

Art commemorates 2010 flood

Watermarks public displays focus on Nashville's stories, resilience

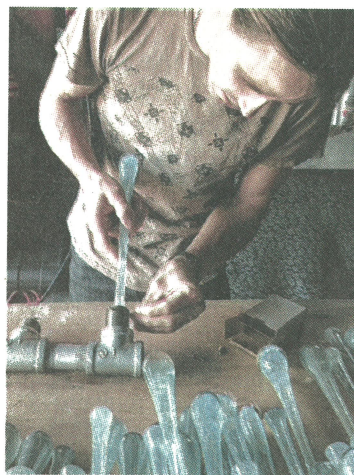
By Michelle Jones
For The Tennessean

The Metropolitan Nashville Arts Commission unveils the Watermarks collection, six pieces of public art commissioned to commemorate the May 2010 floods. The pieces are in areas that bore the brunt of flood damage: Antioch, Bellevue, Bordeaux / West Hamilton, Delray, East Nashville / South Inglewood and Pennington Bend / Donelson.

Many of the pieces already have been installed and public dedications begin today with Christopher Fennell's "Tool Fire," a sculpture featuring a collection of hand tools welded into a pile and painted black. The ceremony will take place at 1:30 p.m. in Shelby Bottoms Park (1900 Davidson St.).

Next, at 2:30 p.m., is Derek Côté's "Pier" at Two Rivers Park (2320 Two Rivers Parkway).

Côté now teaches at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Va., but in May 2010 he lived in Nashville and was on the faculty at Wat-



Michael Allison builds "Liquid 615," part of the Watermarks collection of public art. SUBMITTED

kins College of Art, Design & Film.

"It was super-devastating and everybody has a story about that day," he said in a phone interview. He remembers being stuck in his East Nashville home for a week with his yard flooded and his neighbors scurrying to save their houses.

When the waters receded, Côté and his wife volunteered with the Salvation Army and he was struck by the gratitude and emotions that poured out from people to whom they delivered supplies. "That was something that stuck with me and was another thing that compelled me to do something," he said. "As an artist I'm not saving lives or anything, but this is what I can do."

Côté chose the sloping Two Rivers location because he wanted the challenge of building something site-specific rather than an object that could simply be dropped in. His wooden benches on steel bases are topped with windsocks and are meant to celebrate the river and to serve as a place for positive reflection and contemplation rather than merely a sad reminder of a terrible event.

"It's something we'll definitely remember, we don't need to be reminded of it," Côté said of the flood. "So I thought let's make something that doesn't harp on that day but maybe celebrates the river today and tomorrow and next week when it's actually an asset to us and not this burden that overtakes our lives."

More coming up

More Watermarks projects will be dedicated over the next few weeks: Buddy Jackson's "Emergence" gets its turn at 10 a.m. May 22 in



This is Michael Allison's "Liquid 615" installed at the Antioch Community Center. The piece is part of the Watermarks collection of public art commemorating the May 2010 floods in Nashville. SUBMITTED

Hartman Park (2801 Tucker Road). Jackson's land-based sculpture of a woman's face with African-American features pays homage to the strength and perseverance of the Bordeaux community during and after the flood.

Craig Nutt's "Bench Mark" will be dedicated at 1:30 p.m. June 2 in Harpeth Knoll Park (725 Harpeth Knoll Road). Known for his witty takes on fruits and vegetables, Nutt's design for Watermarks incorporates the Harper River's route and the flood's path through Bellevue.

Lee and Betty Benson's "Anchor in the Storm" at West Park (6015 Morrow Road) will be dedicated at 11 a.m. June 15. The Bensons' sculpture makes a graphic reference to the flood-time connection between homes in

West Park and a nearby limestone quarry.

The official dedication for Michael Allison's "Liquid 615" at the Antioch Community Center (5023 Blue Hole Road) has yet to be set, but the construction of 240 elongated, blown-glass drops suspended from two rows of metal pipes has already been installed. The LED lights that bring it to life at night were tested a week ago.

Allison, a Joelton-based sculptor, said Watermarks is his first public art project but he also is finishing up a bike rack built with reject bikes from Nashville Green Bikes for Fannie Mae Dees Park.

Along with the challenge of working on a large-scale, public-informed piece, Allison also had to make sure his glass drops, which range

from six to 20 inches long, could withstand the elements. Surprisingly, he didn't have to change his process too much.

"I had a structural engineer go over all of this, I did tests on it. The glass will withstand the storm forces; it's more about it about being at a community center where there's lots of public activity and soccer balls," he said. (He made 120 spares, just in case.)

References to nature, specifically water, paired with manmade or industrial items is a common motif in Allison's work, which gives it a particular relevance for Watermarks. "We've created these things to control nature and it gets out of control," he said. "I think it's more about thinking smart about how we use nature, too."