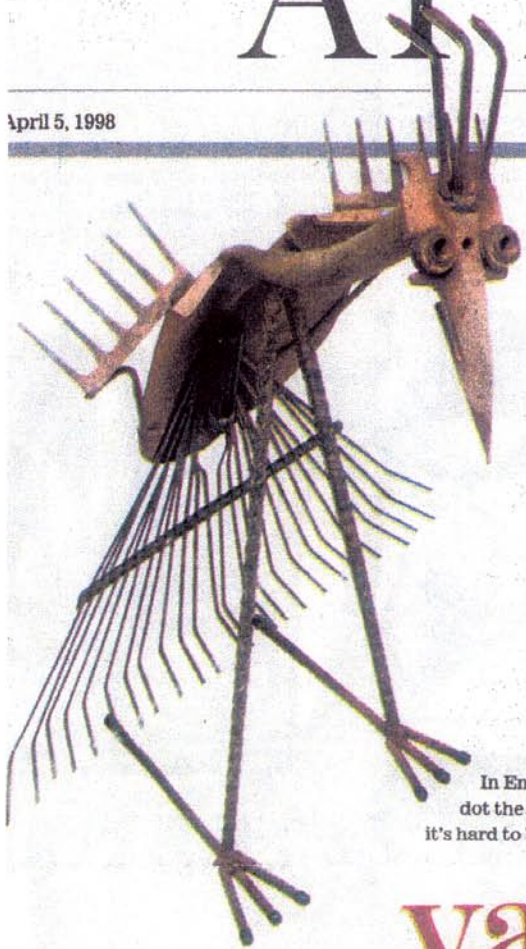


AT HOME

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yard ART

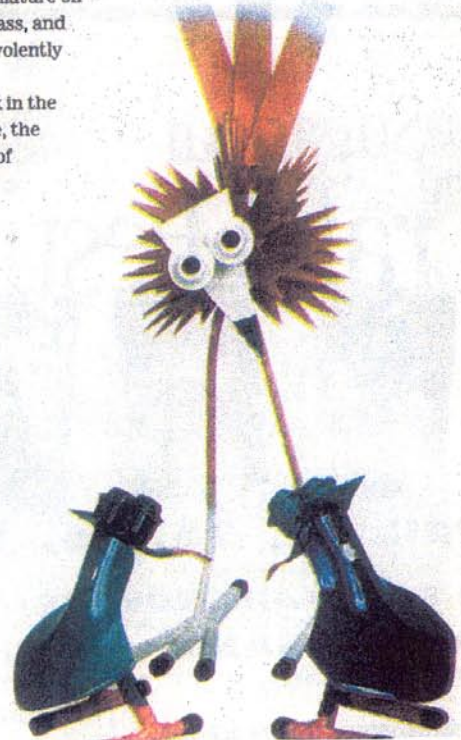
By ROSEMARY KNOWER
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

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For years I've enjoyed looking at one particular block in the community of old mill houses near Falls Road. There, the passion for seasonal display has reached a point of perfection seldom attained anywhere but the American Visionary Art Museum.

At Easter, it's eggs
[See Garden, 14]

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Clockwise from top left are the Peacock, Dinosaur, Mama Hen and Flock made by Yardbird.

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Oddity flourishes on U.S. lawns

[Garden, from Page 9]

and bunnies on every conceivable surface; at Halloween, there are witches on the porch, straw figures on the lawn and ghosts on the roof. And every time I drive by, I wonder, "Where do they find it?"

The answer is usually the local garden center, or those wonderful stands crammed full of everything from saltwater taffy to flocks of Canada geese that you see on the way "down the ocean."

But wherever there's an American appetite, there's also an entrepreneur looking for a niche market. The renaissance of interest in gardens has entrepreneurs popping up like garden gnomes. Some are appealing to the Martha Stewart crowd, with sober reproductions of Colonial pineapples and classical goddesses. Others are marketing to that streak of American craziness that gave us the legends of Paul Bunyan and the albino alligators in New York's sewers.

Pink plastic flamingos — and penguins and pigs and bunnies and bears — are Rick Fazio's business. For \$69.95, you can order 20 flamingos on your true love's lawn, with a signboard thrown in for a message.

"People love this!" says Bensenville, Ill.-based Fazio, who started the Original Flamingo Surprise with his twin brother. "I live near Cleveland, and there's a big Polish community here. The joke goes — if you're Polish, you wear white socks and love pink flamingos. So, I had a friend who was turning 30, and my brother and I decided to gather as many flamingos as we could and surprise him by planting them on the lawn.

"It surprised him, all right, and there we were, out on the lawn with 30 or 40 flamingos and a homemade birthday sign, everybody laughing, when somebody pulled up in the driveway and said, 'Hey, can you do that for my wife?'"

"That's the day the company was born. I took my life savings and put it into the business. My family was saying, 'You're our son, we love you, but don't do this.' But within three months, we had over 400 orders a month. We branched out to Chicago, where we are very popular. Many's the time the mayor has asked us to honor the police chief by putting 50 pigs on his lawn."

Yardbirds, a Jamestown, Ky., company that recycles broken garden tools and machinery into

Sources

• **Duck D'lights:** Call 317-298-8392, or check out the catalog on the Web at www.noblesville.com/duckdlights/duckcat.htm

• **The Original Flamingo Surprise** does not yet have a franchise in this area, but you can order by phone, at 630-350-1280, or on the Web at www.flamingosurpris.com

• **Yardbirds by Bandana:** Call 800-828-9247 for information and brochures, or view the work on the Web at the *Ladies' Home Journal* resource site at www.lhj.com/boutique/yardbird/yardbird. Yardbirds are also available at the *Zyzyx Gallery* on Reisterstown Road, 410-486-9785

quixotic yard sculptures, also began as a family affair. "My father came up with the original idea," says Richard Kolb, the owner, "and the first bird was pretty crude. But we had fun making it, so we gathered up some broken rakes and so on, and spray-painted them. At first, we sold them at flea markets. But they really caught on.

"First we moved up to doing art shows. Now, the business is booming. It's very labor-intensive, a hands-on business. Each bird requires individual attention; each bird has its own personality, and no two are alike. You should come in when the shop is full and there's 600 birds being dipped and painted. It's wonderful to see."

Yardbirds gets its materials from junk dealers, tool manufacturers in Indiana whose runs are flawed, and Amish farmers, whose broken mowing-machine guards are turned into beaks on one type of bird. "Our goal is to help reclaim the beauty of our Earth through creative recycling and reuse," says Kolb. "There are lots of things in life we buy that we don't really need, but that make us happy. And if there's one thing you don't really need, it's a yardbird."

Probably you don't need a concrete goose, either, but if you have one, or want one, Debbie Wade, at Duck D'lights of Indianapolis, Ind., will be happy to dress it for you. Wade specializes in handmade, seasonal yard-goose ensembles, from Christmas (a Dickensian caroling outfit, Santa and

Mrs. Santa outfits) through the holidays to November, when Mr. Pilgrim is available. "Most of my sales are in Indiana and Ohio," says Wade. "I'm not sure why."

Wade also fills special orders, including, recently, one for a Grim Reaper outfit, complete with miniature scythe, for a 50th birthday party. When asked if she'd make an Oriole outfit for the Maryland goose, she said she'd be happy to.

"Just send me a drawing with colors. We get a lot of orders for baseball players." For a good look at some of the outfits, you can browse the Duck D'lights catalog at www.noblesville.com/duckdlights/duckcat.htm

No survey of lawn lunacy would be complete without a mention of garden gnomes. Who can forget the gnome parade during the job interview scene in the recent movie "The Full Monty"? You can find them at garden centers, and there's a flourishing traffic in antique gnomes on the Web, with potential purchasers given mold marks to search for, and the special-edition of Busch Garden Gnomes, individually sculpted by Don Winton, advertised at \$1,500.

With this popularity, sadly, comes the crime of gnome-gnapping. A group billing itself as the Gnome Liberation Front is notorious among statuary owners for kidnapping the helpless little people. Sometimes, a ransom note will arrive, telling where the gnomes can be found (usually in a local park, posed in a partying position with others of its kind.) Sometimes, the gnome owner will receive postcards from distant, exotic places in the name of the missing gnome; after a few weeks, the intrepid little garden ornament will show up with a suntan, back home where he belongs.

Manchester, in England, has been hard hit. In France, the Normandy-based Front de Liberation des Nains de Jardin was responsible last year for wholesale abduction of the gnomes of Alencon "as our way of protesting against kitsch," according to a spokesman. Owners received tip-offs in the form of anonymous calls, which directed them to a clearing in the woods near town. The gnomes had been posed in groups of seven — apparently as a tribute to Snow White. Defiant Alencon gnome-owners vowed to take their gnomes in at night to prevent a recurrence. So far, the Front has not been active in the Baltimore area.