

“Serpentine Fence by Beth Galston”
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by

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A Fence Becomes a Sculpture at South Street Mall Park



The Serpentine Fence is an integral part of a newly redesigned neighborhood park at the South Street Mall and Courts in Jamaica Plain, Boston, Massachusetts. The park was recently dedicated. Present at the ceremony were collaborators and contractors, members of the neighborhood, invited guests and the Mayor of Boston, Tom Menino.

Beth Galston and Ray Dunetz Landscape Architecture collaborated on the project, which was finally ready after three years. The colorful fence and a new landscape of curved granite walls and paving designs create harmony. One might say that the long finishing process was worth the wait!

Galston writes: “I saw an opportunity for my sculpture idea when contemplating the existing chain link fence that separated the park from the tennis courts. It was very big – 120’ long! But it was certainly not a thing of beauty. Functionally, it needed to be there to keep tennis balls from entering the park. So I decided that I would design a sculptural art fence to replace the existing chain link fence separating the South Street Mall and courts. I wanted to create a signature piece

for the site, transforming what was once an ugly barrier into an elegant and beautiful artwork that set the stage for the entire park.

I designed a sculptural fence made of translucent metal mesh fabricated in a serpentine shape with sinuous curves. I decided to use an ordinary material, chain link, in an extraordinary way. In a normal fence, the idea is that the posts are all vertical. In this fence, the rails at the top and bottom are serpentine, and the posts are purposely set at angles (none of them are straight) to create a sense of rhythm and energy. The chain link fabric is stretched around this structure to create billowing curves. This is a unique way to use chain link that has not been done previously. To create this design, I worked with the highly skilled fabricator, Bartek Konieczny at Solutions in Metal. To set the sculpture apart, I chose a purple color, which seemed in keeping with the spirit of Jamaica Plain. Purple is a color that combines ground and sky, the excitement of red and the tranquility of blue.”

We have followed Galston’s career since the 1980’s, first as a Graduate Student at MIT’s Center for Advanced Visual Studies (CAVS). After receiving a M.S.Vis.S degree she remained at CAVS with appointments as a Research Fellow for some years. From an early public art sculpture, “Shadow Walk,” 1984 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to “Tree/House,” 1994, at the Socrates Sculpture Park in New York City, and “Thunderbird Bridge,” 1995-2000 on the new Piastewa Peak Parkway in Arizona signifies ample artistic growth. There, she collaborated with BRW Inc. Bridge engineers and the Department of Transportation in Phoenix, Arizona. Other more recent designs and sculptures include “Color Walk,” 2005, for the new Mesa Art Center, in Mesa, Arizona.

Galston also created over time indoor sculptures and a series of indoor environmental works titled: “Luminous Gardens,” from 2003-09. She chose subtitles based on changing details. We viewed her most recent ‘garden,’ illuminated with LEDs, at Cynthia-Reeves Gallery in New York City, who represents her work. The tall, silver and copper wire LED flowers – actually cast resin seep pods – moved occasionally slowly in the space, and the sculpture left the viewer at peace with the world for an instance.

Her website, [Beth Galston, Environmental Sculpture](#), chronicles her works in beautiful visual details. One can view many more sculptures and public art pieces than have been mentioned here, a pure treasure trove.

The redesigned South Street Mall Park with Serpentine Fence now invites residents and visitors for a respite and provides ambient light for the neighborhood at night.