

I am Angela Anderson Adams director of Arlington Public Art in Northern Virginia. I am honored to be among such a distinguished group of Nancy's friends and colleagues this evening. Thank you, Alena, for inviting me, and, Tom, who I suspect had something to do with it as well.

Arlington, Virginia is home to one of Nancy Holt's most significant and publicly accessible projects, *Dark Star Park*, located in our Rosslyn neighborhood across the Potomac River from DC. It was commissioned in 1979 through funding from the NEA matched with local contributions. The process took five years to complete, and galvanized our community around a common goal of creating a signature work of public art. The effort was, and remains, a symbol for our community which helps us imagine our potential. This was especially significant in the late 1970s, when Arlington County was just beginning to see itself as an urban place; a community with an identity distinct from its relationship to our nation's capital.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the completion of *Dark Star Park* and thirty years of public art in our community. As Arlington's first major

public artwork, it started us down the path of commissioning many new works of art—on average two per year—funded both by the private and public sectors. Nancy’s vision is a legacy to Arlington, encouraging us to strive for the best in civic design. *Dark Star Park* reflects our history, helps us imagine the future, and positions us in relationship to the sun, stars, and universe. It is a visual icon for Arlington, drawing numerous admirers, inspiring other artists to create new works in proximity to it and serving as a placemaker, long before that term was fashionable.

This is the context in which I got to know Nancy, and we worked together for over the nearly two decades during which time I have lead Arlington’s public art program. Over the years Nancy took an active interest in the state of *Dark Star Park*, more so than any other artist whose work we have represented in our collection. She was ever vigilant, which is no surprise to those who knew her, and was very active in all activities related to the park. During a five-year renovation of the park, I came to know Nancy closely and remember her as a warm and generous person. She taught me a great deal about what it takes to design, build, and maintain first-class artwork for the

public realm. Her commitment and dedication to the creative process and her artwork was befitting the devotion and tenacity of a mother's love. Early in our time working together, I asked her if she had any children. She paused, looked me straight in the eye and said, "My artworks are my children."

Nancy died a year after my father, in the same month. When someone close to you dies, it is natural to think of what you didn't get to say to or do with that person. Nancy invited me to visit her in Galisteo, something I put off and never got to do. I also missed the opportunity to come to New York to say goodbye to her earlier this year, thinking that I had more time.

However, I'm happy to recall that the last time I saw Nancy was on the joyous occasion of her lifetime achievement award from the International Sculpture Center. I had never seen her so happy, almost giddy, and it's a delightful final image to have of her in my mind's eye.

Six weeks ago I had the unexpected opportunity to visit *Sun Tunnels*.

Somehow I knew I needed to go to the desert to better understand Nancy's

work. I learned a great deal on this trip—about Nancy and her work, and about me and mine. While the two artworks, *Sun Tunnels* and *Dark Star Park*, which date to the same era in Nancy's career, could not be more different in their locations, both function in a remarkably similar way: providing legibility for our human scale in the vastness of their respective environments. Both mark our relationship to a terrestrial location and simultaneously to the larger celestial patterns occurring at each site—the movement of the sun and the passing of the seasons—by capturing these natural phenomena visually and making them evident to us. Both are the result of Nancy considering what kind of experience would be needed for visitors to better appreciate each site.

Reflecting on our working relationship, I came to understand the symbiosis between an artist's expression and my role as steward of that expression. On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of *Dark Star Park*, I was inspired to begin conducting interviews of those who were involved in its creation, and collectively they reminded of the significance of what I am stewarding: arguably Nancy's most accessible major work of art, as well as a vision that

many in our community had 30 years ago, a vision for outstanding civic design led by artists. Nancy encouraged us to set and hold a high standard for excellence—excellence in the public realm where it is more difficult but more important to achieve. I will always be grateful to her for this lesson.

It was a sad anniversary for us this year without Nancy in attendance. Five years ago, when our community celebrated the park's 25th anniversary, Nancy was there. Like Picasso in Chicago and Calder in Grand Rapids, Nancy Holt has given Arlington a public work of art which has outlived her and carries on as powerful symbol. Distinct from those two examples, *Dark Star Park* is less about Nancy's personal artistic vision and more about what she saw of value in Arlington. As a fellow curator who works in Rosslyn recently remarked to me, "have you seen pictures of Rosslyn in the 1970s before *Dark Star Park*? There weren't even any trees! Nancy's work was the first thing to provide a humanizing element here."

Nancy was curiously adept at rendering high-minded ideas in commonplace materials and having those concepts survive the vagaries of weather and

human interaction. While a perfectionist through design and installation, she did not try to control every element about her artwork once *in situ*. She embraced what time, environmental effects, and the public “added” to the work. In the case of *Dark Star Park*, these include the appearance of mineral deposits in the cracks on the cement spheres and the “desire lines” or short cut paths cut across the sod by people who pass through the park daily.

Beyond creating a human-scaled and welcoming place to relax and play, Nancy taught us how to celebrate ourselves and conceived a reason to do so annually. Each year on August 1st, the day in 1860 when William Henry Ross acquired the land that became Rosslyn, actual shadows cast by the spheres and the poles which comprise a portion of the artwork line up with the shadow patterns on the ground. The time that the shadows align, 9:32 AM, was selected by Nancy for the length and direction of the shadows at that hour, rather than for any historical significance. Each year on August 1<sup>st</sup>, whether sunny or cloudy, the Rosslyn community gathers at the park to reflect on our history and renew our commitment to civic engagement. Nancy Holt’s accomplishments continue to be an inspiration to us all.

While her body has returned to the earth, may her spirit soar.