

#### iv. public sculpture, community art, and other interventions: or, are ninety works of art really enough?

Public art tends to appear through unwieldy processes, so perhaps Atlanta was fortunate that so much public art at the Games simply failed to excite rather than inciting active resentment (though one newspaper columnist has regularly referred to the characteristically biomorphic sculpture of a local artist as "the garden slug fountain"). Some exquisitely inviting pieces, such as Betye Saar's spirit chair in a secluded part of a downtown park, were situated where they could be found only by serendipity or the use of a 1996 Public Art Map.

There was, as has been intimated elsewhere in this rambling essay/review, an astounding range of work out there, both privately and publicly produced, sponsored by sometimes fiercely competing entities and occasionally by entities hostile to everybody else. The work ranged from supremely conservative to interestingly experimental, and within each genre, from technically accomplished to acceptably competent. There may well be no single person in Atlanta who saw it all.

The pieces that were most widely seen were those commissioned by the Cultural Olympiad for such public spaces as Woodruff Park in the center of downtown, where Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel installed one of the most enthusiastically received works, a giant flag being saluted by topiary figures placed atop the surrounding buildings. The flag—white on one side, black overlaid with the 197 national flags of the competing Olympic teams on the other—suggested the Olympic ideal of peaceful competition under a flag of truce during the Games, with just a soupçon of more ironic agendas suggested by the title, *Apostasy*. Yukinori Yanagi's adjacent Midtown installations for two different jurisdictions carried somewhat similar messages; *Atlantic*, a version of his Global



Ant Farm containing the flags, rendered in sand, of the 95 nations bordering the Atlantic Ocean, sat in a trailer on one side of the High Museum/Woodruff Arts Center complex, while Yanagi's map of the world from a south polar projection (instead of the north polar projection that was meant to bespeak universal equality in the United Nations emblem) decorated a plaza on the other side of the arts complex, on behalf of "Conversations at the Castle," an Arts Festival of Atlanta project curated by Mary Jane Jacob, of which other components are reviewed separately in this section. With the High's "Rings" show in the middle between the two Yanagi pieces, the aesthetic battle lines being drawn by some of the participants—though not by Yanagi himself—made for an amusing commentary on the reality of global confrontation versus the idealized vision of harmony promoted by the Olympic movement. (Olympic idealism was also cheerily contradicted by its corporate sponsors; one ubiquitous athletic-shoe billboard overlaid an

athlete's portrait with the words "If I say I'm happy just to participate, blame my translator.")

Vito Acconci's *High Rise of Trees*, a stack of crape myrtles installed along the Olympic Way that visitors walked to the Olympic Stadium, was one of those sculptures that doubtless seemed like a good idea at the time. Despite its lofty theoretical agenda of commenting on architecture and landscape design, in the blazing sun of an Atlanta summer it possessed very little presence whatsoever, and served less as a shady respite for wayfarers than a convenient location for guerrilla pin traders to spread their wares. Under less frantic visual circumstances, in a less intrinsically distracting location, it would be a handsome and successful piece.

Public art in the neighborhoods around the Olympic stadium included Eleanor Hand's *Timeless Seeds* collaboration with teenagers from Capitol Homes, a local initiative that, like Patricia Cunfer's amphitheater for a Summerhill park, Marie Cochran and Tony Bingham's *Reunion Place* piece for the Mechanicsville community center, and Ayokunle Odeleye's *Spirit, Family, Community* bronze for Peoplestown (the latter three sponsored by the Cultural Olympiad), represented an effort to involve the residents in projects meant to have a lasting impact on aspects of community self-image. I have alluded earlier to the complaints raised by outside critics regarding the insignificance of such projects. But as in the "Conversations at the Castle" projects wherein Senegalese-born artist Ery Camara followed in the footsteps of local artist Lynn Marshall-Linnemeier in producing an artistic intervention in Reynoldstown and Irish artist Maurice O'Connell worked with youth (see also the projects reviewed elsewhere in this section), it is difficult to fault anyone who makes reasonable use of the resources realistically available. The allocation of such resources is, as I wrote earlier, the topic that will occupy post-Olympic Atlanta for some time to come.

