

## ARCHITECTURE COMMENTARY

## ArtsPark tames Young Circle

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The ArtsPark at downtown Hollywood's Young Circle is a lyrical ode to the possibilities of the public landscape. It is very modern -- with perhaps more kinship to painting and sculpture than one usually finds in architecture or the landscape -- but it also calls upon time-tested precepts of park design.

Young Circle has been a centerpiece of Hollywood ever since the city was laid out by founder Joseph Young in the 1920s. Though downtown Hollywood has had its own quiet resurgence in recent years, the circle itself had become a bit woebegone. Worse, with three lanes of U.S. 1 zipping past it, the bedraggled circle had become little more than a blip in the passing scenery.

Enter Margi Nothard, the designer behind both ArtsPark and the soon-to-be-completed visual arts center within it. In 2001, she was asked to design a single small gazebo as part of the park plan, but after a long close look at what Young Circle was and an instant inspiration over what it could be, a passion took hold. She began working and did not stop until she had redesigned all 12 acres. Then she had to convince the city to let her do it. To say she was persistent understates things, but she was.

And so comes ArtsPark -- at once compellingly visual and pleasing to stroll through. There's a play area that relies on texture underfoot and features equipment that offers great fodder to a child's imagination, a cattail to twirl about or a flying saucer to swirl on. Broad walkways allow for a stroll or a more energetic run. Two fountains -- one for children to run through and play in -- offer cooling mists. There are quiet and shady places to sit and brighter, more open spaces to congregate -- a grand lawn, a meadow, a palm court, an oak grove, a thicket of bamboo, a promenade. Nothard kept all the existing trees (some were lost to Hurricane Wilma) and added more than 100 new ones.

Nothard, 43, who was educated in her native South Africa and then in Los Angeles and 11 years ago, almost by chance, moved to Fort Lauderdale, eventually opened her own firm, Glavovic Studio. The firm is making a name for itself both for its work in the arts (the work includes museums, galleries, studios and more) and for designs that are at once daring and contextual.

**PUBLIC ART**

Both apply here. A focal point of the ArtsPark -- officially, Glavovic Studio is the design architect while Scharf Architects is on the books as the architect of record -- is its public art installation that includes a dramatic fountain and an intricate and fairly cerebral homage to one of the park's *five* fantastic baobab trees. The Japanese artist Ritsuko Taho, who worked in collaboration with Nothard, measured the life waves of the huge and ancient tree, recording it over the course of a year, then translated that (think of the sounds of ever-so-slow growth or the sway of the wind) into music that includes such actual instruments as the harp and the natural notes of the wind and the ocean; the music emanates out across the street giving the west side of the park an almost other-worldly presence, but it also animates the jets of the large boat-shaped fountain so that the impact is visual as well as auditory.

**AMPHITHEATER**

The ArtsPark also includes an outdoor amphitheater for live performances and outdoor film showings, but the striking visual arts building, likely to open this fall, will also be home to studios, classes, workshops and exhibitions. The building evokes the experimental aspects of mid-century modernism, expressing those ideas in a far more contemporary language in a manner both daring and dramatic. It sits in the southeastern quadrant of the park

The design is simultaneously contemporary and true to the past. Nothard kept the traditional pathways through the park, and of course, the trees. She invoked the principles of the great American landscape designer Frederick Law Olmstead and thought of his Central Park with its idea of outdoor "rooms." As in Renaissance cities, she was conscious of terminating vistas, focusing the eye on the central fountain or the baobab trees.

But those ideas are iterated in language that is entirely contemporary and graphic. The fountain at the center is an asymmetrical ellipse. Flower beds are likewise contained in planting areas of unexpected geometry. The overall effect is truly compelling.

Nothard calls this an "experiential" park, and it is; one can leave the bustle of traffic and the hustle of city life simply by crossing the street and stepping into the ArtsPark. At the same time, it is still, clearly an urban oasis, not a bucolic regional park, more "Barcelona," she said, than the suburbs.

Like Barcelona, there is a feeling of modern art come to life in ArtsPark. It is a remarkable work of architecture, landscape and urbanism, and it is a place that can be taken as a whole -- a set piece of design -- or explored and enjoyed bit by bit.



ROBIN HILL

Margi Nothard's passion for parks revamped Young Circle in Hollywood.

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