

5x5 Project Invites Cherry Blossom Pilgrims to Explore Washington, D.C.'s Artistic Side (</art/5x5-project-invites-cherry-blossom-pilgrims-to-explore-washington-d-c-s-artistic-side-1.46438>)

By Jack Krajewski, March 27, 2012



Think there's nothing more to Washington, DC than marble monuments and career politicians? Think again. As thousands of tourists swarm the District for this year's National Cherry Blossom Festival, the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities is unveiling a dynamic new project designed to raise awareness of the city's artistic side. With the creation of the **5x5 Temporary Public Art Project** (<http://www.the5x5project.com/>), visitors to the nation's capital are encouraged to discover

new perspectives on the city that take them through not just the monumental core, but the surrounding neighborhoods as well. The project unites artists from all over the country and as far away as Europe in creating dozens of dramatic, public art installations placed at various spots around town.

This year the **National Cherry Blossom Festival** (<http://www.nationalcherryblossomfestival.org/>) celebrates the 100th anniversary of the historic 1912 gift of 3000 cherry trees from Mayor Yukio Ozaki of Tokyo to the people of Washington, DC as a symbol of the friendship between the two cities. (Another 3,800 trees were gifted in 1965.) With the arrival of warm weather, thousands of cherry trees open their buds, turning the city into a wonderland of delicate pink blossoms dancing in the breeze and reflecting off the water. Most travelers are drawn to the iconic areas around the Tidal Basin, but with the 5x5 Project spread around the city, visitors are beginning to venture away from the standard tourist circuit.

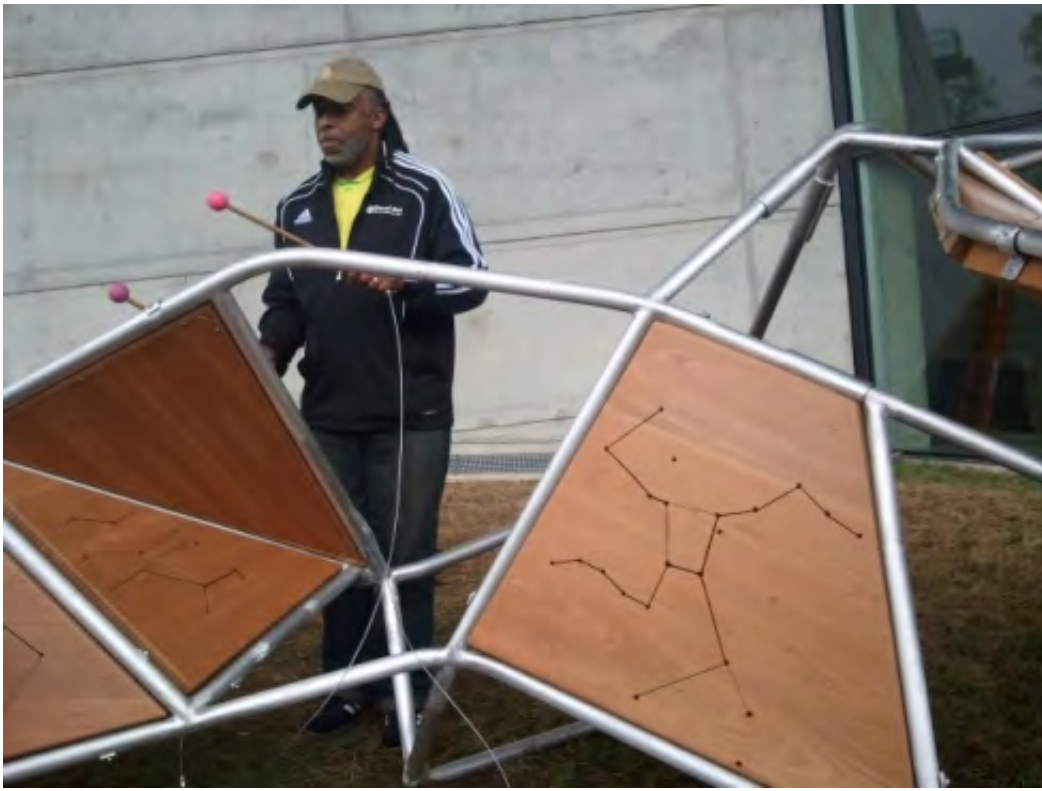
As a guest of the 5x5 Project—complete with a posh room at the **Mandarin Oriental Hotel**

(<http://www.blackbookmag.com/guides/details/mandarin-oriental-washington-dc>)—I was invited to the opening weekend of the National Cherry Blossom Festival to take in many of these art installations while touring the city. I came away with a better understanding and appreciation of DC culture and got to see aspects of the city which I never really knew existed, even though, as a Baltimore native, I've been to Washington many times. After a whirlwind weekend of public art, it's clear that the DC art scene is on the rise, and has earned a spot alongside the creative capitals of Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York. In other words, if art's your thing, don't miss it.



In the Southwest Waterfront area, visitors can discover Deborah Stratman & Steven Badgett's *Polygonal Address System*, a spinning platform floating about 50 yards out on the Potomac River. As I approached, I was struck by the raucous sounds of political protests. Was there a nearby demonstration? Not today. It soon became apparent that the platform had loudspeakers fixed to the side of it. As the pentagonal structure rotated in the water, the speakers roared with the sounds of historic public addresses and protests, including speeches by public figures from Malcolm X to Ralph Nader.

The *Polygonal Address System* was one of the more politically-charged elements of the 5x5 project. Steve Rowell, curator of the installation, described his perspective of the system, pointing out that viewers seemed to have varying reactions to the political speeches. He felt that some people enjoyed the speeches, while others appeared turned off by them, as if the art revealed something about each person's political views. Rowell noted that some of these speeches were "complicating the argument of protests, public activism, democracy, and intolerance amongst so many Americans."



Across the street, Charles Juhasz-Alvarado's *Cherry Blossom Cloud* resides in front of the Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater. One of 5x5's more interactive installations, the piece is a sound sculpture sitting in a framework of interwoven metal pipes. Explaining his inspiration for this piece, Juhasz-Alvarado said he imagined the frame being dipped into a soap-bubble solution and pulled back out. Every spot where a soapy film-like membrane might appear is where he placed a wooden drum. In other sections he fixed cherrywood xylophones. This installation came with several sets of drum sticks attached to it, encouraging passersby to stop for a moment to drop a beat. This particular sculpture exemplified one of 5x5's objectives: get people to physically interact with the artwork.

Further away on Southeast Water Street sits Yards Park Lumber Shed, now the temporary home of an intriguing setup. The tall concrete pillars high above anchor Cath Campbell's *Marathon*, a working scale-model of the original cable car that ferried passengers up the side of Mt. Hiei in Japan, where the original 3000 cherry trees were cultivated. The Yards Park Lumber Shed is an open-air concrete pavilion where city workers can enjoy a pleasant outdoor lunch on a spring day. The intent behind *Marathon* is to draw attention to the wide area and emptiness of the structure's high ceiling as the cable car gradually travels back and forth overhead.

A bit further from the city center in Anacostia, Habitat For Artists is developing their public art initiative *How Much? How Little? The Space To Create*. Using 6' by 6' art studio sheds made from recycled materials, the project is designed to encourage visitors to interact with the artists and the community. One method they are using to engage the local community is by asking them to contribute any kind of poetry, which they can then incorporate into the artwork in some way.

The Habitat for Artists group is a strong proponent for spreading the awareness of art in the DC area. Matthew Slaats, who teaches in the Communication Arts Department at Marymount Manhattan College, explained how this project affects Washington, DC culture as it coincides with the National Cherry Blossom Festival. "The Cherry Blossom Festival draws a crowd to specific areas, so by spreading these various art installations around, you're going to draw people who might not come down to areas like Anacostia," he explained. "They've had people come up to them saying 'We hadn't ever been down here. This place is amazing!'"

Anacostia's also the temporary home of one of the wildest installations in the 5x5 Project. Monica Canilao's *Home Mender* (main photo) is a discordant mix of recycled materials formed into the structure of a small dwelling. Think of your childhood playhouse as if reimaged by Tim Burton. Located in an abandoned police evidence warehouse, the top floor of the building is almost completely consumed by the installation. Canilao explained that the idea for this piece was a "woman who carries her house on her back". This becomes apparent the moment you walk inside and see two large leg-like

structures protruding out of the side of the house. The visceral affect is amplified by the fact that much of the framework is visible, as you can see the poles, wires, welds, and panels twist around each other, overlap in some areas and leave gaps in others.



On the outside roof of the warehouse, Canilao's team has built a second structure, a multi-story tower which artist Harrison Bartlett refers to as a "giant trash beacon". It is astonishing after walking through the "house" to realize that everything was, in fact, made from recycled materials, right down to the chandelier made from old glass bottles. Much of the structure was collected in pieces and brought by the artists, but a good deal of it was also found on location in and around the warehouse. As Bartlett expressed "you don't have to look far to make something beautiful."

The 5x5 Temporary Public Art Project and the National Cherry Blossom Festival both run through April 27, with a handful of the art installations continuing into the summer. For more information on the 5x5 Project, and for locations of all the installations, **visit the website** ([http //www.the5x5project.com/](http://www.the5x5project.com/)).

All photos by Jack Krajewski