

Park Travesty

New York never loses its sense of the ludicrous. But a particularly fine pitch of foolishness has been reached with the Parks Department-endorsed artist-in-residence program for the city's parks. The artist-in-residence will balance logs, stones, boulders and tree boughs in compositions called "Accents on Nature" on a one-a-day basis in May and June in Battery Park and the Bronx Botanical Gardens, in what the program's sponsor, the Public Arts Council of New York City, considers a significant "first." The creative act will be photo-documented and accompanied by mime, ballet, music and video art.

Anyone for photo-documenting erosion, damaged trees, silted-up lakes and ponds, beer cans and candy wrappers? How about balanced composition of paper cups and ice cream sticks? They are as much a part of the parks today as grass—freshly, innocently green and soon to be trampled by summer throngs of concert-goers and festival celebrants. What the parks need is a horticulturist-in-residence accompanied by a troupe of graceful litter picker-uppers. There are clearly more rational philanthropic priorities than upstaging nature.

Park maintenance is almost abandoned and corrective work impossible; the fiscal crisis has meant cutbacks on cutbacks. Although the proposed artwork may be admirable and the intentions good, the art of landscape is the only art the parks require. No one needs a travesty of it now.