



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

"Dreamer: An Eyrie Perch" is Austin Thomas's latest sit piece.

At Bottom, a Comfortable Way to Look at Things

Most art asks you to stand in front of it in admiration — whatever the effect on tired backs and feet. The friendly "perches" of New Yorker Austin Thomas offer a comfortable vantage point from which to look at other artists' works — or to ignore the art and simply chat with neighbors.

Her "Free Form Perch," a four-tier plywood bench that's contoured like a cartoon cloud, sits with the Corcoran's early Americana. It's a pleasure to contemplate the dour portraits of our ancestors while perching on the cheerful work of one of their heirs. Thomas seems set on undermining the stuffy hierarchies — of subject matter, of materials, of function, of "serious"

form, of behaviors — that still determine how museums work.

A new piece, called "Dreamer: An Eyrie Perch," is even more user-friendly. Thomas has simply built a kind of workmanlike gazebo by the Corcoran College's front door. Student painters on a break from class will now get to sit on art, maybe without even knowing it at first. In Washington, full of homeless people looking for a place to rest, the piece may yet take on a darker, more socially conscious tone.

Art usually makes things happen *to* you. Thomas has a lighter, more generous touch than that: She provides a comfortable spot where all kinds of human stuff can happen on its own.

— Blake Gopnik