

ART

TREEmendous Art Installations Bring Magic to Summer

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Anne Evans



Find The Enchanted Castle and four other treehouses in Columbus parks throughout the summer. Photo by Kenny Cramer.

Fans of last year's Tiny Doors project will be excited to learn that a whole new world of discovery has come to several of Columbus' parks this summer. Columbus Recreation and Parks has launched the TREEmendous project, a collaboration with five artists to place treehouses in chosen trees in five city parks. The installations will be up through September 20, 2015.

"To create a fantasy world that includes all of the elements of this project is an artistic bucket list item," says figurative sculpture artist Sharon Dorsey, who worked on a similarly themed project for the Columbus Museum of Art's Wonder Room. "I almost cried when I found out that I was included."

The artists chosen for TREEmendous include Cynthia J. Bryden, Kenny Cramer, Sharon Dorsey, Daric Gill, and Terri Maloney-Houston. Each artist received \$1,000 to complete and maintain their installation. Dorsey discovered the project through Allison Buenger, a former co-worker.

"I found out about the Tiny Door project after they were installed last year," says Dorsey. "I was so enthralled! It made me even more determined to try to be accepted into this year's project."

Columbus Recreation and Parks put out a call for artists earlier this spring, for artists to "creatively interpret the concept of small dwellings inhabited by magical woodland folk situated in trees."

"I love the notion that there are things in the forest that haven't been discovered yet," says Dorsey. "Things that only a few open-minded people can see. I wanted to make something that kids saw, then dreamed about."

My family and I searched for all of the elf houses last summer, and when we go through parks, or are around large trees, my daughter's face lights up and she almost always asks if I think there are elf houses hiding around the trees, her voice fading as she runs off to look for herself. Roaming throughout the parks to find these treehouses is going to make this summer just as exciting. Dorsey shares an inside look at her creation:

The Sons and Daughter of Severus Squirrdinal and Their Scenic Summer Sanctuary

The creatures that live in my house are called squirrdinals. They were a side project created by the brilliant scientist, Mortimer Crum. Mortimer was a gifted biogeneticist who made great strides in cattle farming in the late 1930's. He was contracted by the Germans in 1938 to begin a cloning project. He started his research in his home laboratory with the local squirrels and birds of his native area with the expectation of trials with humans by 1940. WWII began, and Mortimer grew increasingly uncomfortable with the arrangement and the expectations of the Germans. He broke the contract with the Germans who responded by burning down his laboratory. Mortimer died in the fire, but the squirrdinals were able to fly away and find shelter in Ohio's parks. They gather what they need from their surroundings for food and lodging. They are creative folk who can build a basic shelter, but they are happiest when they can create homes that look like the one that their first generation ancestors lived. -Sharon Dorsey



The Scenic Summer Sanctuary of Severus Squirrdinal's children can be found in Westgate Park, 'a slap shot away from the swings.'

Interdisciplinary artist Daric Gill used bent poplar reclaimed from a huge 1960's office desk and other reclaimed wood for his treehouse. The inside contains an Arduino micro-controller, used motorcycle battery, LED lighting strips, and solar charger to give it an evening glow.

"Who could pass up a chance to get paid to make a treehouse of their own design? That's a pretty sweet gig if I ever heard of one," he says.

Gill originally planned his treehouse for Schiller Park, but its home was found in Goodale Park. He had also been aware of the Tiny Doors project.

"Though I didn't apply, I had several friends work on pieces and they seemed to really enjoy the experience," he says. "Plus, it's just a fun idea. I'm always a big fan of fun ideas in nature."

The Living Orb

Like many adults who find themselves children at heart, the tree house still captures my imagination and sense of whimsy. My father built a large combination treehouse/playground for my sister and I when I was younger. Some of my fondest childhood memories were centered around the experiences gained in or around the treehouse. Naturally, this endeavor seemed right up my alley. If you were anything like me as a child, I was constantly coming up with ideas about what cool things I would do when I grew up. I wanted to make something that the 7 yr old version of myself would have thought of.



My take on this project envisions a suspended orb that lives in the crux of the branches. I wanted to depart from the "4-walls and a roof" treehouse and instead opted for something that would take an entirely new approach. During the day time, the segmented pieces hang in the blue summer sky. As the sun goes down, the orb "comes alive" as the inside fills with a soft white glow that pulses from light to dark. The pulse fades in and out slowly and then rests for a small time. This pulsation will make the orb appear to be sleepy during the day and then awake at night.

The slits in the orb will allow enough ambient light to pass through to make children and adults investigate the treehouse further, as will the floating nature of the piece. The inhabitants (if you will) are sustainable and imaginative. I'd like to think each of our 7 year-old-selves have a little imagination building things inside. -Daric Gill



Daric Gill's 'The Living Orb' ready for installation in Goodale Park.

Look for The Living Orb in Goodale Park, 'in the shadow of an old bronze doctor.'

Kenny Cramer, Graphic Designer for the Columbus Recreation and Parks Department, and an artist who participated in last year's Tiny Doors, also was accepted for the TREEmendous project and designed an illustrated treasure map for the project as a whole. The treehouses are installed higher in the trees, and GPS coordinates are included on the map to help you find them. Maps can be found at area Fifth Third Banks, sponsor of TREEmendous.

Cramer studied the famous castles of Germany, particularly the Neuschwanstein Castle referenced by Walt Disney in the creation of Cinderella's castle, to bring some of the history of the country to Columbus' German Village neighborhood.

My tiny door with the elf king face on it was inspired partly from the made-up magical fairyland I invented as a child called Faerical. Similarly I used to pretend that the tallest trees in the woods behind my childhood home were in fact castles for the faeries."

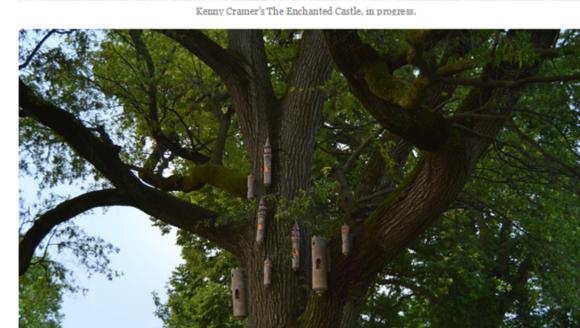
The finished treehouse is installed in Schiller Park with eight castle turrets fashioned from furnace and dryer ductwork that light up with a soft orange glow at twilight.

The Enchanted Castle

Once upon a time, when this continent was still wild and first settlers were moving into the area of present day German Village, a young German prince, tired of being pushed around by his older siblings and longing for adventure, decided to venture to the New World. Once he arrived in the settlement, he saw the largest and most beautiful tree he had ever laid eyes upon. As he gazed upon the tree, he knew that the location was perfect for his new home. He commanded his servants to chop down that tree and to begin work on a new and glorious castle. As the workers began to saw away at the thick trunk, an eerie voice called out from the forest shadows, warning, "Do not cut down my tree or you will face the consequences!" Thinking it was a villager playing a nasty trick on him, the spoiled prince commanded his men to continue their work. Months later, the tree was gone and in its place stood a beautiful castle — which the prince had spent every last cent of his royal inheritance to build. As he prepared to move his belongings into the new home, the castle was engulfed in a magical, glittering light and a fairy appeared — a tree spirit or dryad to be exact. It was her voice he had heard when he issued his first command to cut down that tree. Beneath her child-like face and butterfly wings, her face was grim and angry. "You destroyed my beautiful tree for your own selfish vanity and now you will be punished!" Suddenly the glowing, shimmering castle transformed into a tree... with parts of the castle now jutting out from the bark. "This shall be the home of the faeries now and it is under our magical protection. You will not be able to find it again. It will be hidden from all of mankind except for those who believe in the magic of mother nature," she said as she left the Prince alone and penniless. -Kenny Cramer



Kenny Cramer's The Enchanted Castle, in progress.



The Enchanted Castle installed in Schiller Park, glowing at twilight.

Discover The Enchanted Castle in Schiller Park, 'at water's edge where Shakespeare is read.'

The artists with this project hope that you find as much joy discovering and gazing at their treehouses as they did creating them.

"There is no greater joy than creating the faces of characters out of a sculpting medium," says Dorsey. "To see something you make come to life is like a little sprinkle of the divine."

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Find the five tree houses as part of the TREEmendous public art project in Whetstone Park, Goodale Park, Wolfe Park, Westgate Park, and Schiller Park through September 20, 2015. Find a downloadable version of the map here. For more information on the TREEmendous project, visit Find Me in the Park.