

The Boston Globe

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2014



art+performance



Serious fun

Interactive art piece 'Swing Time' lights up the Lawn on D

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A solitary swing stands still among the activities taking place at the Lawn on D, the innovative temporary public park space adjacent to the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center on D Street in South Boston. An oval, suspended by steel beams, emits a soft-white hue; eventually, curious park visitors decide to take a seat. Faces light up, figuratively and literally, when the oval begins to glow — first blue, then varying shades of purple-pink — as a sitter swings to and fro.

"Swing Time," which in its finished form consists of 20 glowing oval swings in three different sizes, is the first interactive art piece to be added to the Lawn on D. Commissioned by the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority, the glowing swing set contains LED lights that activate based on the

swings' movement. An internal accelerometer measures speeds, which signal the color changes.

The swing set is part of the MCCA's initiative to create the first interactive public space in Boston. "We wanted to have a piece that would entice anyone to use it, not just stop and stare," said Jim Rooney, executive director of the MCCA.

Part playground implement, part art installation, "Swing Time" was designed by Eric Howeler and Meejin Yoon of the Boston firm Howeler and Yoon Architecture. The husband-and-wife team has designed several art pieces meant to activate public spaces, including the award-winning "White Noise/White Light" field at the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens.

Howeler, also an assistant professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, said he wanted to blend the ideas of a responsive environment and a



PHOTOS BY JUSTIN SAGLIO FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Bridget Hunter-Jones (top) and Anna Kaertner (above) check out "Swing Time" adjacent to the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center.

play space to "Swing Time," in order to entice park goers to physically interact with it.

"The stuff between buildings is often left to happenstance, and one of the best ways to bring

life to the public realm is through art pieces like this one," he said. "We stop playing at a certain age. And we were tasked with figuring out how to get everyone, including adults, to play!"

The swing set joins several activities already dispersed across the 2.7-acre green space. The WiFi-equipped park offers bocce ball, corn hole, and other yard games, as well as an open-air bar Thursday through Sunday. The space hosts music events, and serves as a reception area for events at the BCEC.

Rooney hopes that the many organizations and visitors who make their way to the waterfront for conventions, family outings, and the like will take advantage of the Lawn, designated as an experimental event space. "We want the space to be reflective of the innovative people who live and visit Boston," he said. "And especially this new community that the park resides in" — Boston's new innovation district.

Howeler said he is happy that the MCCA sought to unite Boston's creative and technology cultures. "Boston has the (Institute of Contemporary Art) and MIT and so many other institutions that are really shaping the world and the space within it in creative new ways," he said. "This is such a historic city, but it also has this techy-geeky side that could visually shine through."

Blending the Lawn's landscape and atmosphere into "Swing Time" was a pivotal design component, Howeler said. Planning and constructing the piece was a robust process, requiring input from structural engineers, electrical engineers, and computer programmers to prepare it for installation.

"We bring the whimsical aspect with the technological components of the piece, but that was also the work that was truly meticulous and important to get right," he said. "We are trying to help create a community here, so those details are the ones that need to shine through." And in the case of "Swing Time," those details emit a purple glow.

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