

# The art of nature: Connemara draws artists to outdoors

By CATHY SPAULDING

Staff writer

Face the sun and Sharon Loudon's art disappears into the grassland.

Turn away from the sun and the art grows into faintly glistening wisps of silver among the green.

"And when the light changes," Loudon said, "it sparkles across the meadow and creeps up on you like the grass."

Loudon's work is art in transition, much like the 10 other sculptures on display during Connemara's Spring Sculpture Show. The art and nature show will run from March 14 through May 22 on its 72-acre meadow near Alma Drive and Hedgcoxe Road.

People may help the artists put the finishing touches on their works, plus enjoy a chili lunch and sneak peek tour of exhibits during Volunteer Day from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday. Those interested may call Connemara

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Conservancy at 214-346-9736.

Loudon, a New York City resident, has finished setting up her piece — tiny pieces of reflective tape attached to scores of reed-like rods. She said she had a basic idea of what to do with her work when Connemara officials approached her and showed her pictures of the meadow.

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"I immediately thought of the grass," she said. "So I was most interested in the open field. Here the grass gets really high."

She said her vision changed, somewhat, when she set foot on the field and was surrounded by the growth.

"I had wanted to put the work against the fence, but now I have the pieces all going toward the field," she said. "I want to bring people into the meadow."

Looking across the meadow to the pecan grove one can see a tree surrounded by log piles.

"I call it a 'Marker,'" said Dallas artist Philip Van Keuren as he added more logs to his ring. "From every part of the park, it marks this tree."

"I was attracted by the goldness and brown of the oak. It just glows in the sunlight," the director of the Pollock Gallery at Southern Methodist University said. "I'm building rings around this tree, like rings inside the tree."

The third-generation Dallasite compared the tree, the meadow and the pecan grove to home.

"My grandmother came to this (Dallas) area in a covered wagon," he said. "I live about a mile from where I grew up, at what is now Jupiter Road and Northwest Highway. Back then, every place was like this mead-

ow."

Highways, high-rises and houses have replaced most of the meadowland between Van Keuren's former homestead and the conservancy. Housing developments continue to be built around the rolling meadow.

This year, such development has become part of North Carolina artist Marek Rains' sculpture. The work, a line of tree trunks tilting every which way across the top of a hill, imitates the silhouettes of rooftops if seen from the correct angle, Rains said.

"It's a transition between the natural landscape and the surrounding neighborhood," he said.

Look at the trees from another angle and "you see a sick forest," he said. "It moves the horizon line into the meadow because I believe that is the intent of the housing developers — to cover the area with houses."

"But they can't because the land belongs to the people of Texas," adds Lauri Nelson Robinson, curator of the Spring Sculpture Show.

Indeed, for the past 18 springs, the meadow has provided an island of art and nature in the midst of suburban sprawl. Robinson said former curator Amy Williams Monier "established the tradition of working with artists who want to work outdoors."

"It is becoming increasingly rare for artists to work outdoors in such a wide, open space," she

said.

Part of that reason is the unpredictability of springtime weather she observed.

"When artists come out here they're told to anticipate everything from ice storms to tornadoes to mud to sun," Robinson said, adding that artists "wore lots of sun-block this week."

Artist Marsha Pels of Brooklyn, N.Y., may have to be particularly careful. The Fulbright Senior Scholar and lecturer crafted her work along a deep creek by wrapping copper wire around tree's exposed roots.

"The roots reminded me of the baobab tree of Africa, where the roots are above ground," she said, acknowledging that one good rain could put her sculpture underwater.

However, neither Pels nor Robinson seem threatened by the possibility.

"Marsha expects the copper wire to rust and develop a turquoise patina over the next few months.

It seems each artist embraces the fragile, temporary nature of Connemara work, which must be taken down after Mother's Day.

"What isn't temporary?" asked Van Keuren, who even used borrowed wood for his piece. "In geological time, everything is just a blip."

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