



## Seeing Stars

**AT FIRST GLANCE**, the concrete spheres and metal poles that have anchored this Rosslyn park for three decades appear random in their placement. But once a year, at precisely 9:32 a.m., their logic becomes clear—provided the sun is shining. In that moment, the shadows cast by the sculptural forms fill in the outlines of embedded shapes in the ground, as if completing a cosmic puzzle.

It's no coincidence that this annual solar alignment happens on Aug. 1. That's the date that William Henry Ross, in 1860, acquired the land that would later become known as Rosslyn.

Such was environmental artist Nancy Holt's vision for Dark Star Park, completed in 1984 as Arlington's first major public art installation. A pioneer in the 1960s land-art movement, Holt challenged convention by transporting art out of museums and galleries and

into the public realm. She relied on a palette of natural elements (soil, rock, plants, water) and manmade construction materials (concrete, metal, asphalt), describing her settings as "literally seeing devices, fixed points for tracking the positions of the sun, earth and stars."

Though its art forms still feel rather industrial, the park, located on a half-acre site at the intersection of North Lynn Street and Fort Myer Drive, bears little resemblance to the blighted parcel where a gas station and a warehouse once stood. Two strategically placed tunnels, made from cement sewage pipes, offer telescopic views of the spheres, which look like fallen celestial bodies. In the right lighting conditions, a tunnel view of one orb mimics a solar eclipse.

Holt passed away in February, but her influence is still keenly felt. "Dark

Star Park paved the way for outdoor public art in Rosslyn," says Mary-Claire Burick, executive director of the Rosslyn Business Improvement District. "We've continued Holt's legacy by actively championing other artworks in the neighborhood."

That includes more-recent installations by artists such as Christian Moeller, Chris Gardner, Ned Kahn, Boaz Vaadia and Frank Hallam Day.

"Since the park first opened, Arlingtonians have been gathering there unofficially each year on Aug. 1 to celebrate the alignment of the shadows," says Angela Anderson Adams, the public art administrator for Arlington Economic Development. "On this 30th-anniversary year, also the year of Nancy's death, we're looking into having the county board issue a proclamation making this an official observance." ■