

Modern-day monumental bronzes in public places echo a tradition in sculpture in the United States that stretches from the late 19th to early 20th centuries.

Swedish-born sculptor **Kent Ullberg's** monumental wildlifes grace the globe, from bronze sailfish leaping before the bay in his hometown of Corpus Christi, Texas, to a great blue heron shaped in stainless steel on bronze at a municipal art museum in Luxembourg. Ullberg, whose wildlifes have garnered such honors as the National Academy of Design's Barnett Prize for sculpture and the Prix de West Purchase Award, says society's heightened appreciation for the natural world has set the stage for animals to assume primacy as subjects of art. "At no time in history until recently have wildlife — animals — been considered important enough to be honored on their own," says Ullberg, the 1996 winner of the Rungius Medal from the National Museum of Wildlife Art. "Animals have appeared in art but only as symbolism, as adjacent to man."

Where ancient peoples worshipped the divine, assuming the form and attributes of animals, contemporary culture at large is not seeking a reflection of its own image in the environment. "For the first time, we are representing the animal as itself, with some intrinsic value," Ullberg says. "Our

society has begun to see animals as a precious part of our environment, our world, just as worthy of being honored and celebrated for themselves as kings or conquerors."

At a time when revitalizing the aesthetics and economics of dying downtowns has renewed interest and activity in everyday spaces and during a period when a percentage of funding for public construction and renovation projects must be earmarked for art, the age-old ethos of American landscape architecture — that the hearts of cities should beat in tandem with beauty — has gained fresh currency.

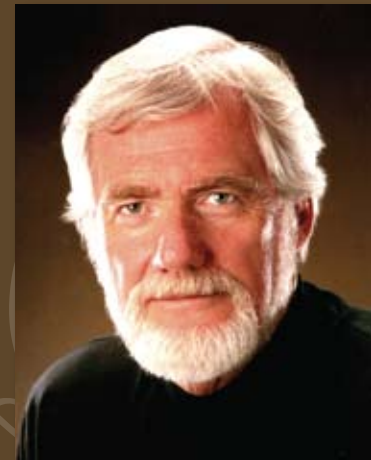
The nine mustangs stampeding across the square in Las Colinas is a textbook example of the recent move toward dramatic artistic statements in public spaces using the landscape as a palette, says Utah State University's Timmons. It is a practice ushered in by such giants of landscape architecture as Lawrence Halprin, and it represents a shift from the longstanding practice of bringing the country into the city, or pastoral places into urban areas, a motif that drove the design of Central Park and embodied its designer, Frederick Law Olmsted, the father of American landscape architecture.



Spirit of Nebraska's Wilderness - Kent Ullberg, bronze, Omaha, Nebraska. Image courtesy of artist.



Wind in the Sail - Kent Ullberg, bronze sculpture with red granite base. Image courtesy of artist. This 23-foot sculpture, located on the bay front in Corpus Christi, Texas, was commissioned in 1983 by the *Corpus Christi-Caller Times* to celebrate their 150th anniversary.



KENT ULLBERG

Ullberg's just-completed opus is a sculpture of Canada geese and bison, *Spirit of Nebraska's Wilderness*, that stretches across six blocks in downtown Omaha. The monumental work — part of a major redevelopment underwritten by the First National Bank of Omaha — incorporates elements of its urban expanse, with geese atop traffic lights and bison barreling through planters, symbolizing the city's stake in the future even as the animals represent its debt to the past. The piece, marrying bronze and stainless steel as the wildlife moves into a contemporary context, exhibits dynamism equal to the fabled mustangs and, similarly, is a masterwork in a master-designed setting (both projects benefited from the genius of the late James Reeves).

Steve Boody is an arbiter of taste for major corporations, assembling art collections that provide paintings in the boardroom and sculptures in commercial centers. The president of the St. Louis-based Boody Fine Arts, the firm hired by First National Bank of Omaha to bring its art aspirations to fruition, likens the pattern in the United States of adorning landscapes with art to the European practice in place centuries ago. "There's a tremendous amount of public awareness and acceptance of the theory that works of art in

the environment affect the psyche of the individual — and, collectively, society — in a positive sense," says Boody.

In a sign that the times are right for a return to the center of cities where art is on exhibit, Boody's work with the private sector gave birth in 2004 to Public Art and Practice, a companion company that crafts master art plans for communities, park systems, universities and riverfronts. The underlying principle is, if you install it, they will come. "There is a new understanding that major works of art are instrumental in attracting people," says Boody.

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