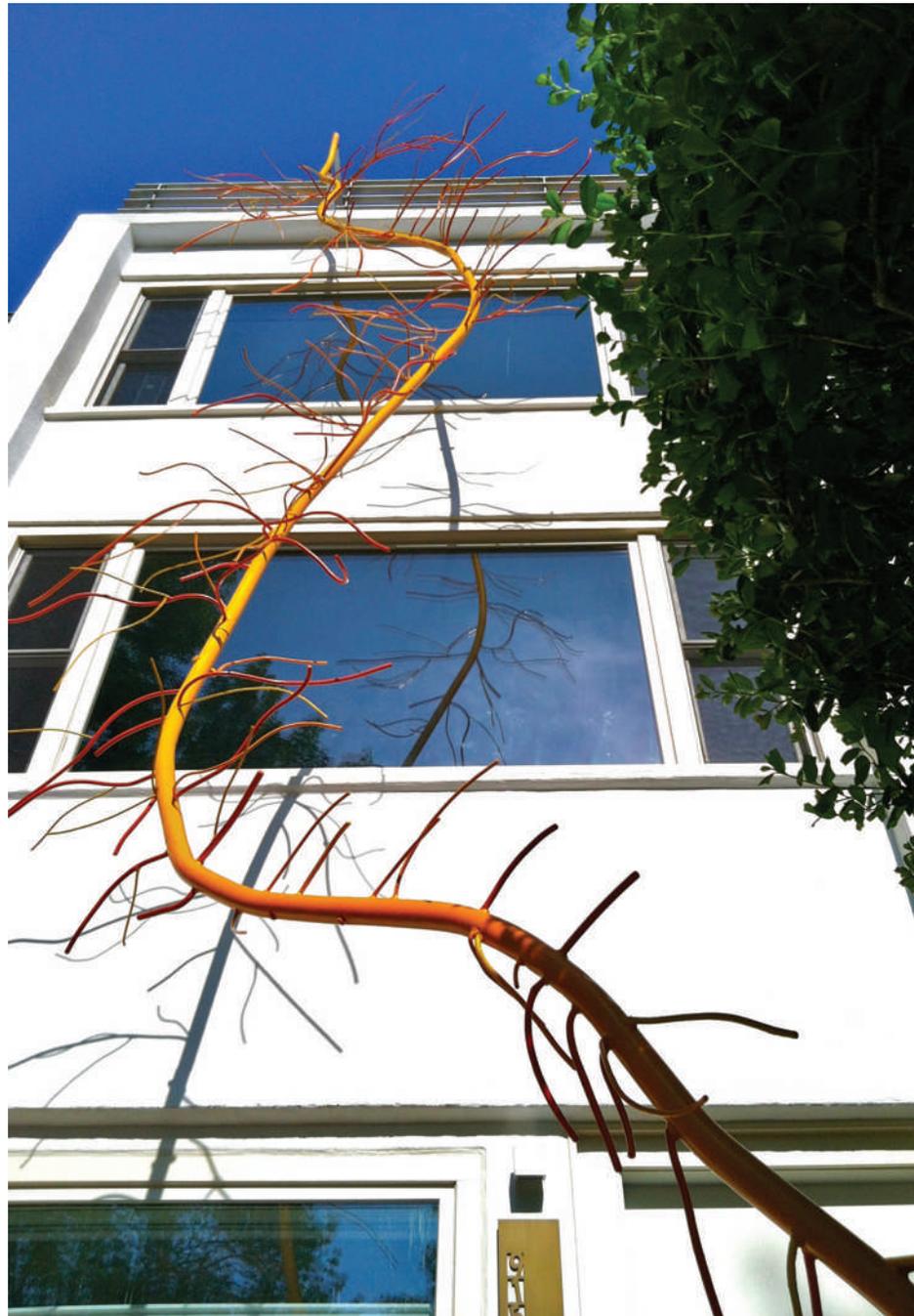
That's a good thing.

The most obvious example of that is Dalya Luttwak's "Alfalfa Root at 4.5 Months Old." In front of a minimalist white contemporary home with big picture windows, Luttwak's yellow metal sculpture resembles a Jack-and-the-Beanstalk-scale vine, originating in a planter next to the driveway and scaling the front of the three-story structure. It's wild, and a bit insane, which is nice to see in this button-down neighborhood.

Twins John and Joseph Dumbacher's towering, black, gatelike structure, "No. 286," is more Washingtonian. It would not be out of place in front of a museum or office building.

Although the works are outdoors, some can be viewed only at certain hours. Peter Lee and Blake Turner's "Craigslist Unrequited," for instance, switches on only after dark on Friday and Saturday evenings. It's a live-text feed of subject lines from Craigslist's "missed connections" classifieds, set to a soundtrack of classic love songs. Jefferson Pinder's racially themed videos will be screened on the side of the George Washington Inn beginning June 1. Barbara Liotta's "Dark Sun" — a glittering tapestry made of monofilament and epoxy resin hanging off the side of the River Inn — is best viewed after sunset, though it looks great in direct sun, too.

But my favorite pieces were among the show's most subtle — and most easily overlooked — offerings. Lina Vargas de la Hoz's "Growing Culture" is, literally, a flower box, filled with native and nonnative plants, both edible and inedible. Over the course of the show, it will move from location to



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL O'SULLIVAN/THE WASHINGTON POST



Top, "Alfalfa Root at 4.5 Months Old" adds some insanity to a button-down neighborhood. Above, "Growing Culture" is a flower box filled with native and nonnative plants.



Washington-based artist Foon Sham's "Curve" is meant to evoke both architecture and a vessel.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORK

Go ahead and crawl inside Foon Sham's "Curve," just outside the entrance to the River Inn hotel. Fashioned from more than 1,000 cedar blocks — stacked, Jenga-like, in the shape of a giant bowling pin — it's one of a series of pieces that the Chinese-born, Washington-based artist has been building for 15 years, meant to evoke both architecture and a vessel.

Inside its shade, there's a slight echo. The temperature is a bit cooler than on the sidewalk. It's a peaceful, meditative experience. If you look up, you can see clouds drifting by through the skylight.

In addition to suggesting a sort of tepee, "Curve" also resembles the human torso. In other words, it's not just a building, but a kind of cloak, offering shelter for one. It's a pretty piece, but it also delivers an unexpectedly powerful message, especially because of its proximity to a luxury hotel.

— Michael O'Sullivan

the most domestic settings.

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SCULPTING OUTSIDE THE LINES

Through Oct 20 at various locations in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood.

www.foggybottomassociation.com/arts.

Hours: Most of "Sculpting Outside the Lines" is on view around the clock. "Craigslist Unrequited" can be seen only on Fridays and Saturdays from dusk to 10 p.m. Jefferson Pinder's videos will screen the first Friday of the month starting June 1 from 8:30 to 10 p.m.

Admission: Free.

Public program: Guided tours will be offered on the third Saturday of each month at 11 a.m.

They will begin at New Hampshire Avenue and I Street NW.

location. (All the addresses are listed on the map.) You'll recognize it because it's shaped like a valise or traveling case, underscoring the theme of migration and cross-cultural sharing, both human and botanical.

Another multi-site installation is Adam Nelson's "Atmospheres." After spending 15 minutes trying to spot these pieces at the designated addresses, I gave up and asked the owner of one of the homes. Look at the buildings' pediments, or triangular ornaments, just above the front doors. In each of the three, the artist has inserted a piece of translucent plastic that looks like a cloud of thick fog is oozing, like something out of a horror movie, from inside the house.

On the one hand, they're visual puns referencing the neighborhood's silly name. On the other hand, they're reminders of how much wonder and mystery still lurk in