

Wind sculptures are going up at Merschel Park in downtown Winston-Salem.

Wes Young

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If you want to, you can think about Wanda Merschel when you look at the new collection of wind sculptures at Merschel Park in downtown Winston-Salem.

Or, you can think about the other contributions of women here or the ones to come in the future.

Then again, you might take the approach one member of the artistic team that created the sculptures suggested:

“They have a meditative quality,” said Stacy Christensen, of Lyman Whitaker’s studio in Utah. “What they can look for is a moment of respite in a busy world.”

The park is still under construction, so during working hours the respite may have to wait. But you can still get the idea by watching the collection of metal spheres turn in the wind from the other side of the construction fence. The park itself is supposed to be finished in February.



Stainless steel wind sculptures, created by Lyman Whitaker’s studio in Utah, are being installed as a centerpiece at Merschel Plaza in downtown Winston-Salem.

Walt Unks Photos, Journal

By then, the sculptures will be illuminated by lights, creating an entirely different experience for anyone who happens to be strolling past after dark.

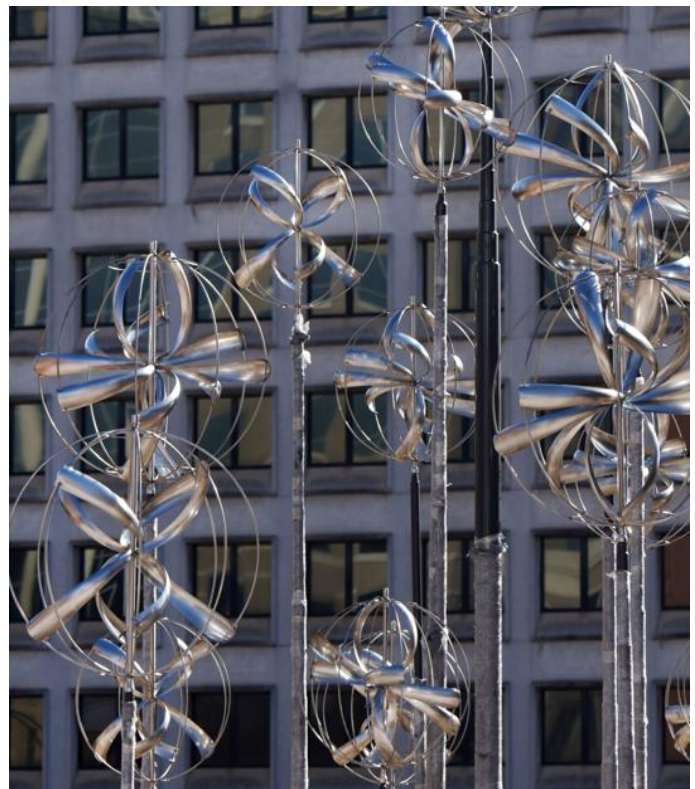
“The stainless steel has a magical way that the light interacts with it,” Christensen said. Even in the daytime, she said, the sculptures glinted in the sunlight as seen from Trade Street.

The centerpiece of the sculptures is a collection of 16 stainless steel spheres mounted on poles of varying heights, and representing the 16 years that Merschel served on the Winston-Salem City Council.

Other wind sculptures will be mounted at a few other places in the park, including one over by the future site of the Kaleideum museum, to tie in that attraction to the park.

The Downtown Winston-Salem Foundation, a nonprofit that supports the work of the Downtown Winston-Salem Partnership, had the wind sculptures commissioned and put in place through a donation from the Millennium Fund.

Merschel served on the city council from 1997 to 2013 and was chair of the city council’s Finance Committee from 2001 to 2013. She died in 2020 of a prolonged illness at the age of 69. During her time in office, she often spoke about the city’s efforts to



The installation features globes that spin in the breeze.

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revitalize downtown. The location on Fourth Street at the Trade Street intersection, formerly known as Civic Plaza, was renamed in her honor.

“We tried to find a piece of art that would embody what she felt would be significant for the city,” said Alfred Adams, the past chair of the foundation and a driving force in bringing the art to Winston-Salem. Adams said he and Merschel’s family learned about the wind sculptures of Lyman Whitaker and had admired their kinetic energy.

“She wanted art to have movement and be flowing and to generate excitement,” Adams said. “That is why Lyman Whitaker was contacted. He and his team have done wind sculptures but has done little east of the Mississippi. We will have art here that you do not find in Charlotte, Greensboro, Raleigh and High Point.”

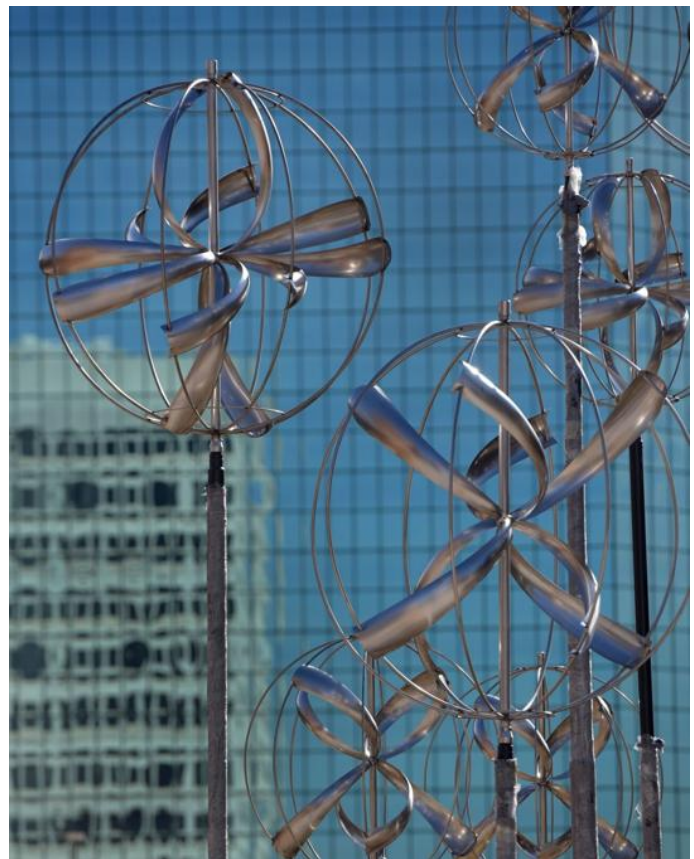
The team of artists include Whitaker, Christensen, who is his wife, and John Whitaker, the sculptor’s brother.

The cluster of 16 spheres is called Balancing Act, Christensen said.

“Being a woman takes balance and commitment,” Christensen said, adding that the sculptures are dedicated to “all women who find imaginative solutions to balance life.”

“It was a big-scale operation to engineer and get these large sculptures shipped and installed,” Christensen said. “We needed a crane with a 120-foot reach to get the sculptures assembled.”

The spheres stand on staffs of powdered steel and while similar, come in two styles. Most of them turn



The sculptures will be illuminated by lights at night, creating a scenic walk along Fourth Street.

in the same direction, but a few of them go the other way.

Christensen said each of the studio's art installations is unique.

"We think of the individual elements as notes in a symphony," Christensen said.

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The sculptures range in height and size.

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