

FAIRMOUNT PARK ART ASSOCIATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE**NEW PUBLIC ART PROJECT FOR PHILADELPHIA'S MANAYUNK CANAL TOWPATH**

The Fairmount Park Art Association will unveil its newest public art project, *Manayunk Stoops: Heart and Home*, created by artist Diane Pieri with the Manayunk Development Corporation along the Manayunk Canal Towpath. The project officially opens with a dedication ceremony on **Friday, September 29 from 4:30 to 6:30 PM** at the site.

Manayunk Stoops: Heart and Home consists of nine mosaic "stoops" that enhance and interpret the physical and natural environment of the Manayunk Canal Towpath. The artwork includes imagery inspired by the native flora, fauna, and industrial heritage of the Manayunk area. The stoops, situated in five sites between Lock and Cotton Streets, serve as seating elements along the Canal and are an interpretation of the front steps and entryways that mark the neighborhood's architecture and street life.

The artist selected the stoop motif as a "symbol of interaction and community." Residents of Manayunk, like those in many Philadelphia neighborhoods, traditionally sit on their front stoops to socialize. "By bringing the stoops to the Canal," says Pieri, "we hope to bring the language of the community to the Canal. The stoops are unpretentious yet meaningful reflections of the people and social customs in Manayunk." As a metaphor for the ascension of the community, the Stoops also relate to an existing staircase that runs from the bottom to the top of the hill.

Manayunk Stoops was commissioned through the Art Association's ongoing program *New•Land•Marks: public art, community, and the meaning of place*. Artists Diane Pieri and Vick Scuri developed an initial project proposal for the site by meeting with community groups including the North Light Community Center, Manayunk Development Corporation, and Venice Island Playground Community Council. They investigated the Canal, neighborhood, local history, industry, and culture. With the North Light Community Center, Pieri led several community workshops where children shared stories, memories, and reflections of their experiences growing up in the neighborhood. Pieri has also revitalized a mural along the Towpath to complement *Manayunk Stoops*. And, to coincide with the installation of the project, an exhibition about the project and the history of the Canal will be on display in the windows of the architectural firm Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates at 4236 Main Street.

Diane Pieri is a well known Philadelphia artist and educator who creates paintings and sculptures that incorporate abstract patterning. She describes her motifs as a “symbolic language” through which she addresses issues of social and timely concern. As resident artist at the Cooke Elementary School in North Philadelphia, Pieri organized the Cooke Museum of Art, which exhibited the work of 120 students. She has also created several murals through Philadelphia’s Mural Arts Program, including *Starr Garden* in Center City. A graduate of Tyler School of Art, Pieri has received two Pollock-Krasner Foundation grants, an Independence Foundation Fellowship, and has attended residencies at Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony.

In conjunction with *Manayunk Stoops* and as part of a larger reclamation effort, the city replanted the banks of the Towpath to protect it from erosion and provide a buffer zone for wildlife habitat. The Towpath, used by over 500,000 walkers, runners, and bikers every year, is part of the Schuylkill River Trail linking Center City Philadelphia to Valley Forge National Historic Park. Across the Canal, Lower Venice Island is scheduled for redevelopment to include hockey and basketball courts, a river walk, children’s spray park, and a Recreation and Cultural Center.

Manayunk Stoops was made possible with the generous support of the William Penn Foundation, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources through the Schuylkill River Heritage Area Grant Program, Samuel S. Fels Fund, Dolfinger-McMahon Foundation, Connelly Foundation, the TD Banknorth Charitable Foundation, and The Dietrich Foundation. We thank consulting architect CuetoKEARNEY Design, LLC and the Fairmount Park Commission for project assistance.

The Manayunk Development Corporation (MDC) encourages healthy economic development to benefit all segments of the Manayunk community. Founded in 1985 by a coalition of business and community leaders in response to the decline of the neighborhood’s commercial district and other evidence of community disinvestment, the MDC has been instrumental in Manayunk’s economic revitalization.

New•Land•Marks works with artists and communities to plan and create new works of public art. The program was conceived as a “public art laboratory” to develop best practices for the field of public art and to support the work of artists in community contexts. It was selected for a 2002 Place Planning Award by the Environmental Design Research Association and Public Art Network’s *2004 Year in Review*, a guide to the best U.S. public art projects. Chartered in 1872, the Fairmount Park Art Association is the nation’s first private, non-profit organization dedicated to integrating public art and urban planning. The Art Association works to promote the appreciation of public art through programs and advocacy efforts that commission, interpret, and preserve public art in Philadelphia.

Enclosed: Fact Sheet about *Manayunk Stoops: Heart and Home* (1 page)

Available: A illustrated publication of the *New•Land•Marks* proposals (Aerial Editions/Grayson Publishing, 2001)

To request photographs or arrange an interview with the artist, please call 215.546.7550.