



The 2017 Dohm Alley spring installation entitled, “Negative Capability” will feature “The Big Six” of The English Romantic Poets. This will include William Wordsworth, Percy Shelley, William Blake, Samuel Coleridge, John Keats and Lord Byron. A team of sculptors mostly from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and the Traction Company in West Philadelphia will each create a bas relief for the alley installation.

Working with them will be landscape artists Peter Soderman, Mason Madden, Greg Napolitan, and Peter Abrams. All six sculptures will be mounted to the wall interpreting how British artists responded to the Enlightenment, and the new circumstances of industrialization and modernity. Consulting on the project is Princeton University, English Department, Phi Beta Kappa professor, Susan Wolfson.

We will explore why the Romantics developed a heightened awareness of nature and how that unfolded in the smog blanketed shadow of post mystery Europe during the French and Industrial Revolution. The sculptor, Kate Brockton, will begin telling this story through a water feature which will pour forth from the quill pen of John Keats’ Living Hand, the last poem he wrote before he died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-five.

After passing through a street portal into the alley, via a moon gate, pedestrians will enter a shade plant and moss vestibule, which will explain the installation. The visual voice of the first gallery will be that of engraver William Blake who lamented the terrible cost of industrialization on the working poor and children. This will be told through his poem from Songs of Innocence called “The Chimney Sweeper”. The first gallery will be an aphotic, Dickensian chamber of Blake’s Satanic Mills with steam punk appeal, featuring most of the sculptural pieces. This will begin to tell the tale of the lamentations of the Romantics as seen through the lens of Blake’s poems and his “Doors of Perception.”

The second garden chamber will be the diabolical opposite; a verdant, garden paradise, based upon Samuel Coleridge’s poem, Kubla Khan. This second gallery will be flooded with lights, plants and water. John Keats’ famous poem, “This Living Hand” will be at the far end of this gallery pouring forth his philosophy of Negative Capability creating an elevated visual to make the water appear, by way of a copper sluice, to be flowing up hill.

The third gallery is a movie theater, allowing ingress and egress to all passing who probably will want to stay a little longer to absorb the music and sound by Princeton Record Exchange as well as the video programming. The marriage of these concepts will show and describe the truth and beauty of the Romantic period. While walking on a sidewalk, there could not be a better left or right turn to make on a beautiful day in Princeton, New Jersey.