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Light sculptor Sharon Loudon's work is included in the sculpture garden at the Birmingham Museum of Art.

Illuminating art to debut at museum this weekend

By MICHAEL HUEBNER
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The sculpture garden at the Birmingham Museum of Art will have a certain glow to it, starting Sunday.

All this week, New York artist Sharon Loudon has been installing illuminated cable in 11 trees in the garden, part of "Taking Turns," a multimedia BMA commission. Loudon's assistants were perched high on a scissor lift, hanging LED lights as Loudon directed their placement on her arboreal canvas.

"I see them as visual objects," Loudon said of the trees and lights. "The work is meshed with nature. It becomes part of the environment, but hopefully a contributor to the environment."

Inside the museum, Loudon is visually connecting the outdoor lighting with 12 paintings and projected video animation on computer screens. Although her strong background in painting and drawing has taken a sculptural, environmental turn recently, she still considers drawing her primary medium.

"You can draw in different ways," she said. "Drawing isn't identified just with a pencil. It can be identified through different mediums."

Loudon's outside-the-box thinking is what prompted BMA curator Ron Platt to seek the commission.



Amy Pleasant hangs LED lights from trees under Loudon's direction. The multimedia installation "Taking Turns" can be seen as an extension of the Leonardo da Vinci drawing exhibition, which also opens Sunday.

"Sharon's work is both elegant and playful, and for this project she is exploring the idea of an exhibition moving from space to space," Platt said. "She considers the site-specific illuminated cable works as three-dimensional drawing."

One of Loudon's environment works got her involved in a legal battle with Yahoo last year, when steel reeds with reflective material, made to blend with surrounding wetland grass at the company's Sunnyvale, Calif., headquarters, were mowed down by workers when the real grass became overgrown. Recently, the issue was resolved amicably.

"They wanted me to fix the piece, but I did more than that," Loudon said. "We not only changed the park, we added to it. We put in benches and had the piece become part of nature."

"Taking Turns" can be seen as an extension of the Leonardo da Vinci drawing exhibition, which also opens Sunday.

"The fact that these drawings go beyond just the paper is inspirational for me," Loudon said. "His reference to the body and architecture is essential. That's the connection I have with this work. I'm doing that in an abstract nature."

Four years ago, Loudon came up with the unique idea of selling shares of a sculpture installation in Kansas City to raise capital (the work would later be sold). She advises budding artists to be just as creative, both artistically and financially.

"Creative thinking is a very big plus for artists. To be business-minded and be able to express themselves, that's the gift we all have."

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