

West Edge Sculpture Exhibition, daily through Oct. 20, on the Harbor Steps (First Avenue and Western Street), Seattle Art Museum Steps (on University between First Avenue and Third Avenue) and in and around Benaroya Hall, 200 University St., Seattle (www.westedgesculpture.com).

Sculpture show takes steps in right direction

By Sheila Farr /
Seattle Times art critic

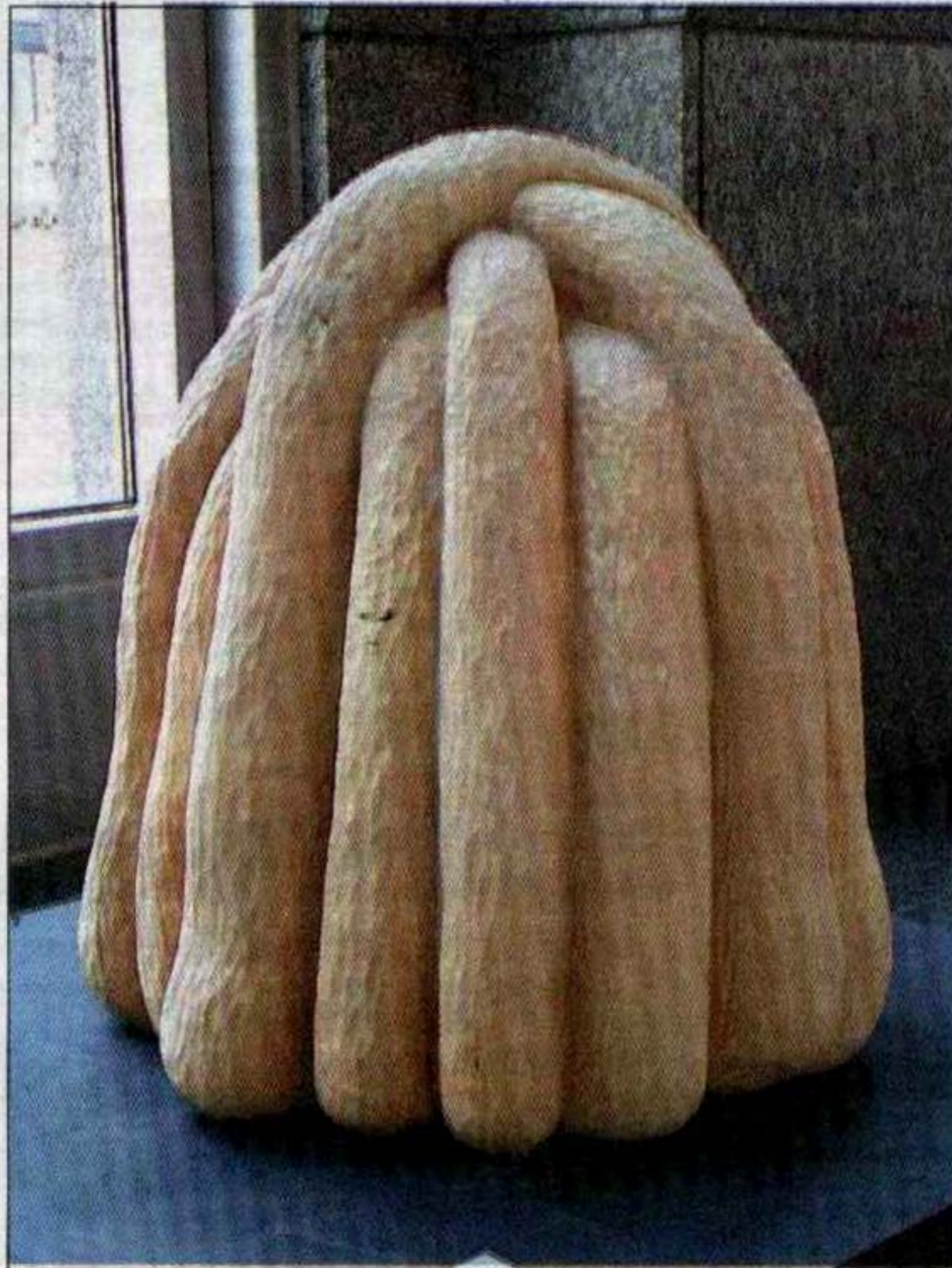
This is the fourth year for the West Edge Sculpture Exhibition, and the show is finally coming into its own. The reason is simple: This year it was chosen by jury instead of being limited to a group of invitees.

After an open call, Seattle Art Museum contemporary art curator Michael Darling, Museum of Northwest Art director Greg Robinson and SAM gallery director Barbara Shaiman selected 20 sculptures. (Word of the show must not have spread far, because there were only 70 entries.) The chosen pieces are installed mostly outdoors along the Harbor Steps, the Seattle Art Museum steps and in and around Benaroya Hall. You can pick up a map with a numbered guide in one of the kiosks scattered throughout the exhibition.

The best sculptures in the show start from engaging ideas, use materials in an inventive way and catch a sense of flux and motion. The jury process added new artists to the mix so it doesn't feel so much like a roundup of the usual insiders. Nevertheless, a few pieces stand flat-footed on their heavy plinths, leaving me wondering how they got in when works by many of the region's outstanding sculptors are absent.

Here are a few of this year's standouts:

One of the quietest but most seductive pieces is Theresa Henson's carved cypress "Touchable," located inside the foyer at Benaroya Hall. Its



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Theresa Henson's "Touchable," carved of cypress.

irresistible waxy smooth surface no doubt suggested the title of the sculpture. The abstract form has a kind of complex simplicity, like the layered roots of a cypress tree. And like tree roots — or a clump of languid worms, an exotic fruit or an eroded hill — the sculpture looks pleasingly different from every angle. But all those comparisons don't really get at its appeal. "Touch-

able" is magnetic, a thing-in-itself that generates its own buzz. I wanted to keep looking at it.

For sheer sparkling energy, Julian Voss-Andreae's "Quantum Man 2" is another winner. Moving through space one layer at a time, like it's been sectioned by an MRI machine, "Quantum Man" is a blur, sort of a 3-D version of Marcel Duchamp's locomoting "Nude De-



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Julian Voss-Andreae's "Quantum Man 2."

scending a Staircase." Looking at it reminds me of the last stanza of X.J. Kennedy's ode to the painting:

One-woman waterfall, she wears

Her slow descent like a long cape

*And pausing, on the final stair
Collects her motions into shape.*

The best sly humor at West Edge comes from the art cooperative SuttonBeresCuller's "Stand-up Van (Upstanding Minimalism)," a white vehicle that seems to nosedive into the pavement outside Seattle Art Museum, near "Hammering Man." The sawed-off vehicle pokes gentle fun at the series of white automobiles tumbling through SAM's lobby, asparkle with LED lights. "Stand-up Van" works not for its illusion of movement, but because it's so hilariously static — the place where all the high-octane power of Cai Guo-Qiang's "Inopportune: Stage One," inside the museum's glass lobby, grinds to a halt. SuttonBeresCuller showed "Van" previously, parked in various sites around the city, a kind of art happening. When I was peering at it outside the museum, trying to figure out the logistics of installing the thing, a nice policeman standing nearby offered his own assessment:

"Kinda neat, huh?"

"Stand-up Van" also nods to the classic 1970s outdoor installation "Cadillac Ranch" in Amarillo, Texas: a row of vintage caddies buried up to their roofs in the desert sand. But "Van" doesn't hold a dynamic angle like those sleek-finned, sexy cars. SuttonBeresCuller's loaf of a vehicle is permanently parked straight up and down, as if it took a suicide leap from the top of the museum. Fini.

Robert Pond's makeshift "Auspicious Crane" also caught my eye, with a sooty tangle of wrenches and salvaged car parts that meld together with gawky grace to become a bird. There are others on my list, but I promise you'll have no trouble finding plenty of your own favorites.

The West Edge Sculpture Exhibition began in 2004, when local sculptors Randy Bolander and Ulrich Pakker organized the show as a venue for their own work and that of other Northwest sculptors, West Edge promoter Cindy Helsley said. Sculptors Steve Jensen and Gerry Tsutakawa have been involved as advisers.

The show has been held back by that self-serving aspect. Turning to a jury process helps establish an air of legitimacy to West Edge, but I wish the organizers had simply asked Darling to make the selections rather than having a three-person panel. It would have made for a more unified vision.

And to me it strikes a sour note that so many of the show's organizers and advisers showed up again on the exhibition roster. Because of its prime downtown location, West Edge isn't a show like the now-defunct Horsehead outdoor sculpture exhibition, started outside the city on private land and intended to be a highly personal venture. If West Edge wants to be considered a serious venue for outdoor sculpture, one that truly represents the region and merits its prominent downtown spot, it's time for the insiders to step aside.