



City of Austin
Art in Public Places - Cultural Arts Division
Economic Growth and Redevelopment Services Office



For Immediate Release: March 16, 2009
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Art in Public Places announces

Grotto Wall at Sparky Park

by

Berthold Haas

Austin, TX– The City of Austin **Art in Public Places** (AIPP) program presents ***Grotto Wall at Sparky Park***, a masonry “artwall” by artist, **Berthold Haas**, commissioned for Sparky Park, a new pocket park located at 3701 Grooms Street, in North Central Austin. The North University Neighborhood Association will host a public art dedication and opening ceremony for the park on **Saturday, March 28, 2009, 10:00–11:00 a.m.**, at Sparky Park, 3701 Grooms Street. The event is free to the public and will include refreshments, live music and a costume parade for kids (with prizes for the “sparkiest” costume).



© Berthold Haas. 2008: Photo by: Liz Hernandez

Art in Public Places (AIPP), in collaboration with the North University Neighborhood Association (NUNA), commissioned **Berthold Haas** to create permanent public art for a former Austin Energy substation site that was recently transformed to a public park. Named by residents for the electrical sparks that sometimes came from the substation, **Sparky Park** was converted into parkland by the City’s Parks and Recreation Department. In one corner of the park, several communication towers remain, surrounded by a curvilinear cinderblock wall that became the focal point for the public art project.

Grotto Wall at Sparky Park transforms an existing cinderblock wall into a sculptural landscape of trees and curiosities. Stone harvested and donated from a ranch in the Hill Country is laid in horizontal layers, alluding to an open landscape. Whimsical trees, constructed with petrified wood and stone, resonate with the natural trees in the park. Berthold worked closely with the neighborhood throughout the making of *Grotto Wall*. Objects contributed by residents are playfully embedded in the wall, sometimes revealed in the seashell canopies of trees as if they were fruit. Arches extend from the wall and rest on columns that define passageways for discovery. The columns are crowned by reflective gazing balls and sections of the old substation’s energy



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towers. Mementos of the parkland's history characterize Berthold's mélange, telling the story of the pocket park and the community who made it happen.

Sparky Park is a new pocket park in the North University Neighborhood and the site of the former North Austin Substation. Decommissioned by Austin Energy in the spring of 2005, all equipment was cleared and the land was deeded to the City's Parks and Recreation Department to be converted for use as a public park as provided by the Central Austin Neighborhood Plan. Sparky Park is the first pocket park to be created through a public/private partnership in Austin and a

collaborative effort of many stakeholders including the North University Neighborhood Association, Art in Public Places, the Parks and Recreation department, Austin Energy and supported in part the Austin Parks Foundation, T-Mobile and Sprint.

Berthold Haas is a sculptor and stone worker living and working in Austin, Texas. His career in the arts began as a child, with an apprenticeship under his father, a painter and sculptor with private and religious commissions in Southern Germany. Raised in the rich cultural regions of Southern Germany, Switzerland and Alsace/Lorraine, Berthold studied at the *Academy of Fine Arts* (Hochschule fuer Bildende Kuenste) in West Berlin, worked under the sculptor Harro Jacobs, and the painter Hann Trier, a well-known first generation abstract expressionist in Germany. In 1975, he moved to the USA and pursued a career in painting, while teaching at the Otis-Parsons School of Design. Berthold's career encompasses a broad range of mediums including painting sculpture, stone work and furniture design. Today, he prefers to work with stone and is well known for his limestone fireplaces, grottoes, landscapes and mosaic sculptures. Berthold's work is featured in numerous broadcasts and publications and represented in major private and public collections internationally as well as in Austin.

For photographs or more information about Austin's Art in Public Places program visit, www.cityofaustin.org/aipp or contact Megan Crigger, Administrator, at 974-9312.

The City of Austin's Art in Public Places acquires and maintains works of art for City facilities and parks through commissions, donations and loans for the cultural enrichment of Austin's community. AIPP is part of the Cultural Arts Division within the City of Austin's Economic Growth and Redevelopment Services Office.

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