

North Carolina Museum of Art Opens Redesigned Park to Connect Art, Nature, and People
Newly expanded Park unifies campus, encourages creative experiences

Raleigh, N.C.—The North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA) has completed a two-year-long redesign, expansion, and transformation of its Ann and Jim Goodnight Museum Park. To unify the campus, the project includes new tree-lined parking, contemporary wave and parterre gardens, a promenade connecting Park and galleries, and the Ellipse—a spectacular lawn overlooking the Park’s rolling meadow. The Museum also installed significant sculptures by Giuseppe Penone and Hank Willis Thomas in the new gardens, with others, including two monumental works by Mark di Suvero, to follow. A [public celebration](#) is planned for November 6, with outdoor activities for all ages.

The Museum enlisted landscape architecture and urban design firm [Civitas, Inc.](#), of Denver, Colorado, to develop the plan, led by the NCMA’s Dan Gottlieb, director of planning, design, and Museum Park. The Museum began construction in August 2015.

“We undertook this innovative redesign project in the Park to unify the Museum campus—connecting the perception of the ‘Park’ and the ‘Museum’ into a singular destination, with works of art and elements of design integrated into thoughtfully crafted experiences,” says Gottlieb. “Our newly expanded Park distinguishes the NCMA as a regional cultural destination with beautifully designed spaces and endless possibilities to explore and engage with art in nature. I see it as a special gathering space for what I believe will be a broadly diversified audience.”



New features of the expanded Park include:

- **The Ellipse:** The manicured lawn is surrounded by a 600-foot elliptical wooden bench and a sparkling walkway with tables and chairs under red umbrellas overlooking the Park’s upper meadow. It is used for Museum and community programming, temporary public art installations, or just relaxing and playing.
- **The Promenade:** This wide path connects the Museum’s galleries and the Park—winding from the Plaza to the Ellipse to the smokestack, past the wave gardens, works of art, and long views.
- **Wave Gardens:** Twenty mounded contemporary gardens are interlaced with paths and benches and are located along the promenade and Blue Ridge parking. The mounds are planted with more than 150,000 varied plants, creating waves of color and texture.
- **Parterre Lawn and Gardens:** These interior gardens connect the Ellipse and wave gardens to Blue Ridge Road. Two lawns, flanked by 10 raised and tilted gardens, are used for sculpture installations and events.
- **New Blue Ridge Parking:** More than 500 new parking spaces with tree-planted islands provide the experience of arriving at the NCMA through gardens. They are convenient to both the Park and gallery buildings. The Blue Ridge North lot is closest to buildings; the South lot is closest to the smokestack, the Capital Area Greenway, and District Drive.

- **New Street-Front Features:** The street front is newly designed with a corten steel blade, planted berm, tree-lined bike and pedestrian path, and new campus entrance at District Drive.
- **Capital Area Greenway:** Bicyclists using the Reedy Creek Trail from the pedestrian bridge over the I-440 Beltline can bike the new trail past the restored Vollis Simpson sculpture *Wind Machine* (to be reinstalled in late October) and the smokestack onto the Blue Ridge Road bike path.
- **Sustainable Measures:** A 1,000-foot-long water quality garden catches water from parking areas and filters out pollutants through bioretention (plants); water then flows through a “dissipater,” composed of rubble from the former prison boiler house, before entering streams. Two large hills were built in the Park’s upper meadow from 30,000 cubic yards of soil removed from the construction site, reshaping the landscape and reducing the carbon footprint and expense of hauling it off site. All new lighting fixtures use energy-efficient LED.



“These new community gathering spaces in the Park—like the Ellipse where people can relax or play, the parterre lawns that can host temporary public art installations or private events, and the contemporary gardens that welcome interactions with both the beautiful landscape and significant works of art by international artists—will truly connect art, nature, and people,” says NCMA Director Lawrence J. Wheeler. “Not only do we want our visitors to enjoy creative experiences with art and with each other, but we also hope they reimagine what a museum can mean to them: elegant gallery and outdoor art adventures; recreation and imagination; events, exhibitions, and installations; and creative escape.”

The Museum and Civitas, Inc., worked together to create a community-focused design for the Park, with emphasis on ways to use landscape design and art installation to foster creative, memorable experiences for the people of North Carolina and beyond. In planning the Park expansion, they hoped to expand access to art, form a new framework for public engagement, and create a sustainable future for the Museum as a place close to people’s lives.

“We used design to give definition to the Museum Park and create something entirely original, where the relationship between the visitor, nature, and art is the subject itself,” says Mark Johnson, principal in charge at Civitas. “It’s more than a traditional sculpture park: it is an intentionally designed landscape with gardens, recreational and fitness programs, sustainability measures, and permanent and temporary public art installations. We activated the Park in a new way and look forward to seeing a variety of visitors every day: fitness groups, art admirers engaged with sculpture, and children playing in nature.”

The Park already draws more than 150,000 annual visits; with the completion of the expansion project the Museum anticipates welcoming many more art, nature, and recreation enthusiasts. Long-term plans include expanded trails, environmental restoration projects, and additional works of art and programs.

The grounds for the Museum and Park were used for various prison and military functions for almost 100 years, including a World War I tank training facility and youth prison. In 1983 the Museum opened its original building (now referred to as East Building) on the site. It is keeping parts of the prison in the design of the Park as a reminder of this history and a symbol of its transformation to cultural destination: a boiler house was demolished and its rubble used as part of a sustainable water quality system; a smokestack now stands tall as a work of art in itself, surrounded by a manicured lawn for games and leisure.

“The NCMA Park is unique to this landscape and the social context from which it’s been created from a former prison site: its land highly degraded and its history the antithesis of openness and creativity,” Gottlieb explains. “Evolving from almost 100 years of use for military and incarceration to an environmentally healthy, culturally accessible place to connect art and nature is the characteristic that differentiates it from other museums’ landscapes.”

NCMA Park Celebration

Sunday, November 6, 1 pm to dark

Free; no tickets required. Food and beverages available for purchase.

Sponsored by Duke Energy

On Sunday, November 6, the Museum [celebrates the expansion of the Museum Park](#). Visitors are invited to explore the new community spaces and gardens, see exciting new art installations, sample treats from food trucks, and enjoy engaging and creative experiences for all ages. Art and recreational activities include pop-up art workshops; art walks and bike tours; live music by Al Strong and Friends, Kaira Ba, the Onyx Club Boys, and other artists; and a new interactive soundtrack app. Plus, it will be the last time to view special 10-day public art exhibition [Amanda Parer: Intrude](#), featuring five giant illuminated bunnies.

Caption (bottom image):

Giuseppe Penone, *Ideas of Stone-Elm*, 2008, bronze and river stones, H. 315 x W. 157 ½ D. x 98 3/8 in., On loan courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, Paris, and London. The installation of *Ideas of Stone-Elm* at the North Carolina Museum of Art is made possible by the generous support of Carol and Rick McNeel.

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About the North Carolina Museum of Art

The North Carolina Museum of Art's permanent collection spans more than 5,000 years, from ancient Egypt to the present, making the institution one of the premier art museums in the South. The Museum's collection provides educational, aesthetic, intellectual, and cultural experiences for the citizens of North Carolina and beyond. The 164-acre Museum Park showcases the connection between art and nature through site-specific works of environmental art. The Museum offers changing national touring exhibitions, classes, lectures, family activities, films, and concerts.

The Museum opened West Building, home to the permanent collection, in 2010. The North Carolina Museum of Art, Lawrence J. Wheeler, director, is located at 2110 Blue Ridge Road in Raleigh. It is the art museum of the State of North Carolina, Pat McCrory, governor, and an agency of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, Susan Kluttz, secretary.