

Statement from Charmaine Locke and James Surls

In the summer of 1976 as we, James Surls and Charmaine Locke, left the urban center of Dallas, Tx. and traveled between Florida, and upstate New York for jobs, and then Houston, looking for a place to build our life, the forests of East Texas drew us in.

The area west/southwest of the Big Thicket is rich in timber, even after the decades of lumbering and milling operations. For a sculptor focused on storytelling through evocative imagery created from logs, branches, limbs and wooden elements, and who was brought up in similar terrain, and learned at an early age all the tricks of the trade of transforming these into either fences, gates, barns, rural needs, or later, artistic creations, James saw a treasure trove. The 22 acres of wooded property that we found suited these needs and we were entranced.

I was enthralled by the possibilities of producing sculptural creations from the environment around the property, exploring the flora and fauna in all its variations, learning of their medicinal uses and food sources as well as other needs. A producing garden from the sandy soil was a top interest, as slowly a spot with sunshine was carved into the woods.

Architectural structures small and large were other projects that were built. Singularly and together we dreamed and sketched plans and models for the structures we built, from the ever expanding home to early studio spaces, then the grand studio barn. Sketches of designs for gardens and paths fill many a notebook.

Living deep in the woods is a secluded existence with time to explore the minute to the enormous, small clusters of tangerine mushrooms next to pure white toadstools, or red spotted ones. These at the base of 100' pines, some with twists and splits; oaks that branched wide with fascinating arrangements of limbs, some covered with moss or lichens; grandfather magnolias of huge girth that stood the test of time as many were taken for furniture in the 1950's. Brilliant green magnolias and holly leaves, cherry laurels maintained a constant sense of green spotted with reds, oranges, yellows in season.

Endless walks through the woods generated not only a grand sense of freedom, but also, a sense of respecting the system that's existed there for eons. The destruction of vast acreage of forest throughout the area for commercial ventures caused concern, seeing that it increased the extent of flooding. Beetles, droughts and freezes, as well as hurricanes and tornadoes, have all altered the forest throughout the region.

Throughout our 47 years of stewarding the area east of Peach Creek on its way to Lake Houston, experiencing the rise and fall of waterways on their flow south to the Gulf, we learned the cadence and beat of life there, and adjusted our flow in response. We grew from 22 acres to near 200 acres of primarily wooded land.

After years of projecting into the future, the future is here for us. The time is now when paths through the trees lead viewers to experience the treasures installed in “Bowers”, alcoves within the woods, that create a novel experience of both art and the landscape.

One of James major works is titled “Look and Listen”. We hope that viewers to the “Gift From the Bowers” exhibit will look and listen and gain appreciation of the surroundings and the creative energy of this group of artists from across Texas. They have engaged with a novel concept in a novel location and brought new expressions into reality..

Specifically chosen to occur on EARTH DAY, April 22, as well as April 23, 2023, the correspondence between this exhibit and the significance of the movement established to create understanding of and dedication to the preservation and protection of the systems of this planet is realized.

Enhancement and entrancement of humans’ relationship with the ecosystems that humans inhabit is a goal.

LSCAN, Locke Surls Center for Art and Nature, was established with this idea.

Our partnership with Diverse Works has propelled this project at every step. Xandra Eden and her team, have been exceptional partners. Jack Massing as Artist Coordinator, along with our team of Ruby Surls and Carlos Canul, as well as the participating artists, have furthered these goals throughout the year long process from concept to fruition, and been exceptional collaborators.

With gratitude we acknowledge and thank the generous contributions of the donors and supporters who have propelled this project into reality.

To our families and friends we thankfully recognize your contributions to this ongoing project.

Charmaine Locke

James Surls

