

# En Plein Air: Merging Art and the Outdoors

Public Art Reston Walking Tours Offer Best of Both Experiences

BY JANET REMS  PHOTOGRAPHY BY PUBLIC ART RESTON

**W**e all know about the health benefits of walking — those 10,000 steps per day. Plus, long, peaceful walks are known to reduce stress, pace thoughts and clear heads. Engagement with arts and culture, likewise, have proven to be central to positive and lifelong development, among other things enhancing creativity, productivity and the overall quality of life.

Restonians have long known these benefits. The frequently studied and lauded planned community of Reston was founded by the late Robert E. Simon on principles that intentionally provided residents with countless places to walk and otherwise interact with the great outdoors as well as to enjoy a diverse array of cultural experiences, including public art.

According to the Reston Association (RA), the community boasts 55 miles of paved and natural surface pathways (with 95 bridges) that wind throughout its more than 1,300 acres of open space. Moreover, Reston's public art inventory, according to Public Art Reston, currently numbers more than 40 and continues to grow.

Public Art Reston, which is celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary



this year, merged the two experiences, art and outdoors, with a public art walking tour during last year's annual Reston Founder's Day in April. The focal points of the walking tour are 10 public art sites within Reston's historic heart, Lake Anne Village Center. Public Art Reston plans to re-offer the tour at the 2017 Founder's Day celebration, April 8.

Anne Delaney, executive director of Public Art Reston, noted that the idea of offering local public art walking tours originated in 2012 when the Reston Historic Trust, in cooperation with Public Art Reston, presented an exhibition at the Reston Museum, "Reston: The Art of Community," showcasing the planned community's long public art history. As a complement, two related public art walking tours were offered. "We were fortunate," she recalled, "to have



had Reston founder Robert Simon as the tours leader." (In honor of Public Art Reston's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, "Reston: The Art of Community," again will be exhibited at the Reston Museum in November.)

The incentive to offer a public art walking tour at last year's Founder's Day was spurred, Delaney said, by her encounter with art historian, teacher and Reston resident Phoebe Avery. "Given her impressive background, I felt she would be the ideal person to create and lead such a tour," she noted, emphasizing it was Avery's idea to focus that particular tour on the Lake Anne area.

"This was a logical first step. ... It was the first [Reston] site conceived that contained public art," Avery explained, also pointing out that the walking tour's overarching theme is how — except for the newer bronze



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sculpture of Simon — Lake Anne's public art was "designed contemporaneously with the architecture and conceived as a visual whole; and even formed of the same constructions materials."

Also a member of Public Art Reston's Public Art and Communication committees and currently an art teacher at



## PUBLIC ART WALKING TOUR: LAKE ANNE SITES

The following are the 10 public art sites included in Public Art Reston's Lake Anne Village Center walking tour. For those who would like to conduct their own independent walking tour of this historic area, more detailed descriptions of these 10 sites, plus Reston's 30 or more public art sites in other areas are available at [www.publicartreston.org](http://www.publicartreston.org).

- 1 Historic marker at the entrance to Lake Anne Village Center's Washington Plaza that describes the founding of Reston;
- 2 "The Pyramid" by James Rossant, 1965, a study in horizontal and vertical lines that mirrors similar directional forces in the surrounding buildings;
- 3 "Untold Stories" by Reston native Zachary Oxman, 2004, locally known as 'Bronze Bob,' traditional medium of bronze casting creates life-like portrait of Reston founder Robert E. Simon, casually sitting on a park bench;
- 4 "The Pulpit" by James Rossant, 1965, a platform rising over Lake Anne inlet on a cylindrical column made of a hollowed-out block of poured concrete, "a place to look from and be looked at;
- 5 "Plaza fountain" by James Rossant, 1965, at the core of Washington Plaza, sculpted from reinforced concrete, its rounded forms respond to the hemicycle shape of the plaza;
- 6 "Decorative Pieces," Washington Plaza storefronts by Chermayeff & Geismar, 1965, commissioned from the New York graphic design firm that created the logos for NBC and PBS among others, larger-than-life objects reflect 1960s Pop Art aesthetic;
- 7 Untitled ceramic mural by potter Olin L. Russum, Jr., 1967, sculptural mural for the outer walls of the Moorings Drive underpass, earthen tones that reflect colors of the surrounding landscape, only the right side remains;
- 8 "The Sun Boat" by Gonzalo Fonseca, 1965, multi-part, molded concrete play structure that inspires children to take imaginary voyages and "Wooden Horse", by Marco Rando, 2016, inspired by Gonzalo Fonseca's "Wooden Horse" realized in 1965.
- 9 "The Lookout Tower," a.k.a. "moon viewing platform" or "stairway to nowhere," by James Rossant, 1964, reached by steep stairs, initially designed to test the concrete for Heron House, now a playful, integral feature of the site and ideal vertical counterpoint to "The Sun Boat;"
- 10 "The Underpass" and "The Pylon" by Gonzalo Fonseca, 1965, "The Underpass" gave Fonseca freedom to create a unified sculptural environment that fully employed his imagination and signature abstract forms; and "The Pylon," a seven-foot monolith, extends the solid-void forms of "The Underpass" with its rounded opening perfectly sized to contain a small child.



Northern Virginia Community College, Avery's art walking tour script elaborated: "Sculpture touches every corner of the site and reaches beyond the plaza greeting the curious viewer in unlikely places. These works are part of the structural fabric of the space. ... Their very composition creates a structural interplay and continuum between the buildings and the space that engenders an active dialogue between form and function. ... It [was designed so it] could uplift the spirit, provide a playful encounter and ultimately bring the community together."

Enlarging on those ideas in a recent conversation, Avery, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Maryland whose art degrees include a masters from the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, further suggested that the artists and architects who created Lake Anne's Washington Plaza — especially Gonzalo Fonseca and James Rossant — were extremely cognizant of the environment not only in the materials used, but also in the works' organic forms.

Lake Anne's public art sites, she added, "reflect and mirror the surroundings. The environment and nature enhance the works, and, in turn, the works enhance the environment. Sometimes, people walk by [the public art works] because they are so much part of the environment. It's not necessarily a negative that they are such a fabric of the environment, but it is something [Public Art Reston] wants to change with these tours ... promote awareness."

Increased awareness, she hoped, might lead not only to support for new public art works, but also for needed maintenance of existing ones. "These are ours," she emphasized, "and they need to be protected."

Fully agreeing, Delaney, who also would like to see the variety of tours expanded, said, "These guided tours are a fun and engaging way to heighten awareness of the great number and value of our outdoor public art."

Although at this time only a nascent goal, both Delaney and Avery would very much like to

see digital versions of these tours eventually developed. Accessed either online or via mobile phones, these walking tours could then be available at any time. "You could walk or get on a bike and do the whole thing," Avery enthused.

In the interim, RA's map of Reston — which is available in print at RA offices — and another one listing all of Reston's public art is available on Public Art Reston's website, which includes the locations of the community's existing public art inventory, making it possible for walkers, runners and bikers to devise their own tours.

Janet Rems is chairman of Public Art Reston's Communications Committee. The former editor of *The Reston Times*, she regularly freelances for *The Fairfax County Times*, writing primarily about the arts.



### LEARN MORE

Public Art Reston is represented by a group of Reston civic and community organizations and leaders. It seeks to inspire an ongoing commitment to public art and create a new generation of artworks in Reston. It imagines public art throughout Reston that inspires the community and engages the mind and senses. In 2008, Public Art Reston adopted a Master Plan that outlines a vision for public art in Reston, key opportunities for new projects, and an action plan for success. Public Art Reston is a 501(c)(3) tax exempt, not-for-profit organization. Visit [www.publicartreston.org](http://www.publicartreston.org) or call 703-880-1177 to find out more or to get involved.