

Up Front

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N.C. Botanical Gardens:

Much more than just a bed of roses

Photos by Brian Foley



John Amero's 9-foot "Attamero Lily."

By ANNE-RENEE RICE
Staff Writer

It was straight out of a drive-in horror movie: there I was, sitting in the mouth of a monstrous Venus-fly trap and escaping with my life.

Sounds pretty scary, huh? I was also surrounded by a giant 9-foot flower, a huge vase and a giant Christmas ball.

It wasn't a dream or my imagination; I was at the sculpture exhibit in the North Carolina Botanical Garden on Laurel Hill Road.

Kathy Buckman, a ceramic artist and organizer of the show led me on an informative tour through the garden. She discussed more than 20 sculpture pieces presented in this invitational show.

"The sculptures are displayed in the garden (as opposed to a studio), which enables us to show the work in an environment similar to the theme of the work," Buckman said.

Garden sculpture is not a new idea. The ancient Egyptians and Romans had elaborate gardens decorated with ornate sculptures. The Renaissance was another period that idealized man's manipulation of the environment to achieve a beautiful landscape.

The garden is divided into different types of vegetation. Each of the 19 N.C. artists represented chose an appropriate garden space for his sculpture.

Sculptures with Indian motifs are in the medicinal herb garden. Here, Irmaly Brackin displays her piece called "The Center," which was constructed from glazed styrofoam.

The piece has an ornate design carved into it with a soldering iron. "It does have a mysterious Indian quality," Buckman said.

It's hard to believe that someone would spend so much time on a material like styrofoam. Buckman said one must look beyond the surface idea. From the artists' point of view, the actual art of their piece is their manipulation of the material used.

The sculptures represent themes that each artist finds personally compelling.

Renee Montague, a graduate student from Pittsboro, is intrigued by ancient imagery. She fashioned her ceramic piece called "Snake Hills" after what looks like a huge snake skeleton . . . or is it a replica of a group of hills in Ohio that she has studied?

Elaine Blumenaur, who is from Apex, uses wolf imagery because of her concern over the decimation of wolves.

As we walked through the garden, Buckman and I talked about art in her life. She has a degree in English and sells real estate. But she says she has finally found her niche in life with art.

"It's my cause in life right now," she said.

Two of Buckman's sculptures are exhibited in the show. She constructed a huge ceramic vase she calls "Vase Form." We're talking BIG — as in 6 feet high. The curvature of the vase reflects Buckman's female imagery motif. Aside from the expression of the theme, she did it as a fun piece.

"The size of an object changes the viewer's outlook," she said.

Buckman said she enjoys having her sculpture on public display.

"I think it's fun. There is a lot of ego invested,



Patricia Rieger's ceramic sculpture "Journey with Light" looks like a miniature Trojan horse.

though. It's interesting to hear people commenting on your piece as they study it," she said.

Everyone can get something different from the same work of art. But learning to "read"

work. Abstract pieces of art demand the viewer's insight because they have no immediately apparent meaning.

Patricia Rieger's "Journey with Light" is a ceramic piece that looks like a miniature Trojan horse, with a small chair on its back and a lightbulb underneath. As abstract as it is, this sculpture derives much of its meaning from the person viewing it.

"Here again, art is what you want it to be," Buckman said.

The art of Norma Nelson's "Acid Rain" is its surface. By working with the glaze used in ceramics, Nelson created a quagmire of lavender hues dripping down the sculpture.

Perhaps one of the more unusual pieces in the garden is Xavier Toubes' "Seating for a Windy Day." A bench with splashes of paint sits in a corner of the garden. Molds of clay feet hang from the tree beside it. Behind the bench, three flagpoles stand.

It is an installation piece, one that depends on its natural setting for its impact.

"It is a work of art because of its setting and the interaction between the elements," Buckman said.

Similarly, Buckman's "Azure Gazing," a funky new way of using a Christmas ball, is best displayed outside. This huge mirrored ball sits atop a ceramic sculptured base. You can look into it and see everything behind you.

"It's wild," Buckman said.

So wild that she has 15 of them in her yard at her home.

But who's to say what wild is? It might be John Amero's metal 9-foot lily, his version of

the lily scientifically named Adamasco. He calls it "Attamero Lily." It is privately owned and sits on the edge of a pond in someone's backyard.

Imagine looking out your kitchen window and seeing a 9-foot flower. What's this world coming to? Giant lilies, giant Christmas balls and . . . what? Giant Venus flytraps?

Ha! Thought I was trying to be funny earlier, huh? Well, you can visit (and even sit in) Adam Kuby's "Venus Trap."

"All You Can Eat. Sit Here — Free Food" is the enticement Kurby has painted on the seat of his "Venus Trap." The sculpture is among the other Venus flytraps and carnivorous plants in the garden. But don't worry, the real flytraps are a lot smaller.

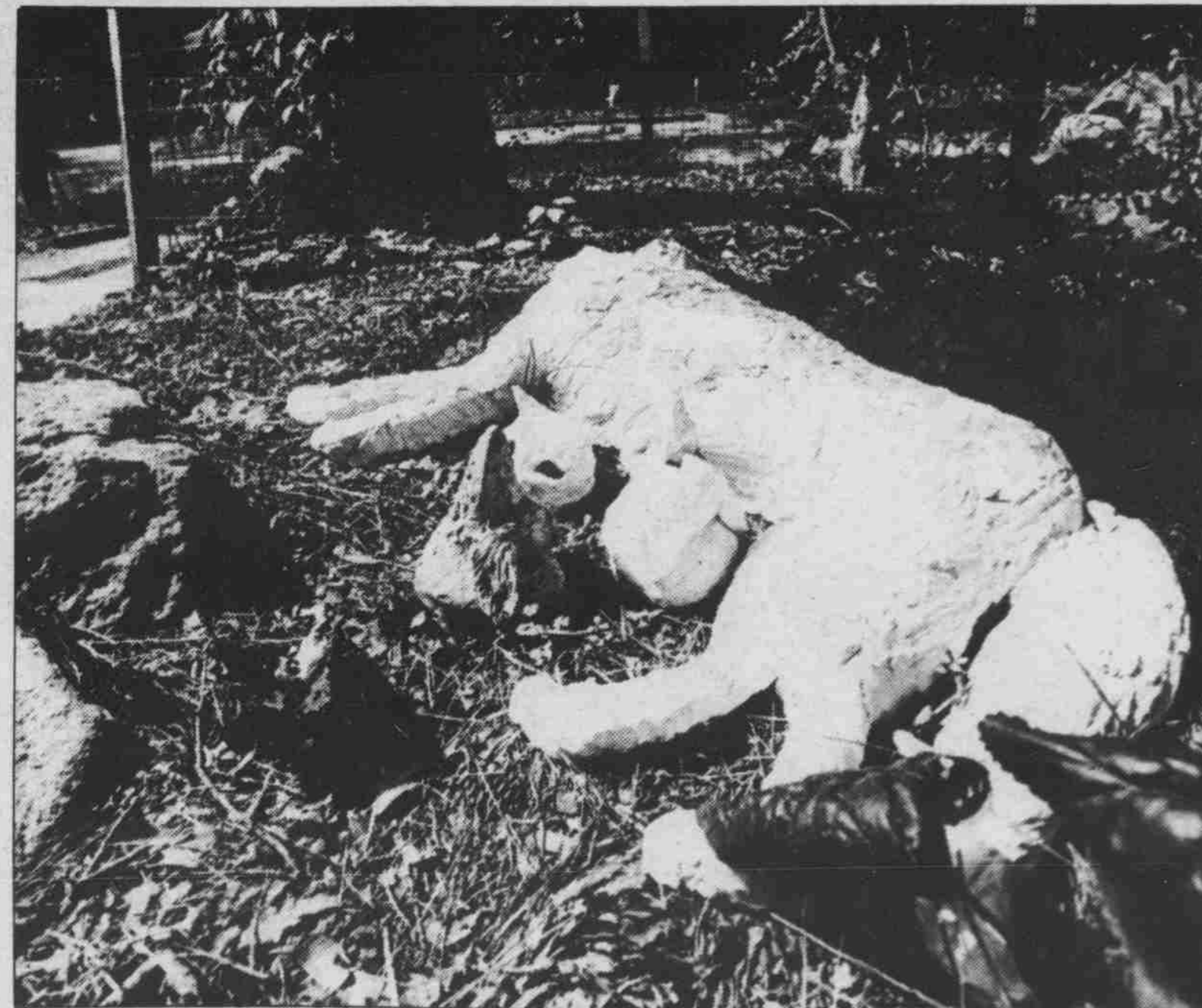
In addition to the sculptures which are on display until Oct. 31, there are numerous natural habitats to explore. Within minutes you can walk from a coastal habitat to a mountain habitat.

It's really a peaceful environment; a place to go wind down after class or to just get away.

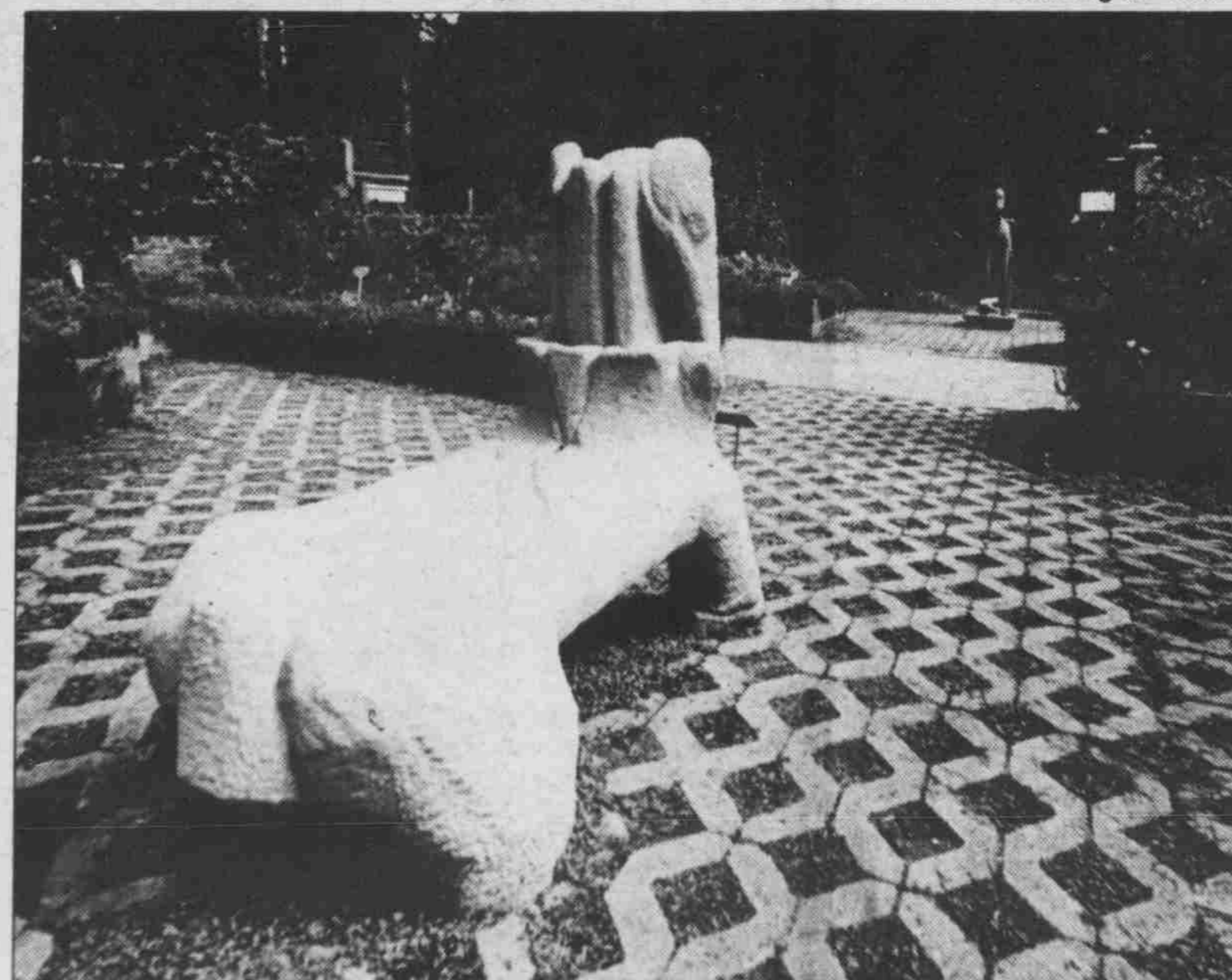
So, if you've never gotten into art or you thought public gardens were places for nature freaks or starry-eyed couples, opt for a change in pace and visit the North Carolina Botanical Garden.

Hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, and 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday.

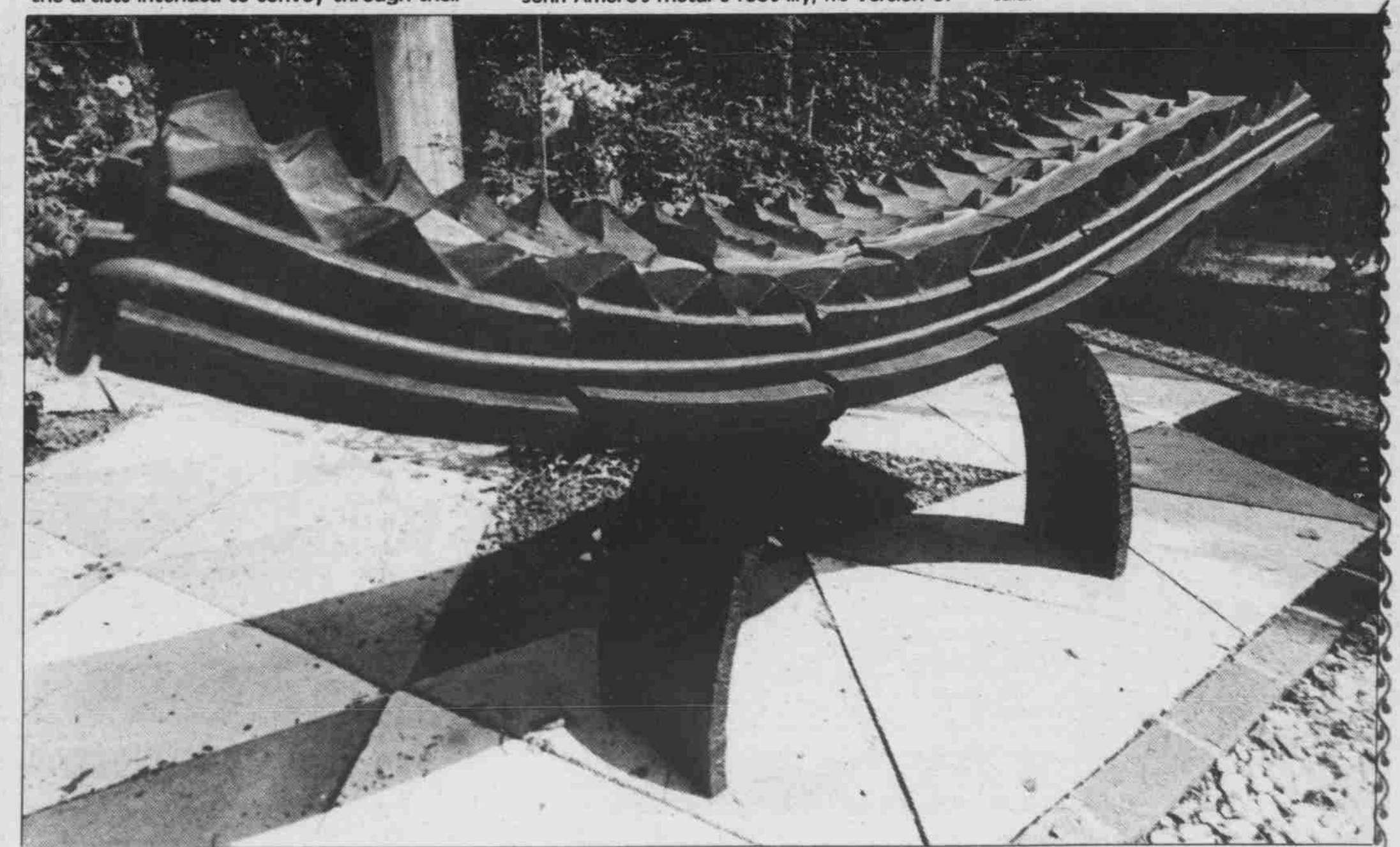
"It's right here on the edge of campus for students to do something different," Buckman said.



Elaine Comento Blumenaur's ceramic sculpture, "Mother and Child Reunion."



The cement "Garden Seat" made by Andy Fleishman.



Alvin Frega's pointy steel sculpture, "Loveseat," doesn't look very inviting.