FreshWater
Covering what's next in Cleveland.

Story: Karin Connelly Rice • Photo: Bob Perkoski • June 23, 2022

Awake in Every Sense: Botanical Garden presents immersive fabric installation

Artist Rachel Hayes

If the ever-changing landscape of Holden Forests & Gardens' Cleveland Botanical Garden wasn't already stimulating, this Saturday, June 25, the Garden will become even more vibrant and alive with the opening of fiber artist Rachel Hayes' large-scale installation Awake in Every Sense.

Hayes has infused the garden with colorful fabric that will highlight different points, while keeping the eyes searching for movement, light, and other stimuli while walking through the trees.

The Botanical Garden partnered with Ghostlight Productions, which completed the technical installations, and LAND studio, which put forth Tulsa, Oklahoma-based Hayes as the artist for the project.

The 10-piece installation takes guests through the Botanical Garden, culminating at the Overlook Garden before continuing onto the Woodland Trail.

Hayes' colorful creations sometimes will be gently swaying in the wind or can catch light dappling through the trees, with materials in colors inspired by the natural greens and earth tones of the Botanical Garden.

"We are thrilled to feature this awe-inspiring artwork all throughout the gardens," says Holden Forests & Gardens president and CEO Jill Koski. "Seeing the bright colors overhead in the trees, with blooming flowers and plants below is an unforgettable summer experience.

Hayes uses a variety of outdoor textiles—including sunshade fabrics, flag fabrics, construction mesh, window screening, and nylon—to create handmade panels in different sizes and shapes that drape through man-made and natural structures in a garden to produce a calming environment that plays with colors and light forms.

"You never know who your audience is going to be, and everyone interprets it differently," says Hayes of her creations. "Some people will stay on the path and look at it at eye level. Some people can walk down and experience it. To be able to do something like this, it has to be functional and be observable in the round, at 360 degrees."

For instance, Hayes says during the installation process this week, she witnessed a parent and a toddler discussing the triangle shape of one of the panels, while another couple came by and commented on the same fabric piece.

"The woman said, 'I can live with something like that—it's art but it also serves a function,'" says Hayes. "It has function as a screen or a shade. It's used as a screen, almost, because the other side provides shade for the oval. That was the inspiration for the placement of that one."

Nancy Boylan, LAND studio's manager of projects and operations, says Hayes completed most of her project in Tulsa, working out of a warehouse and using photos of the Botanical Garden in winter to transform the summer landscape.

L | A | N | D studio

Story: Karin Connelly Rice • Photo: Bob Perkoski • June 23, 2022

Awake in Every Sense: Botanical Garden presents immersive fabric installation (continued)

Artist Rachel Hayes

"We supplied her with photos, which were almost her set of eyes and boots on the ground," says Boylan. "She took what we provided, and it's unbelievable. [The real thing] is even better than the renderings she shared with us."

Boylan says she is blown away at the complete installation. "This is definitely one of my favorites, it's just incredible," she says. "The end product is even better than anyone could have thought [it could be]. The pops of color are just stunning—Hayes was definitely the right choice."

Hayes says she chose the title "Awake in Every Sense" because the installation's motion of the fabrics and colors awaken the senses and make visitors more aware of their surroundings.

"Something I like about working and being outside is it keeps me in the moment," she explains. "Working with textiles, they do react to wind and sun, and everything you throw at it. You might not realize it's windy until you see a leaf blowing by, or that it's sunny until a shadow is cast. It makes me feel alive and awake in the moment."

Hayes adds that the Botanical Garden's unique landscape is the perfect inspiration for her newest installation. "This is a dream place for me to exhibit because I like to respond to things, rather than a blank canvas or a white room," she says. "I can predict and create textiles based on how they will react [to the environment]. It's always exhilarating—oh my gosh, this is so beautiful. Right now, I'm just overwhelmed by how much I love it."

Hayes, whose work has been covered by "The New Yorker." "The New York Times," "Los Angeles Times," "Vogue," and "Harper's Bazaar," first came to Cleveland to discuss working with LAND studio five years ago and met with Joe Lanzilotta and Boylan.

Hayes did not end up working with LAND studio five years ago, but Boylan says they never forgot the impact Hayes made on them.

"LAND studio has been a huge fan of Rachel Hayes and her artwork for quite a bit of time now," she says. "We always had her in the back of our minds and we knew when Holden Forests & Gardens approached us, she would be one of the artists we presented. And they selected Hayes."

In December, when the LAND studio staff approached Hayes about doing Awake in Every Sense, she jumped at the chance. "I feel so grateful to be in their mind's eye still," she says. "Something I tell younger artists is, 'your work might not get through, but [at least] it was seen by the committee.' It's hard to put yourself out there."

Hayes reports she has spent the past six months planning Awake in Every Sense. "That's when it all starts," she says of the beginning of the project in December. "Even if I'm just thinking and daydreaming about it, I start there and then there's a couple of months of sharing photos, designs, measuring; a few months of cutting materials, laying it out, putting it together," she explains. "I loved how it looked in my studio, but it wasn't until it came here—and this was where it came alive."

L | A | N | D studio