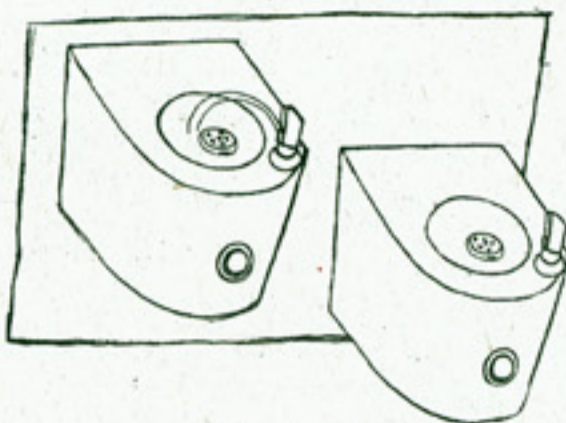


Op-Art

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Thirsting for Fountains

If drinking fountains were as ubiquitous as fire hydrants, there would be no need for steel thermoses, plastic bottles or backpack canteens. Thirsty folks could just amble over to the next corner for a sip of free-of-charge, ecofriendly, delicious water. But there are only about 2,700 public fountains in all of New York — and those are mostly confined to our parks and playgrounds — so we're still forced, in the dehydrating August heat, to carry our water around with us, like camels. The Op-Ed editors asked eight illustrators from around the country to spend an hour one summer afternoon surveying the scene at their local fountains.

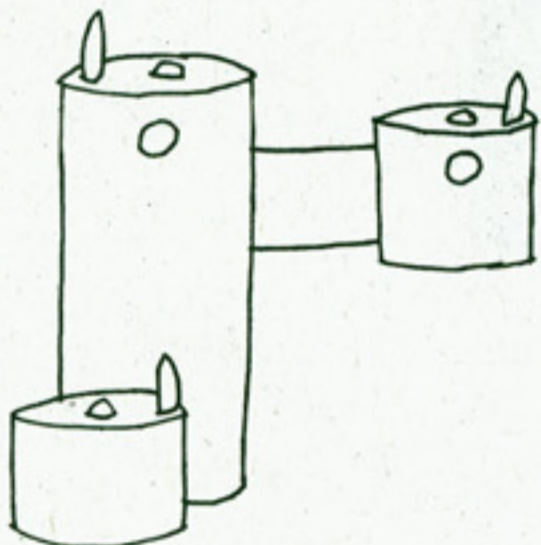


BALTIMORE

Towson Town Center, 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.

FOUNTAIN: Symmetrical, sculptural stainless steel with two heights, one for adults and one for children, located near a ficus tree outside a store in a mall. The water is clear but tepid, the stream solid and strong on the adult side, weaker on the children's side.

FOUNTAIN GOERS: 27. Tall man wearing checkered Vans and hip glasses. Gray-haired man in burgundy polo who leans over to drink and almost loses his checkbook from his breast pocket. Pear-shaped elderly man in blue cap who walks toward fountain then changes his mind. A sandal-wearing couple, with only the man drinking; the woman looks worried. Aesthetician on cellphone carrying a beach bag. Woman in white slacks with ankle tattoo whose companion checks e-mail on his BlackBerry. Chatty elderly woman who was sitting next to me on the bench. Young man and his mother who stop to wet a cloth. Mother who wipes the mouth of toddler in a stroller. Young woman with a snappy step and polka-dot handbag. Expressionless middle-aged woman carrying two bags. Balding dude with beard and coffee cup. Monochromatically dressed man. Middle-aged couple, both wearing sunglasses and holding hands; only she drinks. Brunette in high-heeled sandals who clicks over, flips her hair and drinks. Nurse wearing white Crocs. Mother and the toddler in her arms drink one at a time. Athletic woman in her 60s who bends to take a drink; her back is as straight as a rail! Woman in all black who picks her teeth just before drinking. Woman in red flip-flops carrying green purse. Man in all black with large hair clip on his left sleeve. Woman in flouncy dress who drinks then wipes her mouth with two fingers, so as not to ruin her lipstick. — WHITNEY SHERMAN

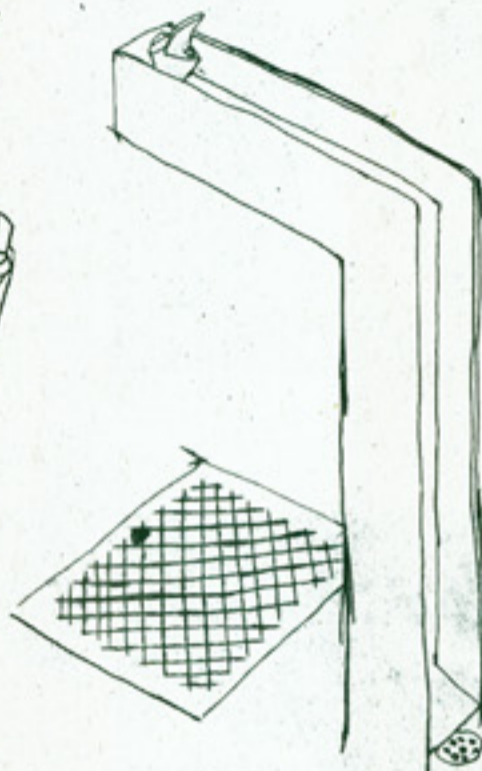


SAN FRANCISCO

Mission Dolores Park, 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.

FOUNTAIN: Welded steel, with three levels for tall, short and canine passers-by. The two upper fountains give off clear, solid streams of cool water. Both streams extend beyond the bowls and land on the ground below. An additional button fills the dog bowl in a steady trickle.

FOUNTAIN GOERS: 54. Woman in very tight pants with bulldog; both drink simultaneously. Three girls in matching school uniforms. A boy who joins them and waits his turn. School group of at least 40 students, 4 of whom drink. Man with black-and-white checkered hat. Hunched woman, very thirsty. Man with two bags of groceries. Woman with boy and light saber. Two of the three uniformed girls come back. Woman in full-length parka. Man with cut-off gloves, sunglasses, cane. Man in blue track suit with elderly beagle. Woman in navy pantsuit. Woman in platform sandals, with large German shepherd. Blonde woman, matching blond Labrador with small log in mouth. Bull terrier with red bandanna around neck, solo. Boy with purple football. Dog walker with six dogs, all sizes, three of whom drink. Two teenage girls, one with dyed pink hair. Older man with mutt that barks but doesn't drink. Girl with waddling black dachshund. Man pushing jingling ice cream cart. Man in hat. Jogger who refills two small water bottles attached to belt. Sunburned man. Co-workers with fast food. Man in suit, no tie, with leather bag. Man wearing orange sneakers. Woman in pink and white. Man with shopping cart piled with bottles and cans. Man wearing jeans with matching jean jacket. Sweaty man with basketball. Woman with empty stroller. Woman balancing tray of tortillas on pink bakery box. Maintenance worker with rake. Man on cellphone in pleated khakis. The boy with the purple football returns for another drink. — TUCKER NICHOLS



LOS ANGELES

Westwood Park, 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.

FOUNTAIN: The water was lukewarm, with a sour mineral taste.

FOUNTAIN GOERS: No one drank from the fountain, except me. — JON HAN



DENVER

Commons Park, 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.

FOUNTAIN: I did not taste the water, but I did push the button to make sure the fountain was working. It was.

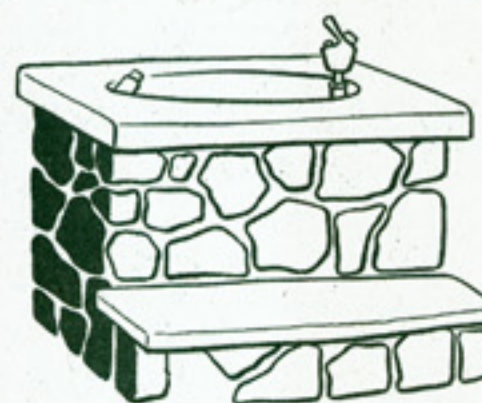
FOUNTAIN GOERS: 9. A mother, grandmother and three children. The two older ones, about 6 and 7, were able to use the fountain; the littlest, about 4, tried but couldn't reach and no one helped her up. Two women, one of whom used the fountain to fill her plastic bottle and then took out a small glass bowl and filled it for their little dog. Two guys in their late teens, one of whom tried the fountain but didn't hold the button down long enough and never got a drink. All the mothers pushing strollers through the park were packed for the apocalypse, so they never needed to stop for water. The runners and bicyclists all carried their own water, and no one refilled while I was there. — HADLEY HOOPER

SALT LAKE CITY

Sugar House Park, 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.

FOUNTAIN: Semi-cold water with a strong stream and slightly mineral taste.

FOUNTAIN GOERS: 9. Father, early 30s, and 2- to 3-year-old son. Eight-year-old boy. Five-year-old boy. Two 10-year-old girls. Man, late 40s. Three-year-old boy. Female jogger, early 20s. — ALEX NABAUM

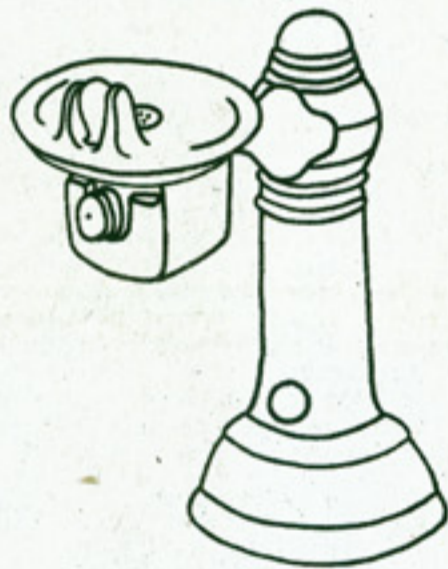


PORTLAND, ORE.

Pioneer Courthouse Square, 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.

FOUNTAIN: At all the fountains in Portland, the water is good; you stop, you leave feeling better. The fountains are abundant symbols of the city. Like rain in the Northwest.

FOUNTAIN GOERS: 38. Man in orange shirt, drinking while on his cellphone. Old man in plaid shirt and baseball cap. Man with big belly in navy T-shirt and white baseball cap. Three street kids, two dogs (one pit bull, one bichon frisé mix). Dude in flip-flops. Man in blue T-shirt and white sunglasses. One teenage boy gets his head pushed into the stream of water by a laughing redheaded teenage girl. Guy in denim baseball cap. Two young panhandlers filling water bottles. Redhead in bandanna. Another redhead. Mom with baby. Baby tried to drink 16 times. Man with rolling backpack. Two cool kids. Girl with yellow backpack, selling ice pops, who takes two drinks. Man with green shirt, mustache. Man, yellow shirt. Older woman, in lime and white. Mother returns for drink with baby in stroller. Older woman in pale yellow. Street kid, tank top, takes big drink, then spits into garbage can. Androgynous person dressed all in black. Girl with scarf on bag, cowboy boots, then the man with her in glasses, beige shirt, denim. Two-and-a-half-year-old tries to get a drink, can't reach, and his mother says no. Cool guy, skinny overalls, cap. Cool kid with blue baseball cap and big backpack. Big homeboy. Man, shaved head, wearing all black, possibly crazy. Dude in snowboarder coat. — PATRICK LONG

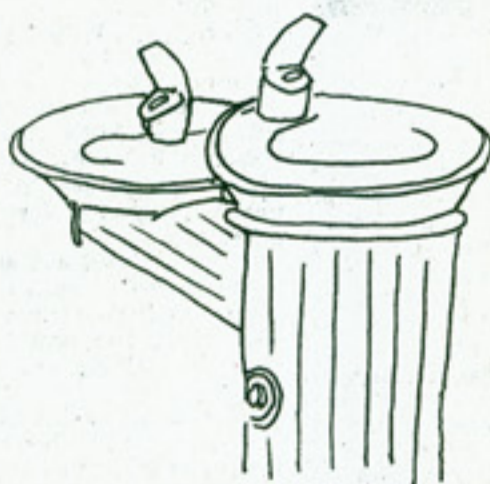


NEW YORK CITY

Madison Square Park, 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.

FOUNTAIN: Water at refrigerator temperature. The stream was a little weak but strong enough to get a good drink.

FOUNTAIN GOERS: 12. Man, early 60s, wearing gray T-shirt, gray shorts and a hat. Man, late 20s, blue oxford shirt, sunglasses and very tall. Man, 40s, dog walker (with four dogs) wearing black hat and red backpack. Woman, 20s, filling up a pink water bottle, wearing bathing suit with a black dress over it. Man in gray, but no longer wearing his hat, comes back and gets another drink. Man, 30s, wearing jeans and sunglasses, also very tall. Smoked a cigarette right after drinking from the fountain. Man, 30s, white T-shirt, with a friend, in a hurry. Man, 40s, bald with a goatee. Drank a lot and then washed his hands. — JASON POLAN



WASHINGTON

The National Zoo, 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.

FOUNTAIN: The water tasted clean, but it didn't have the cold bite I was expecting.

FOUNTAIN GOERS: 13. Dad and son refilling bottles of water. Young boy with glasses and navy collared shirt. Woman with backpack and satchel. A boy and a girl playing in the water, not drinking it. Young man with backward cap and camera slung over right shoulder. Man with yellow T-shirt filling up water bottle. Young boy with ice pop. Woman in gray tank top. Young boy with bright blue sunglasses. Man with a ponytail wearing cut-off jean shorts. Dad helping his two daughters reach the fountain. — OLIVER MUNDAY