PUBLIC ART IN THE CITY

DSM Public Art, a free iPhone app, includes all local public art.

Anchoring Des Moines’ entertainment district and historical Court Avenue are Jun Kaneko’s five hand-built ceramic Dangos (1). Dedicated in 2012, these colorfully patterned sculptures resemble vases without openings.

Stroll north along The Riverwalk toward Locust Street and view the stately Long Look Garden cascading from City Hall on the east riverbank. Joel Shapiro’s sticklike bronze sculpture (2) is masterfully poised at the center of the plaza at the top of the grand staircase of Long Look Garden. The sculpture stands 20 feet tall and plays with gravity’s pull in an interactive tussle.

Continuing to the northeast corner of Grand and 2nd avenues is the Hansen Triangle. Sally Pettus designed Quantum Leaf (3) for this parklike setting. Water pours from the leaf into a circular pond. With a diameter of 15 feet, the bronze sculpture represents an oversized dying leaf with curled edges.

Next to the Iowa Events Center at Hy-Vee Hall on Third and Park streets is Anna Gaskell’s maze and video project (4). Discovery, adventure, and memory inspired this project. A hedge maze of arborvitae trees flanks the building and forms a puzzling network of paths. Gradually changing images of another maze are projected onto the building’s glass curtain wall.

Walk to 5th Avenue and Park Street, and relax at American Enterprise Art Park (5). This corporate collection of abstract sculptures dates from the mid-1960s to the late 20th century. A focal point of the courtyard entrance is the revolving Sphere Within a Sphere by Italian sculptor Arnaldo Pomodoro.

Follow the route back to Nollen Plaza at Third and Locust streets. In 1979, Claes Oldenburg and his wife and collaborator, Coosje van Bruggen, installed the popular Crusoe Umbrella (6). The fictional tale of the castaway Robinson Crusoe inspired Oldenburg’s 37-foot-tall sculpture. The story tells that an umbrella was the first object Crusoe made and one of the few taken with him when he was rescued. The umbrella’s jagged edges suggest the skeletal shapes of branches and plants from an island.

Now walk one block east along Locust Street to the World Food Prize Hall of Laureates Garden. Two bronze figures of famous Iowans (7) hold prominent places. With a backdrop of downtown, Chas Fagan’s sculpture captures influential business leader John Ruan, Sr. (1914–2010), sponsor of the World Food Prize. John Collier sculpted agronomist Dr. Norman Borlaug (1914–2009), World Food Prize creator and Nobel Prize laureate.

Route Scout M. Jessica Rowe, director of the Greater Des Moines Public Art Foundation dsmpublicartfoundation.org

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