

ART

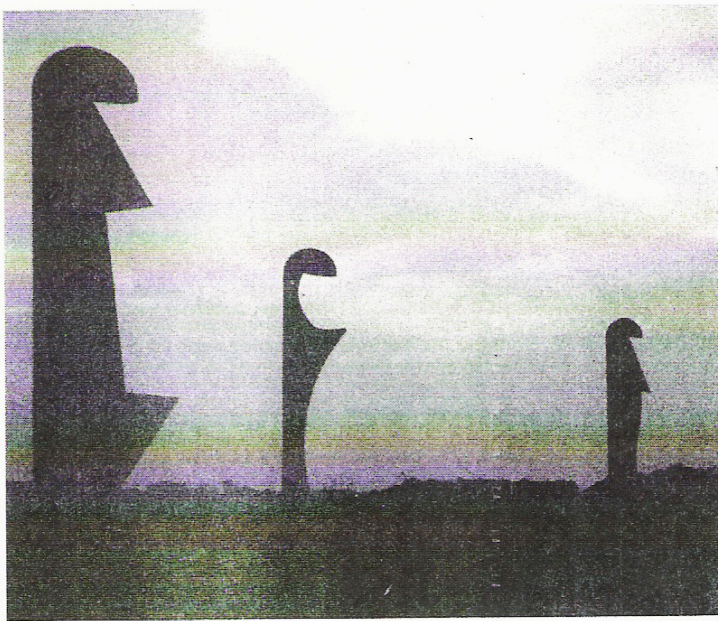
Alchemy in the Hamptons

By KATHRYN MADISON

An international arts center has just opened to the public in Bridgehampton, New York. Developed over a decade, the Ark Project is a combination of idyllic woodlands, fields, outdoor sculpture, and brightly colored barns converted into enormous gallery spaces. The center is the work of Nova, a Romanian artist formerly known as Mihai Popa, who moved to the United States 30 years ago.

Upon arrival at The Ark Project, each visitor is given a hand-drawn site map and encouraged to embark on a tour of the 100-acre sculpture park filled with a wide range of Nova's monumental work. "Free Flight in Space" is two towering welded-steel sculptures depicting a woman and man blissfully floating. "The Astronauts" are five soaring 22-foot high steel totems placed in a Stonehenge-like configuration in the middle of an open meadow. Other monumental sculptures include "Sister Planets" composed of two huge red and blue playfully moving spheres, the curvaceous "Thinking of Raquel," and the dramatic 30-foot high "Orion."

The Blue Barn displays Nova's "integral" paintings. These huge multimedia works, with names like "The Shore," "Las Vegas," "Serengeti," "Pacifica," and "Rock 'n' Roll," are exhibited under black lights. Boldly executed in glowing neon colors and made of intricately formed soft sculpture and painted canvas, they are, in the artist's words, an attempt to "create an equal combination between sculpture and painting. Also, by using fluorescent hues, the combination of white light and black light makes it possible to see the same paintings in colors of night and colors of day, reflecting the entire cycle of 24 hours."



A. R. BROOK LYNN

IDYLIC SETTING Three of the 'Astronauts' installed at the Ark Project.

Nova's latest sculptures, the 18-piece "Homage to Africa Series 2002," are presented in the spacious Red Barn Gallery. Derived from elements of African tribal art, this collection of smaller steel works finished in a rusted patina is in form and execution strongly evocative of its models.

Adjacent to the Red Barn is the assistant's gallery, featuring the art works of Nova's current apprentices, and the Hill Barn, a guest-artist studio and exhibition space — right now being used by New Yorker Diane Blell.

The tour ends at the oldest part of the Ark Project: the Elliptical House. Designed and built by Nova, this is a round "live-in sculpture." The enigmatic structure, instantly recognizable from Scuttle Hole Road, has long been a Hamptons landmark. The bright blue hand-wrought 2600-

square-foot structure borders on a shady glen and, as the artist relates, "has a very small footprint on the earth, only 800 square feet. That way you leave more room for the grass, the lungs of the planet." (The house was recently featured on Home & Garden TV's "Extreme Home Series.")

Adjacent to the Elliptical House is the Museum Barn, which will open to the public in 2003 with a permanent exhibit of Nova's futuristic "Space Art" and his designs and models for urban architecture of the future.

The worlds of art, science, nature, and architecture collide sublimely at the Ark Project.

The Ark Project is open to the public weekends through September by reservation and will re-open again in July 2003 (30 Millstone Rd., Bridgehampton, NY, 631-537-0004)