

# Of Quarries and Orchards



Alma Allen  
*Untitled*, 2014, (left)  
Grey marble with wooden base, 44"x30"x30

*Untitled*, 2014, (above)  
Claro walnut with metal base, 27"x36"x30

Photo credit: Isabel Asha Penzlien  
Courtesy of Shane Campbell Gallery

BY SIGALIT ZETOUNI

Washington D.C. was established along the Potomac River on a hilly landscape of forests, swamps, and plantations.

George Washington envisioned a federal center with space dedicated for government buildings, and a Frenchman named Pierre Charles L'Enfant, who had fought in the Revolutionary War, would subsequently become the city planner. L'Enfant designed a grand capital of wide avenues, public squares, and monumental buildings that centered around a great piazza, or a public walk. Hence our National Mall is a wide promenade of grass and trees, stretching from Capitol Hill to the Potomac River. The Smithsonian museums stand on both sides, accompanied by presidential monuments and war memorials.

In 1791, on behalf of the federal

government, L'Enfant purchased Government Island in Virginia, a site that was home to the quarry that supplied Aquia sandstone for the construction of the White House and the Capitol Building. In the summer of 1793, workers began digging the foundations of the Capitol, and on September 18, 1793, George Washington laid the cornerstone that was crafted of Aquia sandstone from Government Island. The sandstone from the quarry was used for the floors, walls, columns, as well as the exterior of the Capitol.

During the winter of 2004/2005, British artist Andy Goldsworthy (b. 1956) along with his team of assistants and dry-stone wallers, installed a sculpture entitled "Roof" on the ground floor of the West Building in the National Gallery of Art. Several weeks prior to the installation, Goldsworthy spent nine days on Government Island, creating ephemeral works at the Aquia Creek sandstone quarry. The temporary works were recorded in a photographic diary. They were later exhibited in conjunction with a suite of photographs. "Roof" included a series of nine hollow domes topped by

black holes, constructed of stacked slate and held together without the use of cement. Each dome measured approximately 5.5 feet high and 27 feet in diameter. The structure responded to human traditions that have dealt with the passage of life, from Neolithic burial chambers and ancient Roman and Byzantine structures, to modern public buildings.

Goldsworthy's domical forms countered the angular site, while the Buckingham Virginia slate, a highly reflective material, enhanced the light effect in the space and reflected the use of slate roofs in the area.

On Pennsylvania Avenue, Goldsworthy, a *land artist* who usually worked in rural Scotland, had expanded nature into the urban realm. In an interview for NPR, Goldsworthy noted that "The underlying tension of a lot of my art is to try and look through the surface appearance of things... Inevitably, one way of getting beneath the surface is to introduce a hole, a window into what lies below." (quoted from [www.NPR.com](http://www.NPR.com), *NPR Morning Edition*, Susan Stone, March 28, 2005)

Opening this October 29th, in its South Loop location on South Wabash, the Shane Campbell Gallery is going to show work by California-based artist Alma Allen. Born in 1970, in Herber City, Utah, self-taught Allen lives in Joshua Tree, California, and creates sculptural forms through improvisations. In 2014 Allen's work was on view at the Whitney Biennial, and in the past decade art collectors and curators from around the globe have been increasingly intrigued by his unique sculptures. Allen begins his work with an idea of a form and allows the material itself to process organically. He finds his material in nature, including abandoned quarries in the desert and wood from old trees that have been uprooted. He explains: "Some of the shapes are from the stone. Some are worked out in clay. Some I work out on the computer. And sometimes... I've had a piece completely disappear because I just keep working down." (quoted from "Alma Allen's abstract sculptures channel nature's power at Blum & Poe," Carolina A. Miranda, *Los Angeles Times*, January 2015). Shane Campbell Gallery's show will run through December 3, 2016. □