

Somerville's Oddest Park

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Behind one of the exits of the Davis Square T station is a small grassy area that connects the T station to a long trail that stretches from Medford to Bedford. (To accomplish this feat, the trail makes some bizarre choices, like going right through the middle of the cities busiest streets and public squares.) To all appearances, the area is completely unremarkable — some grass, a grate, a few pillars, an odd sculpture. But if you look up, a bizarre exhibit is laid out in the sky.

The pillars, you see, stop above eye level and then continue upwards with poles. Atop the poles are sculptures, model replicas of important Somerville buildings and things. And at the entrance, soaring overhead, where no one ever looks, is an enormous sign: Seven Hills Park, Somerville. And next to it is a large cow sitting on a compass.

The whole park is filled with this kind of gag. On each pillar is a sign describing the replica that sits atop it. One gushes about a particular building's importance to the Revolutionary War, then describes what happens to it. First it was sold to a mental asylum (albeit one [for the stars](#)), then the asylum moved and abandoned it. Then the building was razed. And then the entire hill it sat on was razed and turned into a landfill. Every pillar has a story like this: important landmark, cut down by human folly.

Then there are the sculptures. The sculptures are life-size replicas of people in everyday poses — sitting on the bench, standing with their coat folded over their arm, and so on — placed right in the middle of things as if they were real. So the first surprise is that the people who seem real are really sculptures and that the sculptures aren't set off with signs or space but thrown in with everything else.

So then you admire the happy poses of the sculptures before you notice another oddity: everyone in the sculptures is wearing a mask over their face. Still, the faces all seem like happy ones, until you look at them more carefully. A father appears to gaze down lovingly at the infant son in his arms, until you look more closely, and you see that he's not looking at his son at all. He's staring at the ground at the gaze of love is really more one of wistfulness — he's imagining he was somewhere else right now; somewhere nice.

In another, two parents look down at their son in what first appears to be admiration but on further inspection is more like shock. And shock seems appropriate, because the kid who appears to be their son is dressed up in a bizarre costume of suspenders and is stretching his arms like he's about to go

build a railroad. I still don't know what in the world is going on with that one. It freaks me out every time I walk by.

It's weird having sculptures you can just hang out with like this. You can sit on the bench next to a woman hugging her small child. And you can look right into her face, get right into her space, get closer than you ever could if she were real, analyze her gaze in far more detail than would be polite in public.

And perhaps this is the real message of the statues, and the park: Things are always much more complicated than they first seem, and you can see it if you look closely, it's just that we're all too busy to notice. Nobody ever looks up.