



# HARBOR ARTS 2013

WATCH OUT, AMERICA. HARBOR ARTS IS  
"OccupyING" THE PRESENT.

**BOSTON HARBOR  
SHIPYARD AND  
MARINA**

256 MARGINAL  
STREET

EAST BOSTON,  
MASSACHUSETTS

THROUGH  
SEPTEMBER 21

So snugly do the sculptures dotted along the coastline of East Boston fit into the environment of the Boston Harbor Shipyard that you might think they were a result of spontaneous generation. Well, almost.

Steve Israel initiated Harbor Arts in 2010 by hefting his sculpture of a giant cod up to the top-front corner of the Boston Boat Works. The Works is still launching newly watertight creations into Boston Harbor and that totemic cod still swims into view from every angle of a visitor's perambulations. Powerfully imagined and crafted, it's both a modern artifact and as ancient as our reverence for the sea's bounty.

A raft of other permanent sculptures from Harbor Arts 2010 swim under and alongside, but never over, this regal cod. Several workers in the boatyard pointed out to me the undulating tentacles of an "octopus" book-ending Israel's cod on a roof at the yard's far end. Such a possessive air accompanied this description that I did not beg to differ with my own interpretation – after all, they had been here longer than this interloper from artscope.

When sculptor and installation artist (and artscope contributor) Elizabeth Michelman was asked to curate "Occupying the Present" for Harbor Arts 2013, she also worked respectfully

...no these restive remains from three years past. We've changed, and yet we've remained within our pasts.

So it is that 15 new sculptors were invited to craft and site pieces that embody/occupy their present thoughts and feelings on the relationship of humankind with its natal element, the sea, as well as with our fellow creatures that swim, fly, crawl and, not incidentally, make art.

The dialogue is rich and allusive without being didactic. Peter Lipsitt has constructed an elegant black pyramid that could be one of Plato's "eternal forms" or could be just our contemporary preoccupation, as old as civilization, with leaving our footprint on life's proverbially "shifting sands."

If today's sands seem to be shifting ever more restively, Lipsitt's pyramid, mounted on sturdy lumber, seems ready to pick itself up and float along with the current. Its skin of black roofing membrane, tucked and folded as elegantly as an Armani suit, could be just the fashionable armor needed to keep it bobbing atop the next tidal rise.

Speaking of tides, but more diagrammatically than Lipsitt's pyramid, architect Susan Israel has painted varicolored stripes, from white to fire-engine red, on a derelict pier demarcating the high tide line as it is predicted to creep up over the next hundred years of global warming. Susan has embellished this tracing diagram with the whimsy of corked bottles thrown into a "sea" of speculation: one big one has a capacious corked neck into which you may drop your own thoughts. Many small bottles with ready-made messages parade in more or less plain sight to the end of this marina pier.

## LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

Some words about discerning the difference between a stable and a decrepit pier: If there are boats moored on both sides of the pier, and go-karts, bicycles and pedestrians moving to and fro on top of it, proceed with due caution.

As for navigating the rest of this working boatyard, pay respectful regard to the hospitality of the signs – especially, but not exclusively, the ones that boldly announce: "THIS MEANS YOU!"

I was mesmerized, but mesmerized on safe grounds, by Kerri Schmidt's wonderfully sculptural comment on our throwaway culture. A noxious bloom of multicolored plastic bags was enclosed in a graceful tangle of rusting steel tentacles. Uniting beauty with provocation, Kerri's comment moved me to dwell on the serendipity of creatures that devour the harmful waste we humans endlessly generate.

Not serendipity we can count on, but one we should cherish whenever it finds us.

Other "finds" in this exhibition are, in my opinion, the thoughts that come to us from the artists themselves through the placards accompanying their works. Instead of bearing the learned jargon of an "authority," these placards tell us the thoughts and feelings that moved these artists to create. Refreshing and illuminating to have, for once, worthy "stage-hands" remaining modestly but firmly in the background!

Another comment from this "stage-hand" is the diversity of sculpture that confronts the alert viewer. Perhaps you sit down



Nora Valdez, *Still Waiting*.

on an uncommonly graceful bench to ponder the message you want to pop into Susan Israel's corked bottle. You look again and find that you've just parked your posterior on a sculpture/seat from 2010, sparkling as freshly as though it were just sited.

Or, you meet an uncommonly adept lichen wrapping itself skin-close to the brick of a shipyard building higher than you could ever climb. A placard proclaims this "natural" phenomenon to be an ingenious artifice of the sculptor Wendy Wolf. The process, Wolf tersely explains, is as fascinating, in its way, as the product.

John Powell's "Collected Reflections" sculpture pays homage to a wall sculpture from Harbor Arts 2010 by covering it with a skin of dancing reflections. Powell had to jettison his first choice of material as it was not strong enough to withstand harbor winds; his travails pushed his deadline but resulted in that desideratum of outdoor sculpture: delicacy and strength.

Look high, look low, look twice, read the placards by the sculptures, read the shipyard signs that point your art lover's feet toward authorized territory.

If you disembark from the Blue Line in Maverick Square and walk down Marginal Street to visit "Occupying the Present," don't miss a stroll through East Boston's Piers Park, which flirts so seductively, even sculpturally, with the sea, you'll surely want to linger.

Harbor Arts "Occupying the Present" has continuing activities throughout its tenure and a day of celebration when it closes on September 21.



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