



PHOTOS BY CLOE POISSON | CPOISSON@COURANT.COM

AN EPHEMERAL art installation called "Clytia" by Tatiana Ferahian, an artist from Cyprus, made with sunglass lenses strung together in the pattern of a sunflower seed head, is suspended between two trees at IPark, an artists' retreat located on 450 acres in East Haddam.

EAST HADDAM'S IPARK

ARTISTS' PARADISE

450-Acre Wooded Retreat Set To Hold Open House On Nov. 24

By **SUSAN DUNNE**

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Years ago, Chantal Foretich visited a bar and wanted to remember it, so she made a small model of the interior. "It was very thrilling," Foretich said.

That art project evolved, over the years, into a series of what Foretich calls "shrunk vistas." She creates small buildings or scenes with motorized parts that sometimes reference real places, sometimes literary places, and sometimes "psychological places."

Foretich, of New York City, is one of six artists-in-residence at IPark, a 450-acre wooded artists' retreat in East Haddam. IPark is holding an Open House on Sunday, Nov. 24, to show off the sculpture-dotted grounds of the huge wooded complex and let members of the public meet the artists.

Francisco Lopez is another artist at IPark. He lives in Matamoros, Mexico, and works as an architect. At IPark, he is building a small scale model of a treehouse using sticks and painted aluminum mesh.

"I love IPark. I like the seclusion. It allows you to think and focus on a single project or on research," Lopez said. "You have the freedom that you're not obliged to produce anything, but being here, you end up creating and producing and exchanging ideas with the other artists."

IPark accepts six artists for four-week residencies from April to December, including writers, musicians, visual, video and sound artists, architects and landscape and garden designers. No pressure is put on them. They just are allowed to be, to create if they choose, to research if they choose.

All of the artists there now embrace the isolation as an opportunity to immerse themselves in work.

Ann Oren, who lives in New York, is creating a video at IPark. It depicts a reality show whose contestants are trees with human personalities. Oren, who has done residencies in Berlin, Iceland and others in the United States, says residencies "pick you up out of your normal environment."

"I don't know if they pull you out of your reality or draw you deeper into reality," she said. "But it changes your habits and manners of thinking. When you change your everyday arrangement,



A FLOATING LIVING ROOM is one of the art installations along a pathway at IPark, an artists' retreat in East Haddam. The installation was created by Ted Efremoff, who is originally from Connecticut but now is living in North Carolina.

you have to do something else with your mind."

Lee Hunter of New York also is creating a video, an abstract animated one, but is using most of her time at IPark to read, write and research for future projects. "It's equally important for me to do that as it is to create objects," she said.

Daniel Luchman of Pittsburgh is using his IPark time to edit projects and write. Leland Cheuk of New York is writing, too, a novel set among standup comics.

"This residency is an amazing act of generosity," Cheuk said. "Making art, out in the world, is not always treated as something of value. In this world it seems kind of trivial. But not here."

Foretich agrees. "I'm in shock that residencies exist at all," she said. "It's critical to an artist to really think about what you're doing."

Founding Of IPark

IPark was co-founded by Ralph Crispino and Joanne Paradis. Crispino is president of Superior Products Distributors in Southington. Paradis worked for Superior Products as a corporate credit manager. Crispino got an idea in the early '90s of creating a refuge where artists can let their creativity run free.

"My philosophy is that there are a lot of great ideas and a lot of great activity out there, but a lack of depth and development," Crispino said. "There's a high state of noncompletion in the rush to the market. If people had more time ... Maybe the idea was naive, but I wanted to look into it more."

He did, and in 1998 he bought the 450-acre parcel, which had been owned by the same family for generations. From 1998 to 2001, he and Paradis, who shared his vision, spruced up the property, updating the 2,800-square-foot main house and turning chicken coops into small artist studios.

"After that, we started thinking about how do we create a residency program?" Paradis, now IPark's executive director, said. "An artist from Serbia ... Ivan Albrecht ... became our pusher. He said 'let's do it and stop just thinking about it.' It would have happened anyway, but he was goading us."

The first "class," in 2001, had four artists. In the ensuing years, the classes have grown to six artists each, from all over the world. They live in the main house and work whatever hours they choose in their assigned studios.

A residency manager takes care of the house, and a chef comes in four days a week. Artists are not paid to

participate in IPark, they just have all their needs met for four weeks. The application fee is \$30 and artists pay their own travel expenses. IPark is nonprofit.

"We give them privacy and peacefulness," Paradis said. "There is no requirement to produce work. We just want them to have a place to think."

The Grounds

Many artists leave work behind when they are done at IPark. Visitors during Open Studios can wander the grounds and will see quirky artistic landscaping and may come across a variety of delightful and surprising pieces.

Poet Sara Hughes left bottles with poems in them hidden throughout the grounds: "Beyond the churchyard cemetery, pines stretch their necks under a topaz sun, and dirt paths wind deep into the woods like a man's fingers in a woman's hair."

In the pond, German sculptor Roger Rigorth left floating sculptures called "Wings for IPark." Chad Cunha of New York left "Waterproof," a floating sound installation accessible by rowboat. Russian installation artist Ted Efremoff left a "floating living room," near sound installations inside two small shacks.

British sound artist Michael Fairfax turned five trees into "ear harps," stringed instruments that can be heard only when the ear is pressed to the tree. Cypriot sculptor Tatiana Ferahian strung a circular pattern of multicolored sunglass lenses between two trees, held together by almost invisible cords.

Two extraordinary installations are the "creatures tree" and "bird tree" by Tatiana Nikolaenko of Russia. They show fantastical ceramic creatures climbing up the trees.

Crispino and Paradis know that weather probably will destroy many of the works over time. They're OK with that. "Everything is ephemeral," Paradis said. "Some things are more, some things are less, but everything is ephemeral."

IPARK OPEN HOUSE is Sunday, Nov. 24, from 2 to 5 p.m. at 428 Hopyard Road in East Haddam. Admission is free. Details about the park and information about how to apply for a residency: <http://www.i-park.org>.