

Sculptures Grow Like Flowers

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A redundant phone is rethought.

Photos Chris Lavin

Now those pipes hang in three consecutive sculptures from an oak, reminiscent of regal portraits of faces framed by perfect dreadlocks. The walkway takes you past sculptures too large to move.

"I didn't know what I was getting into," Wyse said about her largest work. It started with another friend calling and asking if she wanted some Manzanita he had cleared. She said yes. She did not expect three moving vans full of branches and trunks. The friend dumped it. She shaped and molded the pieces together, covered it with chicken wire, began sculpting it with cement. It took years to complete. But Wyse is persistent.

"It weighs 75,000 pounds," she said. "And I know it because of my bills from Diamond K," the supply store in Lafayette. It took years to complete when the English ivy, finally – one of the only plants to grow on the land -- began to make it complete. "It looks good now," she said.

Now, Wyse's space is full. Fences are adorned with flowers and lace and bags and beautiful plastic shaped bottles or carry-out containers. She has outgrown her galleries, throughout which she recently sprinkled full jars of glitter to make a connection between one piece and the next. On the path, sculptures like moose ferns

fall from the trees; stalagmites come from the other direction, sprouting sculptures that vary from the whimsical to the baffling.

Wyse has been an artist for a long as she's been alive. She also is an animal lover (she had ocelots, once upon a time, with beautiful pictures and happy cats to prove it) and she eloped at the age of 15 to leave her family home in Newark, N.J. She seems to be a person who does not look back. She is a free spirit, with a dandy hat and bright lipstick to prove it. Her beginnings, she says, are only the start of what she has produced.

She pointed to a cluster of crisp black umbrellas and fresh blankets on the ground. Someone could live here, a visitor might think. But it's a sculpture. "This is the Homeless Ladies Encampment," Wyse announced. She had recently changed a sculpture near it, to freshen it up, replacing a takeout container.

"So it's changing all the time," Wyse said, looking around. "Just like we are. We need to get spiffed up, too!"

For a tour through Karen Wyse's sculpture garden, you may watch an independent production that says it all on YouTube, at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qpz9FcwjnTk>. Or just search Karen Wyse on YouTube.



Wyse has trouble finding coffee cups because she is constantly tying them to trees, where they look better than on the shelf.