



Art on The Green by Ink Tank at Laguna Gloria, photo by Erica Nix

Full Sail

Laguna Gloria

by MARJORIE FLANAGAN

Engaging visitors can be like navigating rough seas for an art museum. Waves of questions arise such as what is fine art? How is art relevant to visitors' lives? What is the balance between education and entertainment? And how can museums spur dialogue for visitors of diverse races, backgrounds and ages based on art? Visual stimulation begins the voyage.

At the onset of AMOA-Arthouse's merger, it seems smooth sailing with two recent exhibitions: *Art on the Green* and *Buster Graybill: Progeny of Tush Hog*. Both inspire visitors to examine where art and life collide and raise the question of high art versus accessible relevance.

Art on the Green on view this spring at the Laguna Gloria location invites visitors to have a new kind of art experience. Dubbed as a social event for all ages, viewing each sculptural miniature golf hole

is only half the fun. You are asked to play golf too! With this show, AMOA-Arthouse demonstrates their continued strength as a place for the people.

Engaging visitors through interaction, artist-designed golf holes ranging from sophisticated to subversive address the bigger questions of what is fine art and how is it relevant to life. Any museum that invites viewers to participate in the artwork is a cause for laud. Interactive exhibits help the visitor make the connection between experiencing art in a museum setting and moving out into daily life to notice that art is all around: from the layout of the neighborhood newsletter to the shapely design of your iPhone; from the color of your morning coffee cup to the sculpture in your office's lobby.

Art comes from the viewer's mind as much as from the product of the artist. Each of the local Texas artists who created golf holes certainly designed,

built and birthed the sculptures, but the sculptures don't stop there. As each museum-goer putts a Titleist golf ball down the green, and with each hole-in-one or one hundred, art permeates. Fine art or not, visitors are affected. When it is as much fun as *Art on the Green*, positive art experiences occur and life-long art museum visitors are created.

In the museum world, the delicate balance between education and entertainment ebbs and flows. Scholarly exhibits generally appeal only to a small segment of the academic or artistic society. Blockbuster shows, though informative, are often deemed too glitzy and commercial to have critical merit, but fund much of the museum's budget for an entire year.

Climbing down from the ivory tower and offering a show like *Art on the Green* affords the museum a chance to give a variety of types of people the opportunity to experience the space and interact with what they see. This and other similar shows can help bridge the gap between smart and significant by bringing in new visitors to experience Laguna Gloria's unique green space and continuing to provide thought-provoking sculptural art to spur dialogue.

The natural beauty of Laguna Gloria is an idyllic setting for an outdoor sculpture exhibition. It allows visitors to feel how art is experienced differently in nature versus the built environment. These grounds are lush with native Texas plant life and nearby Lake Austin creates a serene atmosphere. There are 12 acres to explore sculpture from the permanent collection as well as each of the nine golf holes created by architects, artisans and designers. AMOA-Arthouse's downtown location has a bonus 10th hole to continue the fun in an unlikely rooftop setting. Here and at an earlier show at AMOA-Arthouse, visitors are asked to examine the intersection of art and the environment.

This past winter AMOA-Arthouse's Laguna Gloria location presented another sculptural exhibition, the inspiring installation *Buster Graybill: Progeny of Tush Hog*. The title is a play-on-words. A tush hog is the colloquial term for a feral hog. In slang terms, it has come to describe certain dominant males, especially in the South. Artist Buster Graybill's diamond-plated aluminum sculptures inhabited various areas of the Laguna Gloria property, grouped together like packs of animals. The rough and rugged construction site materials Graybill chose were in direct contrast to the smooth reflective surfaces and geometric shapes. They are reminiscent of Donald Judd and Tony Smith's minimalist sixties sculpture and beg the question: Is it art?

Yes, but much more. Graybill built the sculptures as feeding devices for feral hogs and wildlife. Each sculpture was outfitted with an all weather camera. As the sculptures were placed about the Texas outdoors, the cameras captured interactions with native wildlife. Photographs and videos of these interactions accompanied the outdoor sculptural installation. The eerie scenes included wild hogs rough-housing the sculptures in order to access the feed; strange deer, rams and rabbits in the darkness of night quietly inspecting the metal objects while in the background cameras captured blinking cell towers and man-made devices. In this way, Graybill asks, where do these hogs and animals belong? Where do these sculptures belong? In turn, viewers might have thought, where do I belong? And what is happening to our natural world as the urban encroaches?

In addition to eliciting questions about art and the environment, the exhibit was interesting to see from a design stance. Laguna Gloria was a great location for these "tush hogs" because they provided a primal contrast to the well-manicured and maintained lawns of Clara Driscoll's historic



Buster Graybill: Progeny of Tush Hog on Laguna Gloria grounds, photo by Erica Nix

gardens. Viewers had yet another opportunity to experience art in an inviting space and ponder questions about the human condition. The artist's stimulating fine art video, photography and sculptures showcase a wealth of visual information and a rich testimony to storytelling.

All of Austin and the state of Texas hope that AMOA-Arthouse continues to provide quality art-focused exhibitions which highlight visitor interaction, fine art and education. With fewer government dollars dispersed to the arts, and an economy that hinders outside support, I suppose the rough seas for all museums will continue. As the public looks more towards cultural institutions

to provide outstanding programming I have every confidence AMOA-Arthouse will rise to the occasion. If the two exhibitions mentioned here are any indication, the outcome will be positive. You can count on one thing, I'll be watching. 

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