Woodbury farm raises art

Sculptor welcomes all to open house

BY CALEB BEDILLION REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN   October 15, 2015

Stone. Steel. Air. When Edward Tufte, a retired Yale professor and noted guru of information visualization, constructs his art, these are among his raw materials.

Yes, air. You breathe it, and Tufte shapes it. Its pliability plays a significant role in the construction of his art.

Consider Tufte's megaliths, massive shards of stone balanced and arranged against each into vertical and diagonal arrangements. But between the stones, between the vertical and diagonal lines, you'll find the air.

"The air space is the only thing you can manipulate," Tufte said.

"The stones are pretty well set."

His art, scaled to landscape size, dots Hogpen Hill Farms, 234 acres in Woodbury owned by Tufte and set aside as a sculpture park and tree farm.

Contributed Stone megaliths are among the artworks created by Edward Tufte and on display this Saturday at Tufte's Hogpen Hill Farms.

Contributed Edward Tufte's sculpture "Rocket Science 3: Airstream Interplanetary Explorer" is among the artwork found at Tufte's Hogpen Hill Farms.

More than 100 large art pieces, including the stone megaliths, sit on a 1.5 mile long diagonal line that meanders across the hills and gullies of the farm.

On Saturday, Tufte will open Hogpen Hill Farms to all interested visitors.

In exchange, he hopes those visitors will in turn open themselves up to what calls "the optical experience of the art."

"Try to get beyond words," Tufte said, describing how he hopes visitors will approach his art.

He also believes that the wooded, isolated sculpture park offers "a refuge of contemplation and beauty from the rest of the world."

This year marks the fifth open house Tufte has hosted. Last year, he estimates about 1,000 people visited.

A diverse crowd is usually present. Tufte said visitors typically include "fancy art people from New York and Boston" as well as the families of the men he hires to operate backhoes for him.

Tufte was a professor at Princeton and then at Yale, teaching there from 1977 until his retirement in 1999.

He taught political science, statistics and computer science.

He is most well-known for his research into how data can best be visually illustrated. For example, he argues that the structure of Microsoft PowerPoint discourages the clear presentation of information.

Despite his so-called "retirement," Tufte remains active and frequently tours to teach a one-day course distilling many of his ideas about design. Tufte resides in Cheshire.

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