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A Natural Landscape That Lends Itself to Art

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At the Tippet Rise Art Center in Montana, the philanthropists Cathy and Peter Halstead are creating a new model of sculpture park where the arts and nature can enhance each other.



Tippet Rise is one of the few places on earth where visitors can encounter monumental sculptures in an uninterrupted landscape. The “Domo” by Ensamble Studio is one of 16 large works in its permanent collection. Credit...Iwan Baan/Tippet Rise Art Center

Reporting from Fishtail, Mont.

Traveling down a dirt road through the rolling grasslands of southern Montana, the snow-capped Beartooth Mountains slowly appear in the distance. A metal-roofed, barnlike structure soon comes into view and, beside it, a 25-foot, abstract black steel sculpture by the artist Alexander Calder. On a low-lying stone wall, rusted metal letters spell “Tippet Rise Art Center.”

Here, on 12,500 acres of ranch land north of Yellowstone National Park, the philanthropists Cathy and Peter Halstead have established the world’s largest sculpture park. Now entering its 10th season, Tippet Rise is one of the few places on earth where visitors can encounter monumental sculptures in an uninterrupted landscape; take in open-air concerts and poetry readings by world-renowned performers; and traverse the landscape on 15 miles of hiking and biking trails, all while cattle and sheep graze.

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A new model of sculpture park, Tippet Rise is a place where art enhances the experience of nature. Here, the art is intended to complement rather than dominate the landscape, expressing the Halsteads' vision of a park where visitors become attuned to the natural rhythms of the world and their place within it.

The Halsteads were inspired to create Tippet Rise, which opened in 2016, after visiting other outdoor sculpture parks like the Storm King Art Center in upstate New York and the Fondation Maeght on the French Riviera. They sought to create a place where music, art, architecture and landscape could harmonize.

“Peter and I have known each other since we were teenagers, and had very similar passions around art and music,” recalled Ms. Halstead, 77, seated next to Mr. Halstead, 78, on a video call. “A lot of our early experiences had to do with art and music outdoors.” The Halsteads are also founders of the Adrian Brinkerhoff Poetry Foundation and trustees of the Sidney E. Frank Foundation, the namesake arts organization of Ms. Halstead’s father. Before founding Tippet Rise, Ms. Halstead served as chairwoman of her father’s liquor company, which created Grey Goose vodka.



The Olivier Music Barn, left, and other venues around the vast property of Tippet Rise have hosted musical concerts, film screenings, poetry readings and theater performances. Credit...Erik Petersen/Tippet Rise Art Center

Along with hosting hundreds of musical concerts, film screenings, poetry readings and theater performances over the last decade, the Halsteads have also steadily amassed a permanent collection of 16 monumental sculptures at Tippet Rise by internationally renowned artists, including Ai Weiwei, Richard Serra, Mark di Suvero, Ursula von Rydingsvard, Louise Nevelson and Patrick Dougherty, which are sprinkled across the property. The Halsteads are also artists themselves — Cathy has shown her abstract paintings around the world and Peter is a pianist, photographer and poet.

The scale and vastness of Tippet Rise can be overwhelming, as it is slightly smaller in square mileage than the island of Manhattan. “We are very slow and thoughtful about adding sculptures because we want to maintain the openness of the land,” said Ms. Halstead. “Our sense is that the land here is sacred.”

Moving through Tippet Rise on foot, by bike or on the center’s daily shuttle tours during its open season from June through October, a visitor can traverse miles without seeing another person. “The most important thing about Tippet Rise is the site itself, because that is actually the installation,” said Justin Jakubisn, a 41-year-old Seattle photographer who made his first pilgrimage to the art center in 2024. “I went excited to see the sculptures but left feeling that Tippet Rise is really about the land.”

Over the years, the Halsteads and co-directors Pete and Lindsey Hinmon have developed Tippet Rise in a way that is respectful of the earth. A geothermal system provides heating and cooling to all 17 buildings on campus — which include a music barn, dining barn, library, recording studio and mastering suite, residences for visiting artists and staff offices — while a microgrid with a 237-kilowatt solar array and battery bank helps power them. A collection system gathers 100,000 gallons of snowmelt and rainwater annually, offsetting the center’s reliance on aquifer water by 80 percent.

“Our goal is to conserve and preserve this land as much as possible,” said Ms. Hinmon, 44, while recently providing a tour of the property. “We want to be good neighbors.”

Often, Tippet Rise collaborates with artists to create site-specific works that celebrate the landscape. Some of the earliest are a collection of monumental concrete, stone and earth sculptures by the Madrid-based architecture firm Ensamble Studio, which were created on the site by pouring a mix of dirt and cement into molds dug out of the earth and resemble excavated fossils. The largest, “[Domo](#),” is large enough to provide shade for summer music performances.



Pritzker Prize-winning architect Francis Kéré designed Xylem, a permanent pavilion built from the wood of local ponderosa and lodgepole pines. Credit...Iwan Baan/Tippet Rise Art Center

A more recent installation is Xylem, a permanent pavilion made by the [Pritzker Prize-winning architect Francis Kéré](#) in 2019 out of local ponderosa and lodgepole pine trees. It was Kéré’s first project built in the United States.

“I wanted to create a place where people can sit and be exposed to the quietness and calmness of nature, so that our bodies and souls can be repaired,” said Kéré, 60, of the open-air pavilion, on a recent video call. “I believe that will give us energy back to think about how we can restore nature and how we can preserve it.”

Over the years, the Halsteads and Hinmons have worked to reveal unseen histories of the land at Tippet Rise. In 2017, they began offering geology tours led by the Yellowstone Bighorn Research Association, as the art center sits atop an ice age gravel deposit with many plant and marine life fossils. “This land has a long story,” Mr. Halstead said. “And it’s a story we want to tell.”

In 2024, Tippet Rise permanently installed a glass and granite sculpture called “The Soil You See...” by the artist Wendy Red Star, who grew up on the nearby Apsáalooke (Crow) reservation. The sculpture, which resembles a giant blood-red fingerprint, is inscribed with the names of 50 Apsáalooke chiefs who were coerced by the U.S. government into using their thumbprints to cede their tribal lands. Today, the center’s guided tours incorporate information on the Apsáalooke people.



The sculpture “The Soil You See...” by the artist Wendy Red Star is inscribed with the names of 50 Apsáalooke chiefs coerced by the U.S. government into using their thumbprints to cede their tribal lands. Credit...James Florio/Tippet Rise Art Center

“Having this sculpture at Tippet Rise allows for a continued presence of Apsáalooke history in a landscape that has long been part of our story,” said Red Star, 44, via email. “It challenges the idea that this land is just an open, untouched landscape. It is, and always has been, a site of movement, conflict and resilience for the Apsáalooke people.”

As the Halsteads look to the future, they intend to continue developing their artist-in-residence program, which brings international musicians and artists to Tippet Rise, just as they extend their work back out to communities near and far through outreach and education programs. Their robust recording program documents concerts and performances on the site for [free viewing online](#), and they are committed to keeping Tippet Rise accessible. Concert tickets, distributed through a public lottery, are \$10 each or free to those 21 and under, and entry to the park for hiking and biking is always free, with a reservation. Visitors can also book \$10 guided shuttle tours.

Ultimately, what the venue offers visitors is something intangible. “At Tippet Rise, you are the conduit through which the earth speaks to the sky,” Mr. Halstead said. “Alongside the sculptures, our concerts and performances tap into an ethereal sense of the surroundings. They awaken a sense of awe.”

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