

THE RAINKEEPS OF ALLISON NEWSOME

We often regard a sculpture as purely a work of art. It may be a likeness of a person or animal, a mythological or historical figure, or some abstract shape asking to be touched: an object of aesthetic value not intended for any practical use. Allison Newsome's RainKeep sculptures are different. Each one is unique, visually pleasing while at the same time providing nourishment to the earth and flora. Her creations also educate children by emphasizing the importance of water conservation in a time of a warming planet.



 Bill Curtis

Newsome draws her inspiration for the RainKeeps from the ecology of the redwood tree, a species native to her childhood home in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The sculptures harvest the rain much as the canopies of the redwood tree catch coastal fog and direct the condensed moisture downwards. The upper section of a typical RainKeep is spread



like the petals of a flower in hues of red, green or purple. A system of aluminum "rain chains" (vertical chained links) catches drops of water and directs them to a reservoir below where, depending on size, as much as 3,000 gallons of rainwater may be stored for watering. A spigot mounted on the reservoir can refill a watering can or be attached to a hose. The silver reservoirs have reflective patterns, sometimes curvilinear markings reflecting the shine of a nearby creek as with "Whorl," the RainKeep installed in Thomas Park in Bristol,



Soho NYC, upper canopy with rain chains.



Three Sisters, Casey Farm, Saunderstown, Rhode Island.



Whorl, Bristol RainKeep with daffodils.

Rhode Island in 2018. Or the patterns may suggest the movement of swimming fish like the “Three Sisters” at Casey Farm in Saunderstown, Rhode Island. The latter was designed in collaboration with artist Deborah Spears Moorehead of the Wampanoag people for the 2020 Providence Arts Festival. It tells the Eastern Woodlands story of the Sky Woman falling to earth and giving her people her daughters, Corn, Bean, and Squash—the Three Sisters—to feed and sustain them.

Allison Newsome received her MFA from Rhode Island School of Design and maintains a studio in Warren, Rhode Island. Her first “Raincatcher” flower sculptures



Botanica, Florida Botanical Gardens.

were created for a 2014 outdoor exhibit at Blithewold Mansion, Gardens and Arboretum in Bristol. Last spring, Newsome installed a new RainKeep in the SoHo section of New York City, across from City Hall, which won Fast Company’s 2022 World Changing Ideas Award. “Botanica” was commissioned for the Florida Botanical Gardens near Tampa and will be housed in the new

Children’s Majeed Discovery Garden. You can see more of Newsome’s RainKeep sculptures at her photo gallery on www.RainKeep.com or better yet, if you live nearby, pay a visit to one of the locations mentioned to view one in person.

(Photo credits: Whorl, Bristol RainKeep with daffodils, Laurel Curtis; all others, courtesy of Allison Newsome)



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