



Celebrating Public Art in the Hub City

Hagerstown, Maryland

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In 1762, a German veteran of the French and Indian War named Jonathan Hager established a town at the crossroads of what was once the Great Indian Warpath trading route that ran through the Great Appalachian Valley. Thanks to its location, Hager's town became a transportation center known as the "Hub City," where tracks from three major railroads converged – the Western Maryland, Chesapeake and Ohio, and Baltimore and Ohio – and fueled the area's economic growth well into the 20th Century. Today I-70 and I-81 intersect in Hagerstown, a focal point for the Tri-State Area – Western Maryland, South Central Pennsylvania and West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle.

Hagerstown, now the fastest growing metropolitan area in Maryland, prides itself on a continuing legacy of innovation in technology, and history of fostering the arts. Since 1931, the Hagerstown City Park has been home to the Museum of Fine Arts of Washington County, and is regarded as one of the finest small museums in the nation. Downtown's City Center was among the first designated Arts and Entertainment (A & E) Districts in Maryland and is home to a thriving arts community. In 2018, the Washington County Arts Council in Hagerstown will celebrate its 50th anniversary.

In 2013, while developing a plan for downtown revitalization, community leaders recognized the potential of a

trail to connect downtown's A & E District with the City Park and Art Museum, two of Hagerstown's most popular destinations located about a half-mile apart. Given that both locations share a focus on art, it seemed natural to feature public art along what city and cultural leaders called the "Cultural Trail." (hagerstownculturaltrail.com). They wanted the trail to serve as a community space celebrating Hagerstown's history and future potential, while giving people opportunities to interact with public art, gather with others, and enjoy the outdoors. They turned to William Cochran, Cochran Studios, a public art consultant, for guidance.

"The City of Hagerstown followed his lead," says Dan Spedden, president of the Visit Hagerstown-Washington County Convention and Visitors Bureau. "We needed to know what kind of art would work. He connected us to a network of artists working in the field of public art."

"It took two years from concept to initiation," Spedden says. "We were amazed at how quickly it came together." The Cultural Trail was officially dedicated this past June. He notes that the Trail has become an attraction, drawing people from the Baltimore/D.C. area.

The Trail begins at the West Antietam Entry Plaza in the A & E District, crosses another entrance at Baltimore Street, and travels along Lee Street before reaching City Park. Multi-colored herringbones of red, yellow and green serve as arrows pointing the way over the red-brick pathway, built upon dormant railroad beds. Sleek, contemporary lighting along the way is designed to be unobtrusive. Crosswalks feature street surfaces painted with multi-colored



Views of some of the Cultural Trail showing art and direction maps.

herringbones and are equipped with push-button signals that emit a flashing light to alert oncoming motorists of pedestrian traffic.

The journey along the trail features an eclectic assortment of artwork large and small, ranging from abstract images to elements of nature and created by artists near and far. Assuming that a pedestrian begins at the West Antietam Entry Plaza, here is an itinerary and a description of each artwork:

- **Faces of Hagerstown** – It seems fitting that the people of Hagerstown would be the first featured artists on the

Trail, welcoming pedestrians to the first installation, a collection of candid photos taken of and submitted by local Hagerstonians ranging from amateurs using phone cameras to pros with sophisticated equipment and skills. Connected segments of chain link fence serve as “frames” for each photo.

- **Herald-Mail Sculpture** – Metal fabricator and sculptor Adam Curtis of Ijamsville, Maryland, created an abstract work featuring large sections of orange metal, arranged so that the sculpture seems to change as the viewer moves around it. Could the selection of the color orange have something to do with the Maryland State Bird, the

Baltimore Oriole?

Only the artist knows.

Located nearby are decorative structures that offer shade and diversion from shadows cast upon the Trail.

- **The Mural of Unusual Size** – That it is, the centerpiece of the Trail and visible from a distance. It covers surfaces of four connected industrial buildings of varying sizes, with some reaching 80 feet. Artist Alex Brewer of Atlanta, Georgia, used the buildings as a canvas, painting playful abstract images of different sizes and shapes in a spectrum of colors from bold to basic that blend and contrast. This is a work of transformation and optimism created by an award-winning artist with an international reputation.
- **Whimsical Garden** – This fun zone installation, the first of a larger playscape, captures the eye with oversize flowers resembling pinwheels and brings to mind Dr. Seuss and his fantastical illustrations. A rock garden featuring water trickling over stones of varying sizes and shapes provides a more natural and grounded ambiance. Sculptor Alison Sigethy of Alexandria, Virginia, a resident glass artist at the Torpedo, created this space for children of all ages to enjoy.
- **Decorative Screens** – Inspired by railroad imagery, Vicki Scuri of Seattle, Washington, designed this plasma-cut steel fence evoking the bustling railyards that previously occupied the Trail space. The screens act as a backdrop for the Whimsical Garden and shield the Trail from a neighboring parking lot and loading



“The Mural of Unusual Size,” formerly four connected industrial buildings, draws attention for miles around as part of the Hagerstown Cultural Trail.

Below: Free standing display signs explain points of interest along the Trail.



Italy, where it came to life in Michelangelo's former studio. Internationally renowned sculptor Richard Deutsh hand-carved this piece from solid granite. His intent was to merge art and environment in a work that invites interaction and play.

“There are infinite ways to connect with the Trail, both physically and emotionally,” says Spedden. “It’s an attractive public space, appealing in an urban environment where you’re not assaulted with traffic and noise. The Trail makes a bold statement: We’re on the move. This is progress.” And it’s still a work in progress.

www.hagerstownculturaltrail.com



docks. Scuri has earned a national reputation as an infrastructure artist skilled in using public art to strengthen community identity.

- **Community Art** – Hagerstown’s Judah Claxton created this temporary mural in honor of the Hub City’s legacy as a railroad and cultural center. Attendees of Fall Fest 2016 enlivened the mural with color.
- **Pod** – Now located near the Art Museum, this sculpture came to Hagerstown from