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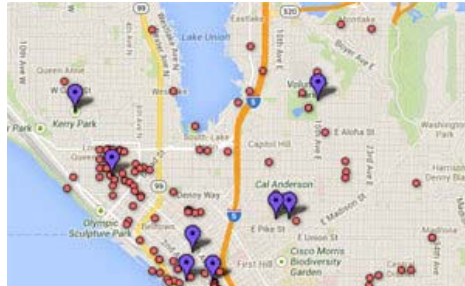
State of the art: 10 great pieces of public art in Seattle

In honor of the 40th anniversary of Seattle's 1-percent-for-art program, Seattle Times arts writer Michael Upchurch applied some shoe leather and his critical eye to come up with a list of his favorite public art projects made possible by the program.

By Michael Upchurch

Seattle Times arts writer

One mark of a great city is that it gives you fun stuff to look at: an unexpected detail on a building facade, a fanciful fountain that masks nearby traffic noise, a quirky or elegant sculpture on a street corner, or even some eye-catching cast-iron utility covers underfoot.



Since 1973, Seattle has had a program in place to provide these artful touches to its urban landscape. The revenue for it comes from the city's 1-percent-for-art ordinance, which, according to the Seattle Office of Arts & Culture, decrees that "1% of eligible city capital improvement project funds be set aside for the commission, purchase and installation of artworks in a variety of settings."

There are now more than 380 permanently sited works in the collection, along with 2,800 portable works. The annual budget over the last five years has been in the \$2 million range. The total value of the collection is about \$39 million. But as Calandra Childers, communications and outreach manager at the Office of Arts & Culture, notes, the main intention of the art is "to provide livability and economic impact — not monetary value."

The city has even created an app, called STQRY, to help you learn more about the art; it's available free for iOS, Android and Windows 8 systems.

To celebrate the program's 40th anniversary, I hoofed it all over town during the summer, looking in on old favorites and making some new discoveries, too. Here, you'll find my top 10 picks.

1 "Black Sun" (1969)

Said to be the inspiration for Soundgarden's 1993 hit "Black Hole Sun," this imposing sculpture, in black Brazilian granite, commands its setting **in front of the Seattle Asian Art Museum** with perfect aplomb. You could say Isamu Noguchi's masterpiece has a doughnutlike form — if "doughnutlike form" didn't so contradict the weighty dignity of "Black Sun."



That said, the sculpture's shape seems irresistible to passers-by who like to have their pictures taken as they peer through the hole in the "doughnut." The sculpture also frames its surroundings in an alluring way. Look out west through it, and you have a perfect granite-framed "shot" of the Space Needle and Puget Sound. Look east, and its dark, rounded surfaces set off the Art Deco details of SAAM to a handsome advantage.

2 "Waterworks" (2005)

Bordered by broad walking paths, rolling meadows and sports fields, Douglas Hollis' fountain complex, which

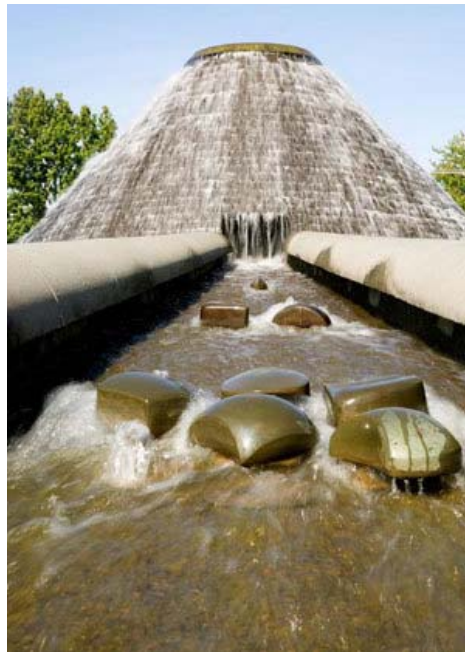
crowns **Capitol Hill's Cal Anderson Park**, invites you to hang out and relax.

It also seems to mimic Cascade Range/Puget Sound geography in miniature. At its north end is a volcano-like cone spouting cooling sheets of water that funnel down a semiabstract rendering of a rock-lined mountain stream.

The stream then spreads out to a rippling "estuary" before emptying into a calm reflecting pool.

All these water features come labeled with signs saying, "Keep people and pets out of the water, and don't climb on the fountain."

But try telling that to your dog — or even your friends — when it tops 80 degrees.



3 "Changing Form" (1969)

It takes a canny sculpture to compete with the spectacular view from Queen Anne's **Kerry Park**. But Doris Chase's "Changing Form" does exactly that, while integrating itself nicely with its surroundings, too.

Originally intended to be a kinetic sculpture, with its top half rotating 360 degrees at the touch of a hand, it later was welded at an off angle to prevent damage to the piece. No matter. There's still something about the airy oval openings in its rectangular form that coaxes you to look through it, first from one angle, then from another, at the city and bay beyond.

Kids like to stand inside it. Visitors like to use it to frame their photographs of the Space Needle, skyline, Mount Rainier and West Seattle.

4 "Dancer's Series: Steps" (1982)

Did your parents neglect to teach you the cha-cha, the rumba and the fox trot weave?

Not to fret. The city of Seattle is happy to oblige.

Jack Mackie's bronze-footprint inlays at eight locations along **Capitol Hill's Broadway** offer how-to lessons. All you need to know is how to count in quick-quick-slow time.

"Dancer's Series: Steps" gets a lot of action from passing couples, according to Maria Ponce, who's worked at La Cocina & Cantina Mexican, near the corner of Broadway and Republican, for the last 12 years.



"Every single day there are at least two couples trying to dance out there," she says. "And because of the music, I think that helps." (The restaurant's nonstop Latin American background music can always be heard out on the sidewalk at lunchtime and dinnertime.)

If some of the dances illustrated on other blocks (the "obeebo," the "busstop") sound unfamiliar, don't feel bad. Sculptor Mackie made them up.



5 "Hammering Man" (1991)

He works away steadily, oblivious to his surroundings. Nothing distracts him from his task — and no one, among the crowds passing by, pays him much mind. Yet he's a powerful presence on the corner of **First Avenue and University Street**. The smooth rhythm of his hammer coming down on his anvil is downright hypnotic. And there's something not quite real about him. From certain angles, he seems more like a Photoshopped silhouette, surreally imposed on his surroundings, than an actual 48-foot-high sculpture.

Jonathan Borofsky's "Hammering Man" pays tribute to "the people who produce the commodities on which we depend." For a while, he was in a flirtatious relationship with the Lusty Lady, the old peep-show arcade across the street from him. After he crashed to the ground while being hoisted into position by a crane, the Lusty Lady marquee cooed at him, "Don't worry, big boy — we can erect you." Twenty-odd years later, sex seems to be the furthest thing from his mind.

6 "Braincast" (2004)

Normally a library escalator ride is a mundane affair. But descend from **Seattle Central Library's** "Mixing Chamber" to the building's Fifth Avenue level and you'll see some very strange, 3-D video doings on your right. Tony Oursler's "Braincast" features three chattering/muttering heads in Oursler's classic features-distorting style. The piece is intended as "a contemplation on the transmission of information" in all its various forms. "Braincast" sometimes runs into technical difficulties, but when it's up and running it's an unsettling, mesmerizing treat.



7 "People Waiting for the Interurban" (1979)

Could this be Seattle's most popular public-art installation? It certainly attracts a response. Artist Richard Beyer created these five cast-aluminum figures (plus one dog) as a tribute to an electric rail line that used to connect Seattle with Everett, via Fremont, from 1912 to 1933. The would-be passengers have been waiting at **North 34th Street and Fremont Avenue North** for a trolley to arrive for more than three decades, and Seattleites have helped them pass the time by dressing them up, accessorizing them and, in the women's case, applying garish makeup to their faces. Recently, the piece was the site for a book giveaway. The figure on the right has been reading the same aluminum book for years. He must have been glad to have a newer paperback to peruse.



8 “Sundial” (1978)

As many times as I'd been to **Gas Works Park** over the years, I never tried out “Sundial” to see how it worked until this past summer. So I never knew that you use your own shadow-casting body as the style to mark the time of day on its clock face. This concrete, ceramic and cast-bronze time-telling/astrological device, perched on the highest point of the park, is the handiwork of Charles “Chuck” Greening, working with Kim Lazare. It's worth close study, even if the views of the downtown skyline, rising float planes and comely sunbathers are powerful distractions. The bronze inlays arrayed across its 28-foot-wide face — of lobsters, crab, salmon, mermaids, ram's heads, lion's heads, human hands and feet — are particularly beguiling in their detail. “Sundial” is in need of some cleanup and restoration, however, to bring out its detail — and to get rid of the standing water that interferes with using it as a sundial.

9 “Neototems” (1995)

Gloria Bornstein's installation near **Seattle Center's International Fountain** seems less like sculpture than an appearance by fossilized undersea creatures surfacing from an expanse of green lawn rather than the waters of Puget Sound. Bornstein's startling piece alludes to a Native American legend about an underground spring that let whales pass between Elliott Bay and Lake Union. The two bronze forms exert a powerful pull on youngsters, who like to clamber up their slippery sides and perch on them. A fragment of the myth is spelled out in English and Lushootseed in bronze letters inlaid in a concrete whale's tail.





10 “Westlake Star Axis/Seven Hills” (1988)

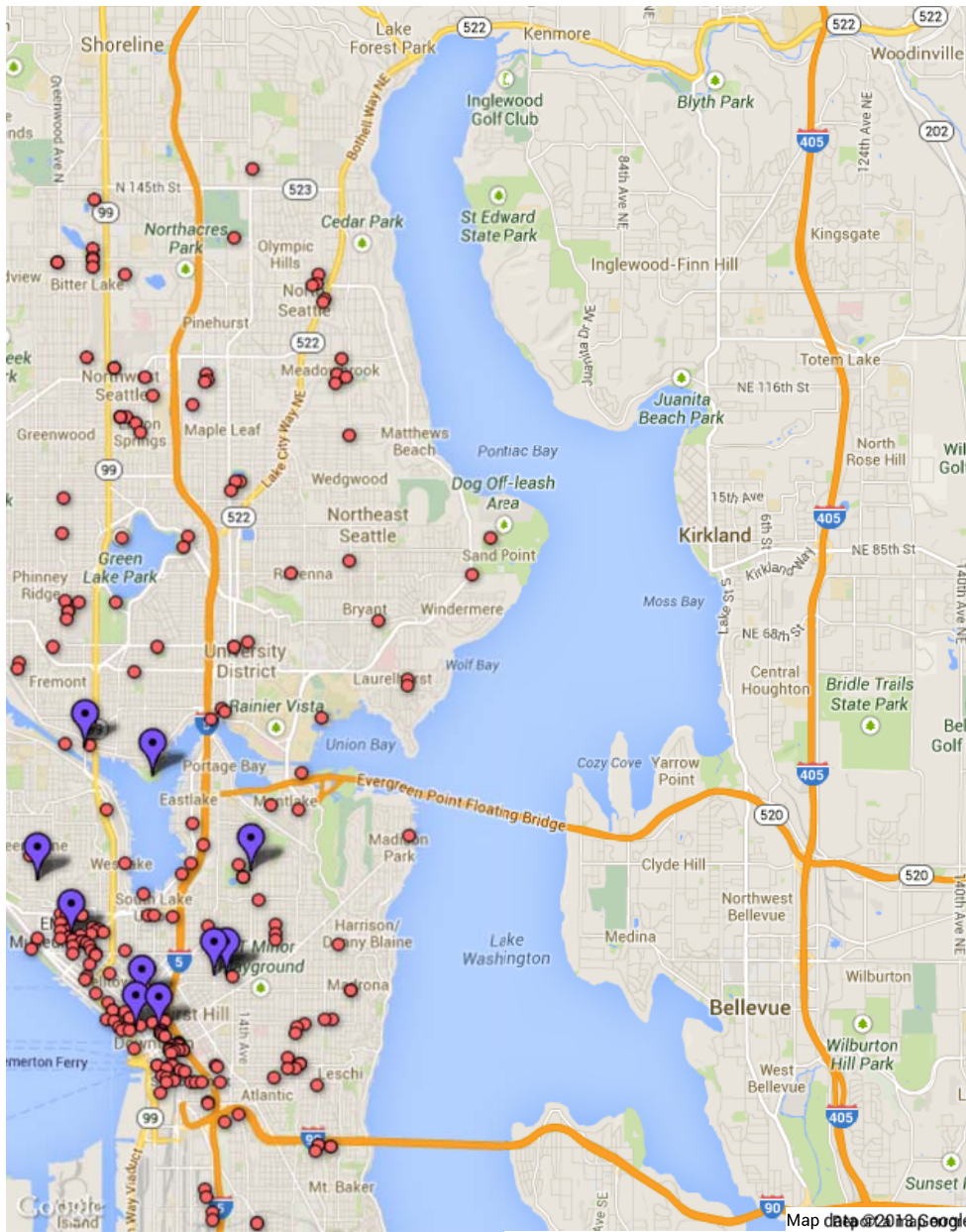
Robert Maki and Robert Hanna’s sculptural installation at **Westlake Park** blends architectural grandeur with the more casual feeling of an open-air lounge. Tourists, pamphleteers, chess-players, downtown workers and homeless folks share the space, and on a sunny afternoon you can almost feel like you’ve stepped into someone’s clubhouse or living room. A 24-foot-high rectangular arch at the north end of the square has become Seattle’s de facto Speaker’s Corner, while the pink granite cubes/columns at the south end — representing Seattle’s seven hills — serve as seats for other activities. Then there’s the 64-foot-long walk-through fountain that masks the urban noise of Seattle’s retail center. (Note: You will get totally soaked trying to walk through it, no matter how fast you sprint — so choose a warm day to do it.) A grove of trees with their trunks painted a startling marine blue adds to the visual allure of the park.

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 = Seattle Times art critic Michael Upchurch's top picks

 = other permanent or semi-permanent public art

Click the red or purple markers to learn more about each work. Or see a larger version of this map.



Source: City of Seattle

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