

ARTS

Making waves: George Sherwood's 'Art in Motion' installed at New England Botanic Garden

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Key Points

Sculptor George Sherwood's outside exhibition "Art in Motion" is on view at New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill through Oct. 12.

The exhibition features 17 intricate stainless steel sculptures that move in the wind and reflect sunlight.

Sherwood, who lives in Ipswich, has been inspired by motion and nature his entire life.

BOYLSTON — The Ipswich-based kinetic and environmental sculptor [George Sherwood](#) had already installed his "[Art in Motion](#)" exhibition at [New England Botanic Garden](#) at Tower Hill recently, but decided to come back a few days later.

Nothing was wrong, but it was a foggy day. The exhibition's 17 intricate stainless-steel sculptures placed outside around the formal gardens move in the wind and reflect the sunlight. Sherwood was intrigued by the effect the fog had on the pieces.

"The fog is quite wonderful. It changes everything," Sherwood said. "These sculptures are best seen over time. It just has a life of its own. It's always doing something a little different.

He'll be returning for more visits.

'His sculptures are mesmerizing'

"Art in Motion: 25 Years of Sculpture by George Sherwood," to give the exhibition its full title, officially opened May 3 and runs through Oct. 12. The exhibition reflects a life of fascination and inspiration with movement and nature.

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The 25 years "is pretty much how long I've been doing it professionally," Sherwood said. "Non-professionally, it's been a lifetime."

Sherwood's award-winning works are featured in many notable collections, including those at the Currier Museum of Art in Manchester, New Hampshire, and the Atlanta Botanical Garden. He has completed public projects in various cities including Salt Lake City, as well as solo shows at the Rose Kennedy Greenway in Boston and the Katonah Museum in Katonah, New York. In 2007 he was awarded the Lillian Heller Award for Contemporary Art at Chesterwood in Stockbridge.

An exhibition of his work, "[Wind, Waves and Light](#)," was featured at New England Botanic Garden in 2019. His hardcover book "[George Sherwood: Wind, Waves, and Light](#)" featuring more than 100 sculptures is now available at the Garden Shop.

Some favorite sculptures from "Wind, Waves and Light" in 2019 have returned for "Art in Motion," including "Flock of Birds" which looks and moves like a flock of birds in a tree except that it is a stainless-steel creation.

The exhibition is not only a career-spanning retrospective but also includes a new, never-before-seen work. "Beneath the Sea," Sherwood's latest piece, evokes the shimmering sense of looking up from under water.

"His sculptures are mesmerizing. They move effortlessly and complement our garden spaces in surprising and beautiful ways," says Lea Morgan, exhibitions manager for New England Botanic Garden. "We hope our visitors will enjoy seeing

these pieces again and again during their time here, especially as the seasons change.”

'A career in creativity'

Prior to becoming a professional sculptor, Sherwood was a concept developer for LEGO. He's worked in computers and robotics and has a degree in engineering. Before that, he earned a degree in art. "It's been a career in creativity in the formal sense of the word," he said.

Originally from Fairfield, Connecticut, Sherwood had an interest in physical theater in the 1970s inspired in part by the Swiss troupe [Mummenschanz](#). He even tried out for the company, "but I didn't make the cut," he said.

He developed his own one-man show featuring props and sculptures. "I was the person who was moving all the things I had on stage." But he found that "I enjoyed making the things more than I did performing."

Meanwhile, he was always attracted to nature. Fairfield and Ipswich are both coastal towns.

"I would say most people are drawn to nature. From the time I was born I was outdoors," Sherwood said. "My father was a sailor. I live in an area that is quite beautiful. It's the ocean. It's the marsh. You notice the things that are moving."

At LEGO he was part of a team that helped developed preliminary concepts leading to the development of Mindstorms and Virtual LEGO construction software. It was during this time that he was introduced to the wind powered sculpture of the late [George Rickey](#). A growing passion to create his own kinetic and environmental works led Sherwood to pursue that as a full time career.

"I enjoyed the making of things," he said. Then, "I think in some ways I didn't try to copy the movement (of nature), but it just came into the work ... Nature — it moves."

'Wind, waves and light'

When it comes to his sculptures, "It boils down to wind, waves and light," he said. "Wind in the broader sense. All the invisible forces. It's the invisible world out there. Waves are the tangible components. Light is what we see. The wind moves the waves. The waves move the light. And the light moves us all."

Sherwood designs his sculptures from patterns and perspectives in nature such as birds in flight, floral forms, and ripples and reflections on the surface of water. They are made with extreme precision from highly reflective stainless-steel. Each piece is comprised of smaller components — sometimes several and sometimes thousands — that move in response to the slightest breeze.

"Each sculpture is a three-dimensional painting of shifting light, drawing all the colors of the environment, pulling down the sky, drawing up the earth, and gathering everything in between," Sherwood said.

"It's like watching a dance. You might feel like moving to it, unlike just watching a painting. There's a different response in your body."

'Powerful interplay with the environment'

The pieces currently at the New England Botanic Garden vary in shape, size, and movement, ranging from smaller more intimate sculptures to large-scale works reaching up to 21 feet. "Art in Motion" interacts with its surroundings in the garden in its own special way.

"Having my work displayed outside in a garden space provides a powerful interplay with the environment. You'll get this subtle, sometimes more than subtle, reflection of color from the gardens back in the sculpture," he said.

Put another way, "It's fabulous," he said of having the exhibition at New England Botanic Garden. "It's always a great collaboration with nature in general but these gardens in particular."

Prior to installing "Art in Motion" he was at the garden walking around with the staff and "we decided on what spots" to have the sculptures set up, he said. The installation took several days but went smoothly. "People there are just wonderful people to work with. Very cheerful. It's a pleasant experience both times I've been there."

Sherwood has had indoor exhibitions as well as outdoor, but likes his work to be in the elements.

"I guess I would say I prefer the outdoors. The indoors you don't have the forces that are working outside. Most importantly the wind. Placing this outdoors, that's when the sculpture begins ... There's a lot of unpredictability."

Asked what he hopes visitors will take away from "Art in Motion," Sherwood replied, "I just hope that it has given them brief moments of mystery, and magic and wonder. It maybe changed their perspective for a few moments on life."

"Art in Motion," at New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill in Boylston now until Oct. 12, is included with general admission and can be experienced during daytime hours Monday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and during special extended hours on Wednesday and Thursday evenings this summer. For more information visit [nebg.org](https://www.nebg.org).