

We're all familiar with traditional public art — prominent fountains, proud monuments, abstract forms of commanding size. But for years observant pedestrians have been appreciating a more subtle version in the alleyways along Madison Avenue: Alley Art.

It's tucked away, slightly hidden from the downtown foot traffic, against the unnoticed walls of the alleyways. Alley Art is about looking closer and in turn, finding a pleasant surprise. It stems from a desire to embellish our surroundings and take pride in our sense of place.

Alley Art began in 1990 when Jim and Ruth Howland created the Howland Foundation Fund in the ArtCentric Endowment. They had just returned from Europe and were inspired by little sculptural vignettes that adorned alleyways. Why not translate such an idea to Corvallis? So the Madison Avenue Task Force and then-director of the Corvallis Arts Center, Susan Johnson, worked together to create the Howland Foundation Fund for public art.

Between 1993 and 1999, four Alley Art works were installed in alleyways along Madison Avenue. Any artist could submit a proposal, and the Public Art Selection Commission made the final choices. The project continued at a slow pace, occasionally acquiring more artwork, until 2004 when the Madison Avenue Task Force decided to formally finish the Alley Art Project. They paired up with ArtCentric and received a \$10,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The two Corvallis organizations matched the grant from the NEA to reach the \$20,000 needed to complete the project.

The latest additions are from artists who were formally invited to participate and include six silkscreen reproductions, six photographs and three poems. The photographs and the poems came from the 2001 exhibition *Marys' Peak: Sentinel of the Coast Range*, curated by the Willamette Valley Photo Arts Guild. Owen Bentley, a member of the guild whose artwork is featured in the Alley Art Project, doesn't see much of a difference between a gallery and the alleyway. "It's an outdoor gallery," he said. "It is more accessible to more people so I think it is a great venue for any artist's work."

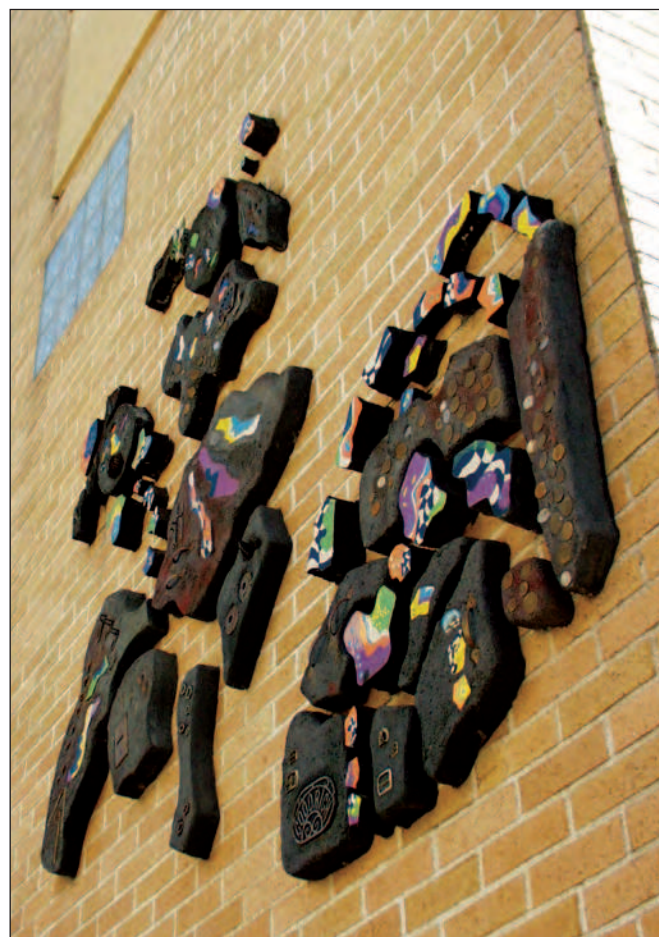
A new technique involving enamel on metal has allowed for the installation of silkscreen, photography and poetry; media uncommon for public art. With this technique, the silkscreen prints of Bonnie Hall, a beloved Corvallis artist who passed away last year, serve as a kind of memorial of her life and work. Her prints of local wildflowers can be found on the brick wall outside the City Hall. Whereas her work was often placed in gallery exhibitions, the wildflowers appropriately reside in the open air, her "Giant Purple Trillium" placed next to the green two-hour visitor parking sign.

"Cities are known for their art, so Corvallis is getting its own little art show," Bentley said. The artists involved are local artists responding to their perceptions of Corvallis. Hester Coucke, a member of the Public Arts Selection Commission who acts as the city liaison, said Alley Art reflects a "bond between artists and their community." Though unified as one project, the separate pieces are diverse in both subject matter and medium. "It gives opportunity for identification because it goes from rock forms to river otters to a dog," she said. "There is opportunity for anybody to identify themselves with one piece or another. There is even an old drive-in movie theater sign featuring poems by local poets."

According to Coucke, the alleyway becomes "a little gallery for that particular moment." Suddenly the brick walls and graffiti below the tangled lines of telephone wires are interesting and worth noticing. This time of year, the streets downtown are crawling with people. You can watch someone walk by the alleyways, notice the walls, duck in, and enjoy a moment out of the routine. "The thing about Alley Art," Coucke said, "is it is really like *your* art collection."

Alley Art can be found in alleyways along Madison Avenue in downtown Corvallis. The official self-guided tour starts at ArtCentric (700 SW Madison Ave.) where you can also pick up a brochure.

Stop number 9 on the self-guided tour, "The Shopper" by Heitho Bokides-Reuther was installed in 1996. Located between 4th and 5th streets along Madison Avenue, it depicts busy shoppers and their purchases.



Made from recycled, fused metal, "Fly Squatter" by Rich Branstrom was installed in 1996. Owned by the MATF, the sculpture currently resides high on the alley wall between 2nd and 3rd streets on Madison Avenue. But it's the one piece of artwork that moves, so keep your eyes peeled and look up.



"Waterdance" by Miles Pepper is the 15th stop on the tour and marks the beginning of the Corvallis Waterfront District. Find it on the corner of the street at 2nd and Madison.



"Giant Purple Trillium," "Cobra Lily" and "Mountain Lady's Slipper" by Bonnie Hall reside in the open air and form a kind of memorial to the beloved Corvallis artist who passed away last year. Located on Madison Avenue between 5th and 6th streets.

