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ART|CLOSE READING

## Sculpture to Invigorate a Shrinking City

BY MALCOLM GAY

One telling measure of this city's past glories and present challenges is this: The United States Census of 1950 reported roughly 850,000 people living in St. Louis; today the number is around 350,000. Or there's this: In 1988, when [Jonathan Franzen](#) published "The Twenty-Seventh City," a novel about real and fictional tribulations afflicting St. Louis, his title referred to the city's plunge in rank to 27th largest in America from 4th in less than a century. If he wrote the book now, just two decades later, he would have to call it "The Fifty-Second City."

Signs of the depleted population are everywhere, from the boarded-up houses that dot the city's north side to the stubbornly vacant office buildings downtown.

Over the last 10 years, however, civic groups, private developers and city leaders have been trying to nurse downtown St. Louis back to life. Taking cues from revitalization drives in other midsize cities, they have created thousands of residential loft units. There is now a bookstore in the area, and next month a local grocery chain plans to open its first downtown branch.

But perhaps the most original — and conspicuous — step in the campaign is Citygarden, a 2.9-acre sculpture park that opened Wednesday on two blocks of the city's central corridor, known as the Gateway Mall.

Financed by the Gateway Foundation, a nonprofit organization that installs

public art in the St. Louis area, the park cost between \$25 million and \$30 million — which does not include the collection of 24 works by artists including Fernand Léger, Tony Smith, Jim Dine and Bernar Venet. (The foundation, which has a longstanding policy of not commenting to the news media, declined to disclose the collection's value.)

Within walking distance of the Gateway Arch, the park is intended to bring tourists and art fans to the mall and to draw office workers and loft dwellers outside with an array of amenities. "It's really a hybrid landscape," said Warren Byrd, a principal of Nelson Byrd Woltz, the landscape architecture firm in Charlottesville, Va., that designed Citygarden. "It's some combination of a city park and a sculpture garden."

The sculpture collection, which includes both modern and contemporary works, is cosmopolitan in flavor, ranging from Mr. Dine's whimsical treatment of Pinocchio in "Big White Gloves, Big Four Wheels" to the mysterious, egglike form of the Japanese sculptor Kan Yasudas's "Door of Return." Visitors can call up an Acoustiguide-style audio tour, read by prominent St. Louisians, by dialing a dedicated number on their cell phones.

The park's other features include a cafe, a massive "spray plaza" and a split-level pool whose two parts are joined by a waterfall. A granite-capped "meander

wall" snakes through the park's southern portion, offering seating and spatial definition, while a complementary wall of Missouri limestone arcs diagonally through the northern section. The walls, Mr. Byrd said, were "our way of marking several territories in the site" — which was previously two empty squares of grass — and of linking the two blocks.

The park, shown below in a rendering by Nelson Byrd Woltz, has no formal entrances or barriers to segregate its manicured paths and quiet spaces from the streets around it.

"It has no limits," said Mr. Byrd, whose firm also designed the Flight 93 National Memorial in Shanksville, Pa. "We wanted to make this site accessible to everybody."

He added that the landscape included several "design gestures" — rows of Ginkgo trees, native plants, wide sidewalks — that could be extended to other portions of the Gateway Mall.

City planners say they share that vision, but for now they are looking to these two blocks to spur economic development on their own.

"There are several development opportunities right in the vicinity, and as the economy recovers, I think Citygarden will make those sites a lot more attractive," said Barbara Geisman, the city's executive director of development. "This is probably one of the best things that's happened downtown in the last couple of decades."



1. **LIMESTONE WALL** Constructed from stone quarried about 80 miles down the Mississippi River from St. Louis, the arcing limestone wall is one of the park's dominant features. Its diagonal curve provided 'the opportunity to make a higher ground and a lower ground,' Mr. Byrd said. The wall's eastern portion is bisected by the park's 180-foot split-level pool (shown here with Bernar Venet's "2 Arcs x 4; 230.5 Degree Arc x 5" from 1999 on the grass beyond it.) Its western section incorporates a large LED video wall, which during the first season will feature video art and films selected by local museum directors and curators.
2. **'FEMMES AU PERROQUET'** One of several works by Fernand Leger depicting women with parrots, this bronze has relief from 1952 is installed on the exterior wall of the park's café, within view of its patio.
3. **'EROS BENDATO'** At the park's southeast corner the Polish sculptor Igor Mitoraj's arresting 1999 bronze head, more than 12 feet long, rests on one of the park's water features: a tilted granite disk that is partially covered by a scrim of flowing water.
4. **'TAI-CHI SINGLE WHIP'** In this 1998 bronze work by Ju Ming, a Taiwanese sculptor, a blocky figure strikes one of the martial art's basic poses.
5. **SPRAY PLAZA** With 102 computer-controlled spray nozzles the park's "spray plaza" occupies more than 4,300 square feet, making it one of the largest its kind in the United States. Each nozzle is outfitted with LEDs, allowing programmers to create nearly infinite combinations of water and light.
6. **MEANDER WALL** Evoking the twists and oxbows of the nearby Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, the 1,100-foot wall gives a loose structure to the park's southern sector, defining both open and more intimate spaces within it. Topped with Lake Superior granite – designers tried to use materials "sourced from within the rivers' basins" whenever possible, Mr. Byrd said – the wall also acts as a bench for viewing sculptures, several of which it wraps around. Here it is shown with one of the two figures that form Tom Claassen's 2004 work "Untitled (Two Rabbits)."
7. **'ZENIT'** At the garden's highest spot, this towering and mysterious 1999 work by the Italian sculptor Mimmo Paladino is cast in bronze and aluminum.
8. **UNTITLED** Martin Puryear's 2008 stainless steel abstract explores the relationship between traditional craft – in particular, basketry – and industrial design. Doubling as a bench, it allows visitor's to sit while viewing Mark di Suvero's "Aesop's Fables," shown here in the background.
9. **'AESOP'S FABLES'** A classic example of Mr. di Suvero's work with industrial materials, this sculpture from 1990 is a low-slung balancing act. The collection of I-beams welded into a tidy pattern of interlocking V's at one end is counterbalanced by the curvilinear tangle of steel at the other.
10. **'LA RIVIERE'** Aristide Maillo's nude, perhaps the park's most famous sculpture, is also the earliest in the collection, made between 1938 and 1943. Meant to personify a river's churning current, the bronze figure is sited here on the upper portion of the park's split-level pool, where the sound of water falling into the lower pool gives an auditory assist to the sculpture's dynamic lines

