

by Ron Hall, assistant editor

## NY artist creates 'living' sculptures

Hera bends the rules. Of art. Of landscape design. And she gets away with it, to the delight of both herself and a growing number of admirers.

Landscape with a message?

"I call myself an environmental sculptor because my work is large enough to walk around in, but you can still smell the flowers. I want to affect more senses than just the visual," says Hera, who works out of a Manhattan apartment but is represented by work as far away as New Orleans.

Her self-professed goal is to nudge the consciousness of visitors to her gardens toward an understanding of space. Or as Hera (in 1977 she took the name of an ancient goddess of Crete) says: "I want to create a sense of our scale as human beings."

Her creations use predictable landscape plant material in unpredictable designs.

Her latest project, the "Vaulted Arbor" at the Glenwood Houses in Brooklyn, generated conversation in both landscape and art circles in New York at its dedication last fall. She describes it as a "living" sculpture. It is a 22-foot-high, octagonal steel sculpture made of 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch galvanized steel pipe welded at the intersections and anchored in concrete footings.

Plantings of flowering vines on the structure will give it life, Hera explains. White clematis provides

blossoms in spring, golden honeysuckle in summer, blue-purple clematis in fall, and evergreen ivy in winter. "Vaulted Arbor" (43 feet in diameter) could as easily be described as a living sundial. It is laid out in north/south, east/west symmetry.

Hera designs her environmental sculptures for the people who will come in closest contact to them.

"About 80 percent of the people living at Glenwood Houses are elderly and they're very caring people," Hera explains. "They seem delighted with the vegetation. The plants make it easier for them to make contact with the sculpture." Much of the care for "Vaulted Arbor" will be handled by some of these same residents of Glenwood, volunteers, with the help of the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, which provided financial and technical assistance for its construction.

"Vaulted Arbor" is a departure from her previous work as an environmental sculptor.

In 1980 Hera directed the planting of "Floribunda", a 96-by-69-foot maze of evergreen shrubs and flowering bushes on a prominent traffic island at the Creedmoore Psychiatric Center, Queens Village, NY. Students from nearby Martin Van Buren High School and the City University of New York helped in the planting of the 300-plus shrubs in what Hera feels is a "huge floral puzzle."

The outside curves contain crimson azalea and purple rododendron. The dead end pockets are darker with inkberry and boxwood plants. Hera wants the maze to create a sense of mystery without being threatening (it's only three feet tall). The message of the living maze, which is best viewed from above, from the cafeteria of the psychiatric center's main building, should be obvious, the environmental sculptor feels.

Says Hera, "the only true life is outside institutional structures."

The Manhattan-based artist created additional interest in her personalized approach to landscape sculpture with the hedgemaze "Stormflower" in New Orleans, "Snail Shell Maze" in Boxford, MA, and "Bear Paw Maze" in Yonkers, NY.

"Stormflower," installed at the University of New Orleans is perhaps the most colorful. Planted primarily in azaleas, the maze fans out spiral arms to a diameter of 160 feet, representing a hurricane.

Hera's next major project, "Spirit House," should be ready for Laumeier Sculpture Park in St. Louis sometime next year.

"One of the most exciting smells which I can remember is the smell of clean, moist earth which permeated the air of my grandmother's greenhouse," Hera recalls.



"Vaulted Arbor" in Brooklyn is a 22-foot high "living" sculpture.



"Stormflower" in New Orleans is primarily planted in azaleas, providing a maze of color.