

The New Wave of Sculpture Parks Redefining How Art Is Seen

Five destinations, whether in the English countryside or a forest in Thailand, where the work and nature go hand in hand.



Fujiko Nakaya's "Fog Landscape #48435" (2024) at Khao Yai Art Forest in Thailand. Andrea Rossetti, courtesy of Khao Yai Art Forest

By Gisela Williams

Nov. 25, 2025

[Leer en español](#)

The modern Western tradition of the sculpture garden is generally thought to have first been developed during the Renaissance, when classical statues were integrated into formal gardens, although the practice of displaying artworks amid nature is much older. Millenniums ago, Chinese scholars displayed abstract rock sculptures within private courtyard gardens that represented microcosms of nature and were intended for contemplation. More recently, artworks have found homes in wilder settings like [Storm King](#), a 500-acre museum in New York's Hudson Valley, and [Wanas Konst](#), a sprawling, forested site in Sweden. As demand for immersive art experiences has continued to grow over the last decade, fueled in part by social media, international collectors and curators have started to install site-specific art projects in a new wave of unexpected landscapes.

The most interesting of these projects are breaking the traditional mold that stipulates not only what or where art can be but what it can do. For the Beninese French art collector and restitution activist Marie Cecile Zinsou, who this year founded an outdoor museum, Le Jardin d'Essai, in southern Benin, showing art among native plants gives viewers a stronger connection to the country's history. Diana Campbell, the curator of the Samdani Art Centre and Sculpture Park in Bangladesh, which opened in 2024, believes that taking art out of museums and galleries can make it more approachable. "Art spaces of the future should be places where the artists, the local community and the viewers are all active participants," she says.

Le Jardin d'Essai in Benin



Cyprien Tokoudagba's "Dan" (2022). ©Fondation Zinsou 2022



Joël Andrianomearisoa's "Musée des Promesses" (2025). ©Studio Joël Andrianomearisoa 2025.

After opening two of the first museums in Benin — the [Fondation Zinsou](#) in Cotonou and the Musée d'Art Contemporain in Ouidah — Zinsou turned her attention to a remote plot of land that her father, an entrepreneur and the country's former prime minister, had initially bought with the idea of developing a yogurt factory. Now, it's Le Jardin d'Essai, a 14-acre art garden about a 15-minute drive outside Ouidah, a small port city on Benin's southern coast, where a path created by the Tunisian artist Aïcha Snoussi winds through palm trees, citrus trees, bamboo, beehives and sculptures, connecting to open-air workshops for the hundreds of children who visit from surrounding schools each week.

From the beginning, Zinsou says, she's considered the property's trees and insects to be just as important as the art she's commissioned to be installed on it. For the last two years, she's sponsored university students to catalog all the life-forms in the area, and their findings inform the guided tours that started this past September. "Many of these plants can be traced to 4,000 or 5,000 years ago, so it allows us to share a much longer history," says Zinsou. When visitors walk through the garden's groves, for example, the park's guides tell stories of the area's precolonial architecture and how the end of the slave trade there was partly due to the export trade of palm oil with France. As for the art, this January, the Madagascan artist Joël Andrianomearisoa installed his "Musée des Promesses" (2025), a 30-square-foot exhibition space made of mud and concrete that's open to visitors 24/7. Zinsou says the work, like the park itself, is meant to "question the role of the museum institution in the 21st century, on the continent and beyond."