

SELF GUIDED TOUR INFO



The Adirondack-Sacandaga River Sculpture Park is a artist designed park featuring the work of internationally recognized sculptors [John Van Alstine](#) and [Caroline Ramersdorfer](#). The 8 acre parcel is nestled along the banks of the historic Sacandaga River, in the quaint hamlet of Wells, NY located in south central section of the Adirondack State Park. The grounds, once part of a 19th century wood products mill, are wonderfully landscaped showcasing an ongoing, changing exhibition of both sculptors, whose works are held in many national and international collections including of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, City of Beijing, and the City of Zhengzhou, China

Van Alstine's work is also currently on exhibit at many other parks and gardens including the DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Garden, in Lincoln, Mass., Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton, NJ, The Olympic Garden in Beijing, China, Tsinghua University Sculpture Garden, Beijing, China and the garden at the Gulbenkian Foundation Collection, Lisbon, Portugal among others.

Ramersdorfer's work can be seen in the Eda Garden Museum, Yokohama, Tokyo; Artothek, Vienna, Austria; Abu Dhabi, UAE; Ordos City, Inner Mongolia, China; Urumqi, China; Cairo, Egypt; Hualien County Sculpture Museum, Taiwan; Tsinghua University Campus, Beijing, China; Robert T. Webb Sculpture Garden, Dalton GA and many more.

All works are for sale – if interested please inquire for more information:



SYPHEAN HOLIDAY (Portals and Passages)" 12-6"h x12'6"w x4"d

http://www.johnvanalstine.com/Wells_Garden.htm

This dynamic new work is a extension of the recent "SISYPHEAN CIRCLE SERIES" (2005-2009) which examines parallels between the Greek mythological character Sisyphus and the plight of the artist.

As we know from mythology because of a lifetime of transgressions when Sisyphus reached the underworld he was forced as punishment to roll a large stone up a steep hill, only to have it tumble back after reaching the top. This toil lasts all eternity and can be seen as a perfect metaphor for the creative process and life in general especially applicable to those, like myself, that use stone as a primary material.

However, to view the creative process (and life) simply as toil or a punishment is obviously too narrow and negative. I prefer to take the view presented by Albert Camus, the French existentialist in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*. where he uses the myth to illustrate the idea that reaching ones final destination is not always the most important. If one "reconsiders Sisyphus" as suggested, the struggle or journey reveals itself as ultimately the most meaningful - an idea that I, and many others, believe is central to the creative process and more broadly to life in general.

After completing over 30 sculptures in the "Sisyphus Circle Series", a new series has developed - *SISYPHEN HOLIDAY SERIES*. These new works are presented in a light hearted, "tongue in cheek" way that suggests giving Sisyphus (and me) a break or "holiday". Here the "Sisyphus Stone" is placed in a form similar to an Adirondack guide boat or canoe which gives the sculpture a playful and local summer twist.



3. John Van Alstine
Sisyphian Circle (tank top), 2018, riverstone/stainless/galvanized and powder-coated steel,
117”h

x75”w x30”d http://www.johnvanalstine.com/docs/SisyphianCircle_tanktop_T-18-11.htm

In the Sisyphian Circle series, the formal arrangement of the stone and steel elements suggest a figure frozen in the act of prying or pushing a stone. This struggle parallels that of the mythological Sisyphus who was cast to a life of perpetual labor pushing a stone to the top of a mountain only to have it roll back down. In many ways this series is a self-portrait as I am continually (and often literally) pushing stones to a creative peak and once reached, compelled to start again on a new work.

However portraying the creative process simply as “endless toil” is undeniably negative and I prefer to view the myth and metaphor through the lens of French existentialist Albert Camus. In his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he points out that the idea of reaching one's final destination is not always the most important. In fact if one "reconsiders Sisyphus" as Camus suggests, the struggle or journey reveals itself as ultimately the most meaningful. As in life, this notion is at the core of the creative process where the act of making triumphs over the object or final product.

The lower element of this piece is a section of an aeronautical fuel tank left after I removed the pointed end to use in one of my “Chalice” sculptures. It simultaneously lifts and anchors the thin whimsical upper elements. The sculpture is somewhat of a departure from my usual “style” and was partially influenced by the Spanish surrealist Joan Miro’s outdoor sculpture I had recently seen at Foundation Maeght in southern France.



4. John Van Alstine TETHER (Boy's Toys) 1995, Granite/steel/aluminum, 16'h x 14'w x 10'd

http://www.johnvanalstine.com/docs/garden/grounds_02/lg_img_teather.htm

This piece was born from two primary influences: my youthful infatuation with farmer's mailboxes observed along country roads magically dancing atop a welded chain and my first scuba trip where, from underwater, I experienced vessels wafting above on their anchor chains. At the time my studio was on the west bank of the Hudson in Jersey City and full of objects collected from nearby marine salvage yards - large anchors, chain, cleats, buoys, pontoons.

Tether (Boy's Toys), an unlikely stew of material and ideas, was conceived to simulate the experience of being underwater observing a floating tethered vessel. The sub-title, which came about while the work was in process, refers to the large phallic form and alludes to the things that often get the masculine gender into trouble: cigars, missiles, penises.



5.
PIQUE A TERRE VIII, 1999, bronze / granite 41" h x 59" w x 31' d John Van Alstine

Pique à Terre series. Pique à terre is a term from classical French ballet for a pose with one toe touching the ground, the other foot firmly planted, and a sweeping arm gesture. Once you are aware of the title, when you see the piece the connection is clear. I am in a sense choreographing these works, getting a heavy weight off the ground and making it dance— taking what is often seen as a negative, the fact that stone is damn heavy and a big hassle to move around, and turning it into a positive. It is this transition that helps give these pieces their magic.



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6. John Van Alstine "SISYPHEAN CIRCLE LXIV" 2015, slate/galvanized and powder coated steel, 65"h x 64"w x 16"d (165 x 162 x 40 cm)

"SISYPHEAN CIRCLE SERIES" (2005-present) which examines parallels between the Greek mythological character Sisyphus and the plight of the artist.

As we know from mythology because of a lifetime of transgressions when Sisyphus reached the underworld he was forced as punishment to roll a large stone up a steep hill, only to have it tumble back after reaching the top. This toil lasts all eternity and can be seen as a perfect metaphor for the creative process and life in general especially applicable to those, like myself, that use stone as a primary material.

However, to view the creative process (and life) simply as toil or a punishment is obviously too narrow and negative. I prefer to take the view presented by Albert Camus, the French existentialist in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*. where he uses the myth to illustrate the idea that reaching ones final destination is not always the most important. If one "reconsiders Sisyphus" as suggested, the struggle or journey reveals itself as ultimately the most meaningful - an idea that I, and many others, believe is central to the creative process and more broadly to life in general

7.



Hauch (Breathing) 1996 marble, 15 1/2 x 22 x 50 inches Caroline Ramersdorfer

Excerpt from the 2016 Opalka Gallery, Sage College, Albany, NY exhibition catalogue : Gravity & Light essay written by Federica Anichini

The proliferation of surfaces creates new dimensions, providing fresh perspectives for the viewer. The visual, or physical, interaction between the observer and the sculpture produces a meaningful reaction, as the artistic creation allows the organic qualities hidden in the inorganic matter to emerge. As if affected by the living presence of the observer, the inert material of the sculpture morphs into vital tissues, and the piece is transfigured into an organism, exposed.

Ramersdorfer conveys this response in a language that is direct and immediate. *Breathing* (1996) (figure 4) illustrates how extracting and liberating vital components from the block of material is achieved, as Ramersdorfer brings the marble to life. It breathes, suggesting movement, as if the piece were responding to a puff of air. Or perhaps the marble is carved into a respiratory organ, what might resemble the gills of a breathing animal, extracting oxygen from water. The meaning is communicated simultaneously at the symbolic as well as at the literal level.

Further organic elements surface, including those composing a human body—cartilages and bones boldly emerge in *Inner View_To the Bone* (2005) (figure 5), polished by time, and alive. A microscopic view of the inside of a bone, made of alabaster, springs from the confined space to spill through its boundaries, growing over itself. The material appears altered by a generative force that illustrates the process of transformation at the foundation of life. In order to demonstrate the continuity of such process, Ramersdorfer lends a sense of incompleteness to the piece, which appears on the verge of excreting yet more shapes.

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8. John van Alstine ODALISQUE I, 1989, granite /steel, 81"h x98w x60'd

This work was inspired by the famous reclining nude by Jean-Auguste-Dominique INGRES and my continuing interest in “breathing life into the heavy inanimate materials of stone and medal”

Jean-Auguste-Dominique INGRES (Montauban, 1780 - Paris, 1867), *La Grande Odalisque*, 1814

Ingres transposed the theme of the mythological nude, whose long tradition went back to the Renaissance, to an imaginary Orient. This work, his most

famous nude, was commissioned by Caroline Murat, Napoleon's sister and the queen of Naples. Here, Ingres painted a nude with long, sinuous lines bearing little resemblance to anatomical reality, but rendered the details and texture of the fabrics with sharp precision. This work drew fierce criticism when it was displayed at the Salon of 1819.

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9.
CORNUCOPIA WITH COLUMNS
1998, steel and granite, 11' 4" x 6'4" x 3' 7"

Many of my works incorporate anvils, either real or cast. Anvils have the shape suggestive of a boat or vessel that implies journey, which interests me. But further, as a metal worker, the anvil is the place where I physically and conceptually forge things together; there is an art spirit that comes off the anvil. It's almost like an altar. I've titled many of these pieces Ara, which is Latin for altar. Also, to me the anvil is the quintessential heavy object, and to get it up in the air creates a wonderful sense of tension.

The title "Cornucopia" refers to the horn shaped element in the lower part of the sculpture where the upper element "spill out". The

connection to the “horn of plenty” reinforces my notion that art nourishes”

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10.

“Trilogy” 2006-7, marble from Vermont , steel, stainless steel, wire, 9x 13 x 17’ Caroline Ramersdorfer

Excerpt from the 2016 Opalka Gallery, Sage College, Albany, NY exhibition catalogue : Gravity & Light essay written by Albert Ruetz

The essential force field inherent in these works develops when, even as they extend into an architectural space, an internal architecture is simultaneously formed. A force field is also generated when internal voids appear, when lattice work divides the field of view into segments and new, transformed spatial perceptions arise from different lines of vision. The important components here are light, fullness, and emptiness.

They enable the sculpture to occupy its own space fully, to change the space around it and to make use of the ever-changing play of light and shadow, direct or indirect illumination and, consequently, the many variable colors of light.

The essential precondition is the positioning of the sculpture. Standing alone

in space, without immediate reference to its surroundings, it is limited to its particular form and external impact. When set in a direct contextual relationship with architecture, in fact complementing it, a symbiosis is formed; architecture and sculpture are both transformed in the observer's perception and acquire a new significance through their interplay.

11.



SISYPHEAN CIRCLE 2013" 2013, slate/powdercoated steel, 54"h x"h x56"w x12"d
(137h x142w x30d cm)

(see #6 – Sisyphean Circle statement)



15. John Van Alstine

SAXUM VELUM (stone sail), 1996, Bronze/granite, 92"h x46"w x38"d

http://www.johnvanalstine.com/docs/lg_img_SaxumVela.htm

The Latin title translates as “Stone Sail;” the sculpture features a bronze vessel careening off a sparkling gray granite “waterfall”, together they present an interesting suite of ironies.

Stone that we perceive as durable, ageless and heavy takes on the visual fluidity and capriciousness of water, reminding us that granite, an igneous stone, was once liquid. A sail generally get its billowing shape from something as ephemeral as the wind. Sparkling bits of cystatin mica embedded in the granite bring to mind sun sparkling on freshly fallen snow. All these characteristics and associations are quite the opposite of our traditional understanding of stone.

Art often confronts us with these conceptual reversals allowing, or sometimes forcing, us “to see” our preconceived ideas differently. When successful, it can re-align our instinctive understanding of the “real world” and open us up to new ideas and experiences.



"Buoy" 1995, granite/steel, 130"h x 120"w x60"d (330 x 304 x152 cm)

During the 1980's and 90's my Jersey City studio was very near a marine salvage yard on the Hudson River where I acquired many objects like large anchors, ocean chain, cleats and buoys. I have several sculptures that use large ocean buoys, in fact one is titled *Buoy*. It has occurred to me that the act of making art is like dropping buoys as you bob along in your "stream" of creativity, leaving floating reminders of where you've been and what you were thinking at the time. This piece *Buoy*, 1995, attempts to formalize and convey this idea.



"SISYPHEAN CIRCLE (homage to Major Taylor)" 2019, granite / galvanized and powdercoated steel, 80"h x70"w x16"d (w/o base) 203 x178 x40 cm

Granite/galvanized and powder-coated steel, 80"h x70"w x16"d (203 x 178 x 40 cm)
http://www.johnvanalstine.com/docs/SisypheanCircle_MajorTaylor_T-19-10.htm

*In the Sisyphean Circle series, the formal arrangement of the stone and steel elements suggests a figure frozen in the act of prying or pushing a stone. This struggle parallels that of the mythological Sisyphus who was cast to a life of perpetual labor pushing a stone to the top of a mountain only to have it roll back down. Like the other works in this series, this work speaks to the myth of **Sisyphus** in relationship to the creative process and overcoming life's obstacles.*

*In 2019 while working on this piece I heard an NPR interview about **Marshall Walter "Major" Taylor** (1878-1932), an American bicycle racer and unknown to me, first black sports superstar. Perhaps through sub-conscious association the developing sculpture began to suggest an antique "big wheel" bicycle - a good example of my fluid creative process, absorbing and assimilating information on the fly. The piece ended up as homage to Taylor's **Sisyphean** efforts challenging the racial prejudice he encountered on and off the track, making him a pioneer role model for other athletes facing racial discrimination.*



Taylor in July 1907



16. " Labyrinth Trophy I" 1996, bronze/granite, 110"h x53"w x31"d

John van Alstine

"Labyrinth Trophy" is a cast bronze and granite sculpture inspired by the classical myth of Theseus slaying of the Minotaur in the Labyrinth on the island of Crete. The King had offered the hand in of his daughter Ariadne marriage to the person who could slay the Minotaur and rid the island of the monster. When Ariadne, an exceptional weaver, learned of the plan, she knew that even a hero like Theseus would get lost in the winding passages of the labyrinth so she gave him a ball of thread. Theseus entered the dark, winding labyrinth, unraveling the thread as he went and after he had disposed of the monster was able to use it to find his way out safely.

The sculpture features an oar suggesting Theseus' boat passage to Crete, horns of the Minotaur poised on top as the "trophy" and a bit of bronze thread. It is a good example of how mythology as a springboard for contemporary expression.



SISYPHEAN CIRCLE 8-14-17, 2017 (located near the entrance gate)
Granite/galvanized and powder-coated steel, 49"h x53"w x16"d (124 x 134 x 41d cm)

http://www.johnvanalstine.com/docs/SisypheanCircle_8-14-17_T-17-21.htm

(see #6 – Sisyphean Circle statement)



"RECONSIDERING SISYPHUS (fallen obelisk)" 2020, granite/galvanized and powder coated steel, 123"h x102"w x43"d

(see #6 – Sisyphian Circle statement)