

Artists, city to discuss keeping in step

By SUSAN CHADWICK
POST ART CRITIC

THE HOUSTON International Festival's "Landscapes" show of outdoor sculpture remains on view until May 15. And at the end of May, the organizations involved will meet to discuss how to avoid problems for next year's public art show.

City Parks Department Director Don Olson provoked a controversy when he refused to allow one of the sculptural works to be installed in Buffalo Bayou Park, citing his concerns for the park and for the structural integrity of the work.

But neither Olson nor members of the Municipal Arts Commission, who also were skeptical about the ambitious project, met with the artists to discuss their concerns. The episode was cited by some in the art community as evi-

dence that public art was a low priority for the city, and that city officials had little respect for artists. Among other things, the controversy also brought to light confusion

over the future role of the appointed members of the MAC, which before had never been involved in approving such temporary sculpture shows. In the past year, however, the commission has adopted a more active role in public art issues.

Michael Galbreth and Jack Massing, a collaborative team who call themselves the Art Guys, planned to place three upside-down shotgun houses from the Fourth Ward in the park as a statement about homelessness and unused housing.

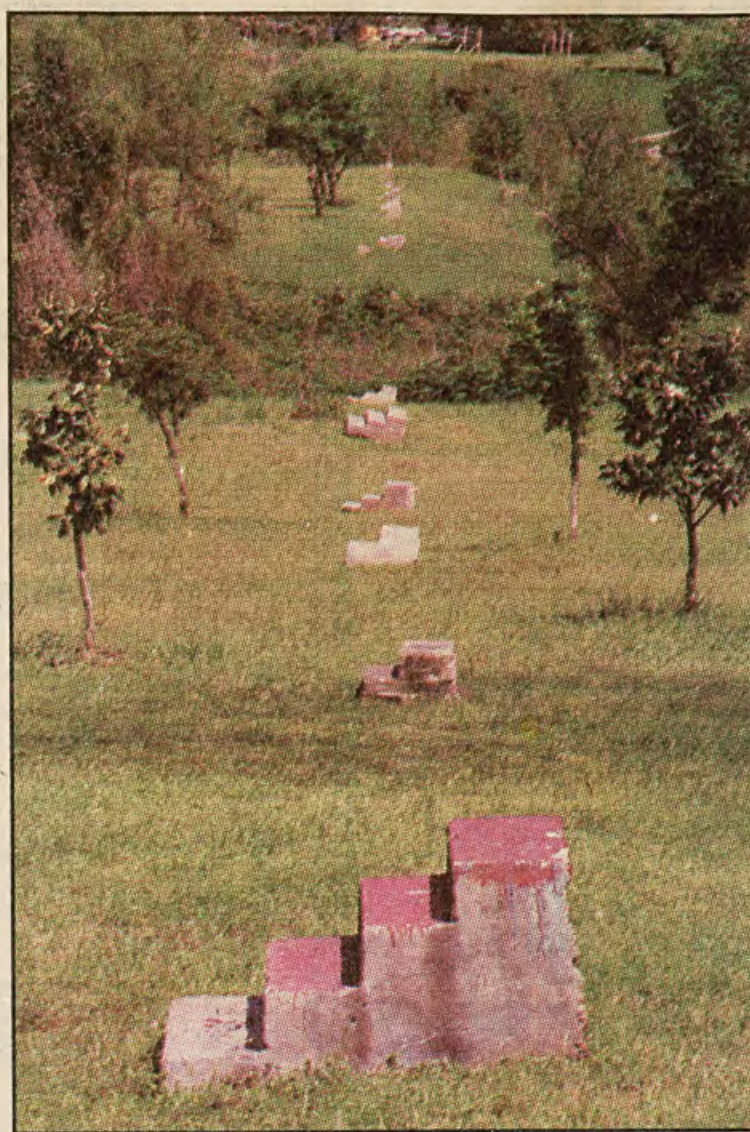
They were two of seven Houston artists selected by a jury of experts for the site-specific sculpture show, a revival of the popular Bayou Show which ended in 1986.

Michael Peranteau, co-director of DiverseWorks, the non-profit art space which organized the show for the festival, said that representatives of the parks department, the MAC, DiverseWorks, and the festival would meet at the end of May to "talk together to make it easier."

"Education is the problem, absolutely."

In the meantime, the Art Guys have installed a poetic alternative piece in the downtown park beautifully combining both formal values and social content.

It is a series of more than 30



Ira Strickstein/The Houston Post

Art Guys' steps were installed in Buffalo Bayou Park when their three upside-down shotgun houses were vetoed.

Please see ART, E-6

ART: Nature gets heavy dose of sculpture in 'Landscapes'

From E-1

concrete steps, remnants of houses that were. The steps, some still covered with broken glass and other debris from their disintegrating neighborhoods, are lined up like a street of phantom homes, and the line spans the park, going from the north bank near the Sabine Street Bridge and crossing the bayou, cutting a line through the grassy horizon of the park.

It is the only artwork that succeeds as a sculpture which responds to the land and the environment of the park, which is what the site-specific sculpture show is all about.

Nevertheless, the talented Dean Ruck created an interesting chain-link house with rubber balls being batted around inside. Mark Monroe built a tree out of trash cans. Sharon Kopriva buried some of her ghoulish people, a couple with child, in the side of a hill. Wendy Smith started something like some huge nests made of bent branches on the south side of the bayou.

And Rose Finn-Kelcey, a British artist obsessed with doors, installed swinging saloon doors in the grass on the bayou's north side, which is unfortunately a trite and somewhat insulting vision of Houston.

Houston artist John Atlas promised to have his sculpture installed

by this weekend.

This only partially successful sculpture show was funded in part by the Houston International Festival and the City of Houston through the Cultural Arts Council. To see it, drive to the Sabine Street Bridge and park. Walk west along either side of the bayou. Most of the work is on the north side.

■ Artist Eleanor Dickinson, a native of East Tennessee, is fascinated with the religious culture of the South. An exhibition at DiverseWorks, 1117 East Freeway, through Sunday, includes Dickinson's mesmerizing videos of revival meetings and gatherings where people speak in tongues, drink poison, handle snakes, and shake, rattle and roll with the Holy Ghost.

The show also includes velvet paintings from her collection dating from the 17th century to the present, as well as religious folk art and paraphernalia, and some of Dickinson's own paintings on velvet, these latter being mainly portraits of nude friends reclining as if on a cross.

Still, the whole of this peculiar exhibition and of Dickinson's investigations into the bizarre faith and ecstasy of these people is quite engaging overall.

DiverseWorks is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, and noon to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.