Photos by John Hickey/Buffalo News

Finger Lakes sculptor Kim Bellavia installs a piece called "Wind Catcher" in a display at the Buffalo & Erie County Botanical Gardens. Her exhibit, "Whispering from the Woods," will be on display at the gardens through Nov. 5.

Branching out at Botanical Gardens

Artist Kim Bellavia's moss- and bark-covered sculptures allow visitors to see the South Buffalo facility's plant collection from a new perspective

By Mark Sommer
News Staff Reporter

The new pieces of art at the Buffalo & Erie County Botanical Gardens blend seamlessly with the nature surrounding them.

The 16 sculptures are intended to accent the plant collection and help show the familiar in a new light.

"Whispering from the Woods," on display through Nov. 5, was created by Finger Lakes artist Kim Bellavia. Her work, which incorporates discarded materials found outdoors, is heavily influenced by nature, mythology and symbolism.

"I'm interested in nature and human nature, and how they combine," said Bellavia, who grew up in Brockport and earned a master's degree in sculpture at Portland State University in Portland, Ore. "That's why I made the figures humanlike.

"Birds and Bees" is one of the nature-themed sculptures in the "Whispering from the Woods" exhibit.

I'm also interested in trees, and the aura that trees give off."

That's particularly evident in "What the World Needs Now," a tree figure under the main dome that was inspired by Jackie DeShannon's 1965 recording of the Hal David and Burt Bacharach song. The tall figure, made of ornamental grape vines, leans forward so viewers can see the face and make eye contact. A large heart-shaped rock Bellavia found on a hike is held behind its back.

"Kim's pieces feel like they fit in here," said Erin Grajek, the Botanical Gardens' vice president of marketing and visitor experience. "The materials speak to the harmony of art and nature, and her pieces complement our plant collection so nicely."

Grajek said the sculptures sneak up on viewers, as they are intended to randomly do.

See **Sculptures** on Page B2

Inside: *To view more photos from the Botanical Gardens, go to the Picture Page, C6*

John Hickey/Buffalo News

"Dancing Poet," a sculpture by artist Kim Bellavia, is tucked among the plants at the Buffalo & Erie County Botanical Gardens. The piece is made from a linden tree, which Bellavia said has long been a symbol of poets. An exhibit of Bellavia's nature-themed sculptures will be on display through Nov. 5.

'It's a little bit of a scavenger hunt' to find some sculptures

SCULPTURES • from B1

"It's little bit of a scavenger hunt to find some," Grajek said.

The "Dancing Poet" is an abstract figure from the waist up clutching a spiral. The piece is made from a linden tree, which Bellavia said has long been a symbol of poets.

"I found it with one arm going up, and I saw the piece right there," she said. "I did this spiral to talk about individual consciousness, and the poet who writes about things like that."

The sculpture's placement is intentionally at odds with its environment, she said.

"It's in the cactus room, which is funny because it has moss all over it," Bellavia said. "It's kind of opposite, but it works."

Other surprises await as visitors move from arid to Amazonian environments at the Botanical Gardens.

"Leaf Man" was made for another project, "Looking for the Green Man." It features the rectangular shape of a man's face in brilliant orange, yellow, brown and green-colored leaves.

Bellavia used wood and cob, a building material made of clay, soil, fibers and sand. A paper layer was added before the piece was painted and sealed to make it stronger.

"He's like a mythical concept of the woods, the wildness of nature, like an archetypal figure," Bellavia said of "Leaf Man." "It's also perfect timing now, because it's October."

The "Shag Bark Hickory Imp" presents a whimsical character made from layers of bark. Its hands are behind its back while it stands on one leg.

"Imps are a mythological figure, like a jokester," Bellavia said. "The hickory tree is a symbol of strong character, so I kind of combined that in this piece."

Her favorite is "Lil' Oak," made from acorns, cob and moss mixed with a molding paste and finished with an oak wood stain.

Bellavia currently also has five pieces from "Whispering in the Woods" on exhibit at Cornell University. She will be taking the whole exhibition on the road later in the year, but before leaving, she plans to donate one piece to the Botanical Gardens.

Grajek said to expect more of the unexpected at the Botanical Gardens.

"This is part of our plan to do new and interesting things we haven't done before," she said.

"We want people to see the gardens from a different perspective every time they visit."

On the web: *For more photos, go to galleries.buffalonews.com*

Artist and sculptor Kim Bellavia spent Thursday and Friday placing her sculptures at the Buffalo & Erie County Botanical Gardens. At left, she carries "Wind Catcher" to its exhibit site. At center, Bellavia installs a sculpture titled "Shag Bark Hickory Imp." At right, she and her husband, Dan, work on placing "What the World Needs Now."

The Buffalo & Erie County Botanical Gardens has announced a new sculpture exhibit, "Whispering from the Woods," in collaboration with Finger Lakes sculptor Kim Bellavia.

'Whispering from the Woods' of nature

PHOTOS BY JOHN HICKEY / BUFFALO NEWS

Kim Bellavia's nature-themed sculpture exhibit, "Whispering from the Woods," will be on display at the Buffalo & Erie County Botanical Gardens from today through Nov. 5. Above, "Leaf Man" seems to observe visitors from its display space. At far left, "Lil' Oak" stands among the Botanical Gardens' plants. At left, "Web Dance." According to Bellavia's website, her work, which is "influenced by folklore, myth and symbolism of the trees from different cultures," expresses the "connection between nature and human nature with an underlying theme of an awareness to environmental issues and topics such as conservation and preservation."

See story on Page B1.