

The **Outdoor Gallery**
40 Years of **Public Art**
in **New York City Parks**



Exhibition: September 13 – November 23, 2007
The Arsenal Gallery, Arsenal, Central Park
Fifth Avenue at East 64th Street, 3rd Floor

Curated by Jonathan Kuhn

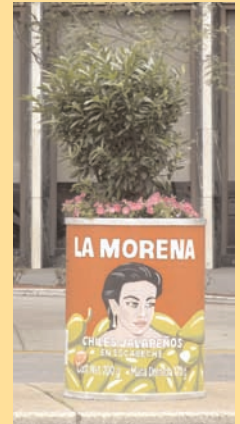
Gallery Hours: Monday – Friday, 9:00 A.M. – 5:00 P.M.
Closed holidays

For information: call 311 or visit www.nyc.gov/parks



City of New York
Parks & Recreation
Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor
Patricia E. Harris, Deputy Mayor
Adrian Benepe, Commissioner, Parks & Recreation
Kate Levin, Commissioner, Cultural Affairs

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The City of New York
Office of the Mayor
New York, N.Y. 10007

September 2007

Dear Friends:

New York City has long been known as the arts capital of the world, a reputation born of our countless museums, theaters, and special events. And in recent years, this reputation has been bolstered by a growing number of public art projects that are open to all, free-of-charge. *The Gates*, which for two weeks in 2005 transformed our Central Park into a sea of saffron, showed that allowing people to experience great art in public places not only captures their imagination, it attracts tourists and economic activity to our City. That is why in all five boroughs, we are working to ensure that our beautiful public parks include some of our best public art.

I hope you enjoy looking back at this history of the outdoor gallery and take some time to explore the great works we have on display across the City. Here's to 40 years of inspiring, thought-provoking, and magnificent public art – and many more to come!

Sincerely,

Michael R. Bloomberg
Mayor

New York City is known for its unsurpassed creative energy, as well as its beautiful parks and green spaces. In 1967 the New York City Parks Department combined these two quintessentially New York characteristics when it debuted its first major outdoor group exhibition of contemporary sculpture, entitled *Sculpture in Environment*, organized by Doris C. Freedman. Since then, the Parks Department has hosted over 1,000 temporary exhibitions in the city's open spaces, from *Henry Moore in the Parks* to *The Gates*. The range of work on display has been vibrant and stunningly democratic, embracing the world's most revered artists – as well as its most trail-blazing newcomers.

This October, New York will celebrate the 40th anniversary of public art programming in City parks, and we invite all New Yorkers to stroll through the largest – and greenest – outdoor gallery on Earth. To commemorate this milestone, installations featuring the New York art world's full range of traditional sculpture and new media will be on display throughout the City. The Parks Department will also present a retrospective exhibition at the Arsenal Gallery in Central Park. All exhibits are free and open to the public, and in the spirit of the last four decades, the pieces on view aim to excite, enliven, and inspire not only artists and aficionados, but all who visit our parks.

We are grateful to the many organizations that have supported this endeavor, and extend special thanks to the Department of Cultural Affairs, Public Art Fund, Creative Time, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, Madison Square Conservancy, Socrates Sculpture Park, and Snug Harbor Cultural Center.

We hope to see you outdoors this fall!

Sincerely,

Patricia E. Harris
First Deputy Mayor

Adrian Benepe
Commissioner
Parks & Recreation



Jean Tinguely and Niki de Saint Phalle, *Machines and Nanas*, 1968

THE OUTDOOR GALLERY 40 YEARS OF PUBLIC ART IN NEW YORK CITY PARKS



Ross Lewis, *Fanscapes* (detail), 1993

In 1856, thousands gathered in Union Square to witness the dedication of the George Washington equestrian statue by Henry Kirke Brown, the first sculpture in a municipal park in New York. The following day *The New York Herald* commented: "It is we hope the commencement of the good work of beautifying our great metropolis, the people of which are fond of art and willing to encourage it." The sculpture had been sponsored by citizen contributions, and it was the beginning of a vast civic outdoor museum that would reflect the shifting interests and styles of the ensuing decades.

More than 100 years later, art had changed. Artists had discarded the idea of a common visual language based largely on classical antecedents. While the primary function of public statuary had been commemoration, a new public art embraced art for art's sake. New artistic constructs and new ideals, not to mention materials, freed sculptors to explore pure forms as well as social issues not previously viewed as the role of public art. Rather than perpetuating mores or striving to create a timeless universal art, artists tended to focus on forms of individual expression.



Tony Smith sculpture installation, 1967



Louise Nevelson, *Night Presence IV*, the artist with Mayor John Lindsay and Parks Commissioner August Heckscher, 1972

Responding to these trends, in 1967 the City of New York initiated a bold experiment to place contemporary art in its public parks on a temporary basis, challenging the conventional confines of museums and galleries as the main venues for the display of art. In January an exhibition at Bryant Park of Tony Smith's minimalist geometric sculptures (he called them "presences") assembled by Barbaralee Diamonstein, the City's first Special Assistant for Cultural Affairs, inaugurated this endeavor, followed in the spring by William Accorsi's playful sculptures at the Union Square "Check-A-Child" Playground.

The program took flight in October of that year, with the first major group exhibition of temporary public art. Entitled *Sculpture in Environment*, it was organized by Doris Freedman, who had taken over as Special Assistant for Cultural Affairs, and curated by sculpture consultant Sam Green, who had mounted a similar exhibit in Philadelphia earlier that year. The show, encompassing the works of 24 artists including Claes Oldenburg, Barnett Newman and Louise Nevelson, was staged at nine city park locations and 15 public or corporate buildings and plazas, and had a catalogue written by prominent art historian Irving Sandler. Its mission was to use the cityscape as an outdoor gallery, bridging the world of art insiders and what would later become known as the "public realm." In the words of then-Parks Commissioner August Heckscher, the objective



Doris Freedman and staff, public art office, Arsenal, Central Park, 1968

was to let works of art "loose in the city, to set them under the light of day where they intrude upon our daily walks and errands."

People were talking. The critical response and the public's reaction were as varied as the artworks themselves, ranging from enthusiasm to outrage. Overall, the exhibition appeared to engage citizens (though some shrugged off the whole thing as a conspiracy of art-world kooks), and it provoked much discussion regarding the interrelationship of nature, art and public space. One piece, Tony Rosenthal's kinetic painted steel cube at Astor Place, called *Alamo*, proved so popular it was accepted by the City on a permanent basis, an outcome at odds with the tenets of the temporary exhibition.

The parks art programmers felt sufficiently emboldened to expand their efforts, and late in the year they announced the "Sculpture of the Month" program of rotating short-term art installations around the city, which lasted into the early 1970s. The projects were supported by a combination of donations from local businesses, loans of art by commercial galleries, and some sweat equity by park workers to rig and install the pieces. Bold, physically assertive works by artists including Herbert Ferber, Robert Murray, Niki de Saint Phalle and Jean Tinguely, and Kenneth Snelson were placed mainly at prominent high-density locations, such as Central Park, Bryant Park and the Battery.



Warren Padula, *Black Atlantis*, 1973

Though contemporary in feel, the artworks tended to conform to the traditional notion of independent stand-alone objects.

In the late 1960s, parks advocate and preservationist Joan K. Davidson helped form City Walls, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing artists opportunities to create and display art in public settings, with a particular emphasis on murals. In 1972 Doris Freedman—by then director of the City's nascent Department of Cultural Affairs under Mayor John Lindsay—founded the Public Art Council (under the auspices of the Municipal Art Society), dedicated to enhancing opportunities for artists working in the public realm. In 1977 City Walls and the Public Art Council merged to form

the Public Art Fund, to this day the leading nonprofit organization programming temporary public art in the city. The Public Art Fund has regularly placed art at Central Park's southeast corner plaza at 60th and Fifth Avenue, which in 1982 was named in honor of its late founder, Doris C. Freedman. The Fund has been guided since then by her daughter, Susan K. Freedman.

During this era, against the backdrop of the City's worsening economic condition, monumental abstract sculpture, community murals, and performance-based pieces competed for the public's attention, with equal weight given to emerging and established artists. Experimentation and inclusiveness were two

guiding principles of the Parks Department and its public art partners. In 1972 the City, seeking to empower communities, formed the Neighborhood Action Program (NAP). The Washington Heights NAP and the Public Art Council solicited broad citizen input, and helped select art for placement in northern Manhattan parks. While the pieces were placed on a temporary basis, some fervent programmers hoped they would prove popular enough to remain indefinitely, whether or not they were conceived to withstand the test of time.

The organization CITYarts, formed in 1968, took a similarly populist approach. It united artists with children, often in poor neighborhoods, to create community murals in an uplifting blend of process and product. The organization continues to bring art and art making to those who may not find it otherwise present in their daily lives. Creative Time, founded in 1974, also encourages artists to use public space as a laboratory beyond the studio, and has continued to foster projects in new and old media that push the boundaries of artistic expression.

For all the creative ferment, by the middle of the 1970s the state of the City's parks system had deteriorated to such a degree that the improvisational nature of much of public art was viewed as frivolous and an affront to the City's primary mission of providing clean outdoor space for recreation and contemplation. In 1976 *The New York Times*, usually supportive of the public sculpture projects, lamented that although the intentions of



CITYarts, *Pieces for Peace Mosaic*, 2005



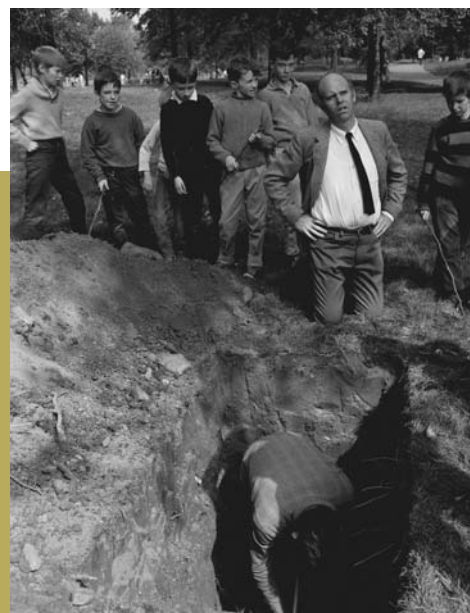
CITYarts, *Welcome to Our Neighborhood*, 2006



Mark di Suvero, *For Lady Day*, 1975



Tony Rosenthal, *Alamo*, 1967



Claes Oldenburg, *Placid Civic Monument*, 1967



Ronald Bladen, *Kama Sutra*, 1977

those who programmed public art were good, “the art of landscape is the only art the parks require.” As if in response to such criticism, combined with a general shift away from randomly placed “plop art,” artists had begun to put increasing emphasis on the relationship of the piece with the surrounding nature and community. Marta Pan’s spherical, brightly colored polyester *Floating Sculpture* (1973) was a deliberate response to its setting in Central Park’s southeast pond. Warren Padula’s steel *Black Atlantis* (1973), placed at Central Park’s north end near Harlem, was sited to produce a contrast with the rolling landscape, and fulfilled an added objective of bringing art to new audiences. Padula’s installation coincided with a brief period in which this section of the park went by the radical-chic name “Liberation Plaza.”

Claes Oldenburg’s *Placid Civic Monument* (1967), an entry in the *Sculpture in Environment* group show, was an early instance of environmental art. Bordering on parody, the work consisted of an oblong trench of 108 cubic feet of excavated earth near the ancient Egyptian obelisk known as Cleopatra’s Needle in Central Park, and whimsically responded to both minimalist sculpture and ancient monumental funeral art. Les Levine took the notion of absence a step further in his Cheshire Cat-like *Process of Elimination* (1969) on Wooster Street in Greenwich Village. Over a month, 10 of its 300 curved plastic elements were systematically removed each day, creating an art that disposed of itself. Alan Sonfist installed *Crystals* (1970) in Theodore Roosevelt Park at the south entrance of the American Museum of Natural History. Two containers over 12 feet tall contained crystals in a continuous process of transformation from solid to gas and back again, the artwork reconfiguring itself based on the changing external environment. Sonfist would later recreate a patch of Manhattan’s primeval forest in Greenwich Village called *Time Landscape* (conceived 1965, planted 1978).



Christy Rupp, *Food Chain Piece*, the artist with Parks Commissioner Gordon Davis, 1978



Nancy Cohen, *A Community of Shelter*, 1992



Noah Baen, *Persephone*, 2005

This interest in transitory processes has preoccupied many artists over the years. The results have ranged from poignant to comic, with the impermanence tending to make the experience more intense. Warren Owens's *Working Wagons* (1980), installed next to the Central Park Zoo, was composed from actual antique carts. One was filled with coal that the artist anticipated would be stolen, adding to the sense of loss that these industrial relics evoked. Christy Rupp's *Food Chain Piece* (1978) consisted of translucent bear-shaped wire mesh sculptures laced with nuts to feed the squirrels of City Hall Park, merging prey and predator in an "animal behavioral sculpture."



Henry Moore, *Reclining Figure: Hand*, 1984

Gina Wendkos's *Waiting for the Fish to Bite* (1980) explicitly invited Washington Square Park patrons to remove the hundreds of figurines (nine different types) placed around the park's fountain, awarding spectators with co-ownership of the piece. In Riverside Park, Paul Solomon's *Forest Project* (1989) "recycled" hundreds of unsold Christmas trees into an artificial dense wood. More recently, Noah Baen created *Persephone* (2005) by shaping leaves into a ghostly figure left to decay over four seasons in Brooklyn's Lentol Garden.

The trend of environmentally responsive art and ephemeral art has not precluded an equally vigorous parallel trajectory of big art by "big" artists adhering to the monumental tradition of sculpture. Tal Streeter's 70-foot tall *Endless Column* (1970) on Central Park's perimeter at Fifth Avenue and 79th Street recalled Brancusi, while challenging riggers and spectators with its sheer size. In 1975 the robust steel sculptures of Mark di Suvero were given a five-borough installation—a crowd-pleasing mix of structural solidity and whimsy.



Melinda Hunt, *Circle of Hope*, 1994



William Fulbrecht, *Bill of Rights*, 1990

In 1984, 25 large-scale bronze sculptures by British master Henry Moore were loaned by George and Virginia Ablah and placed in parks around the city. They combined strength and subtlety, resting easily within their surroundings, and affirmed a mutually beneficial connection between art and nature.

Public art in our parks is not just about aesthetics. Whether public art can serve as an agent of social change remains subject to debate, but it is certainly true that many artists have increasingly made public their private concerns, using installations to address sociopolitical and environmental issues of the day. For instance, Nancy Cohen's carefully crafted pod-like forms in *A Community of Shelter* (1992) at Foley Square paid homage to the resourceful recycling of cast-off materials by the homeless who at the time sought shelter in that park and many others. Placed at five lower Manhattan parks, William Fulbrecht's *Bill of Rights* (1990) consisted of cast-concrete markers whose inscriptions commented on the foundation and fragility of our civil liberties.



Ross Lewis, *Fanscapes*, 1993



Francis Hines, *Washington Square Arch Wrap*, 1980

Some artists have focused more narrowly on responding to or reclaiming the aesthetic and historic conditions of a given park or park feature. In 1980 Francis Hines bound the iconic Washington Square Arch in strips of fabric, described as a giant bandage for a wounded monument. Jane Greengold's *A Drop in the Bucket* (1985) used journals and a water purification device to evoke the 70-acre fresh water "collect pond" that once stood in lower Manhattan. In *Fanscapes* (1993), Ross Lewis's nylon swatches with hand-painted calligraphy embellished Central Park's Victorian decorative folly, the Belvedere Castle. Melinda Hunt planted a small fenced-in cornfield called *Circle of Hope* (1994) in then-unrenovated Madison Square Park to commemorate the anonymous dead of the potter's field that once occupied the site.

Certain otherwise overlooked parks, such as the hardscrabble triangle bridging Soho and Little Italy known as Lt. Petrosino Square, have gained an identity through public art programming. Beginning with Lisa Hoke's *Molecular Motion* (1984), this constrained and inhospitable



Karen Finley, *The Black Sheep*, 1990



Robert Taplin and Daniel Wolff, *Welcome to New Haven*, 1978



Jenny Holzer, *Benches*, 1989



Olav Westphalen, *Extremely Site Unspecific Sculpture*, 2000

public space became fertile ground for an ambitious program of regularly changing installations of a wide variety organized and sponsored by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, and on occasion by the nearby Storefront for Art and Architecture. Today, though the neighborhood has gentrified and the park is slated for renovation, temporary art continues to animate the space, most recently in Nancy Hwang's mock hair-salon shampoo performance project (2002), Kim Holleman's micro-environment in *Trailer Park* (2006), and Minsuk Cho's domed performance pavilion (2007).

Beginning in the 1970s many public art projects have been conceptual, often text-based with participatory elements. In an antic arcade at Union Square's south end called *Welcome to New Haven* (1979), Robert Taplin collaborated with poet Daniel Wolff to create an intimate world of images and verse in a variety of Rube Goldberg-like viewfinders. Jenny Holzer's aphorisms on benches at Doris Freedman Plaza (1989) and electronic message boards (Grand Army Plaza, *Sign on a Truck*, 1984) used street "furniture" and signs to subvert conventional wisdom and intrude upon our private thoughts. She later projected text onto Central Park's Bethesda Terrace and the Washington Square Arch (2004).



Keith Helmetag, Chermayoff & Gismar, *Science City*, 1994



Mark Dion, *Urban Wildlife Observation Unit*, 2002



Nancy Hwang, *S: An Urban Oasis*, 2002



Installation by Kazuko, 1982



Kit-Yin Snyder, 1981

At First Street Park on the Lower East Side, performance artist Karen Finley transposed her nine-stanza poem about alienation and AIDS, *The Black Sheep* (1990), onto two bronze tablets mounted to a granite plinth, appropriating a monumental context to convey a personal lament. Some projects have used irony to comment on the very nature of public art, most notably Olav Westphalen's mobile *Extremely Site Unspecific Sculpture* (2000), in which a curious object that looked like a cross between a barbecue grill and a UFO benefited from the shifting contexts of its various locations from Tompkins Square Park to the *Unisphere* in Flushing Meadows Corona Park.

The physical underpinnings of our urban environment were more literally revealed at Herald Square in the *Science City* installation (1994). A project of the New York Hall of Science and the National Science Foundation, *Science City* used interactive components such as periscopes and animated displays to convey the complex infrastructure and systems that make the city function. Drawing upon traditional exhibition methods of taxonomy and natural history, Mark Dion's *Urban Wildlife Observation Unit* (2002) was a fanciful pseudo-scientific research lab/field station in Madison Square Park, described by the artist as "an ecosystem of remarkable impoverishment."

Several artist-in-residence programs have placed artists in an even more intimate and sustained relationship with local parks. These residencies have typically supported artists with funding and materials for a year so that they might immerse themselves at

a given park to create responsive installations in full public view. At Bryant Park artists Kit-Yin Snyder (1981), Kazuko (1982), Scott Pfaffman (1983) and Mel Chin (1984) were all granted one-year artist residencies at a time when the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation was formed to revive this midtown haven. A decade later visitors to Flushing Meadows Corona Park could watch artist-in-residence Robert Ressler carve wooden sculptures from salvaged trees (1991). In the same park, beginning in 1992 sculptor Nick Micros carved a massive pile of limestone into a tableau of images inspired in part by the park's history as a World's Fair grounds.

Harking back to *Sculpture in Environment*, the late 1970s and the 1980s saw a flowering of group shows. From 1977 to 1981 the Organization of Independent Artists assembled five group exhibitions at Foley Square and Battery Park that gave a voice and public forum to artists who were largely unaffiliated with the gallery structure. Creative Time capitalized on another downtown location, the vacant landfill at the north end of Battery Park City (later designated Rockefeller Park), to program dynamic annual group shows from 1978 to 1985, known as *Art on the Beach*. To celebrate the Brooklyn Bridge Centennial in 1983, Pratt Institute organized a group show of 25 artists at five parks in Brooklyn and Manhattan. The sculptors, chosen from 500 proposals, created works based on a theme of bridges and connection. The concentration of several works near Brooklyn's civic center at Cadman Plaza was yet another



Ann Magnuson, *All Hail the Lizard King* (detail), *Art on the Beach*, 1985



Toshio Sasaki, *Moving Earth*, 1989



Mel Chin, *The Conditions for Memory*, 1989



Meredith Bergmann, *Anonymous*, 1989



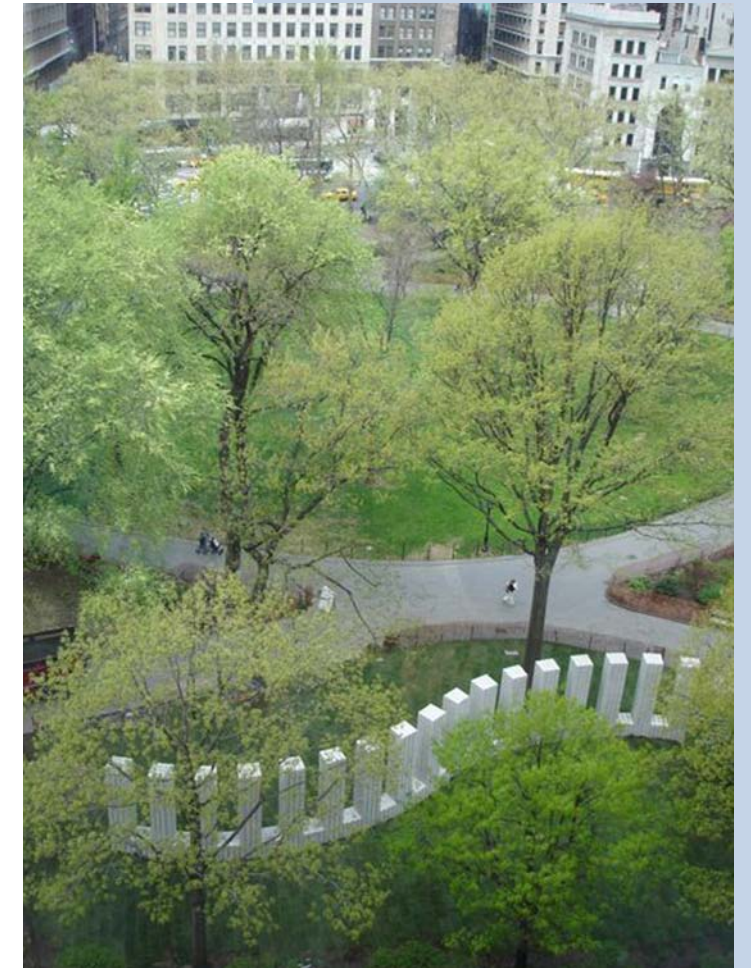
Doug Makemson, *Royal Heron*, 2005

attempt to fulfill the promise first trumpeted in the early 1970s by the Downtown Brooklyn Development Association to revitalize the area by displaying artworks “meant to be seen by people who don’t go to museums.” For more than two decades the Brooklyn Working Artists Coalition and more recently the D.u.m.b.o. Arts Center have programmed the improved public waterfront at Empire-Fulton and Brooklyn Bridge parks with the work of local artists. One of the most ambitious group projects was *Art Across the Park*, first staged in the north end of Central Park in 1980, and expanded to include Prospect, Van Cortlandt and Riverside parks in 1984. Conceived by sculptor David Hammons and curated by Horace Brockington and Gylbert Coker, *Art Across the Park* was an effort (in Brockington’s words) to “get artists and tempt them to use [the park] as a lab.” Short-term visual displays were complemented by a two-

month festival of dance and musical performance pieces. In 1983 the Parks Department established a coordinator to manage the growing temporary public art program, and in 1989 organized *Noah’s Art*, a group invitational exhibition with an animal theme at the southeast portion of Central Park.

There have been several efforts to designate a given park or area within a park as a permanent outdoor sculpture garden of rotating exhibits. Sculpture gardens at Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza (1971), Cadman Plaza (1972), Flushing Meadows Corona Park (1980s) and Hunts Point (Crames Square, 1998) were either short-lived or never realized, unable to secure consistent funding or curatorial attention.

One such dream that did become a reality of long-standing is Socrates Sculpture Park on the East River waterfront of Long Island City, Queens. Salvaged in 1986 from a rubble- and trash-strewn lot by sculptor Mark di Suvero, Socrates has in the intervening two decades nurtured the creativity of nearly 600 artists, often granting them an opportunity to create a public piece for the first time. In 1993 Socrates was designated a municipal park, and today sustains an international reputation as a place



Sol LeWitt, *Curved Wall with Towers*, 2005



Left: Socrates Sculpture Park, 1994



Jennifer Zackin, *Pachakúti*, Socrates Sculpture Park, 2002

where cutting-edge public art finds a home in a relaxed setting. Three more venerable places that trace their origins to the mid-19th century have reinvigorated themselves and attracted a wider patronage by cultivating public art. At Wave Hill, a cultural center and public garden in the Riverdale neighborhood of the Bronx, a contemporary art program has drawn visitors to its historic grounds since 1977, producing a satisfying symbiosis of old and new. At Snug Harbor Cultural Center on Staten Island, since the mid-1980s artists have been offered studio and exhibit space at this former retired seamen's community. More recently, the Madison Square Park Conservancy has established an adventurous program of temporary art displays by some of the leading artists of the day, making the park an avant-garde destination.

Has temporary public art fulfilled its early promise? One objective was to help transform parks and public places. It's difficult to gauge a direct causal improvement, though the physical fabric of New York's urban landscape has certainly rebounded during this 40-year period. When Parks Commissioner Gordon Davis declined Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *The Gates* after much consideration in 1979, it was on the basis that the artwork it was to use as its canvas—Central Park—was at the time in such poor condition from over-programming that its preservation should be the City's foremost concern. By 2005 when *The Gates* eventually wowed New Yorkers and the world, a healthier balance had been achieved in which art and nature could coexist.



Keith Haring, *Crack is Wack*, 1986



Tom Otterness, *Trial Scene* (detail), 2004



Andrea Zittel, *Point of Interest*, 1999



Keith Haring, *Red Dog*, 1997



Robert Indiana, *Eight*, 2003

Tom Otterness on Broadway (2004), which included more than two dozen sculptures on the Broadway Malls from Columbus Circle to Washington Heights, was indicative of the renaissance of these formerly forlorn traffic islands. On the Upper East Side, a series of solo shows on Park Avenue, including “blue-chip” artists such as Fernando Botero (1993), Barry Flanagan (1995), Keith Haring (1997), Robert Indiana (2003), Jean Dubuffet (2003), Beverly Pepper (2005) and Deborah Butterfield (2005) coincided with a general upswing of the city’s economic health. Some artworks, such as Andrea Zittel’s simulated rock outcropping at Doris Freedman Plaza in 1999, *Point of Interest*, have paid explicit homage to the city’s vibrant historic landscapes.

The improved condition and the beautification of the city's parks sometimes present a challenge to artists. When the temporary public art program was born, many of New York's premier parks were in a severe state of deterioration. Withered landscapes and barren spaces were the norm. Many parks were virtually a blank slate begging for broad experimental solutions. It's harder to compete with superior horticulture and public spaces designed with much consideration and community input. Some artists have even enlisted plants as a medium,



Julita Wojcik, *My Garden*, 2003

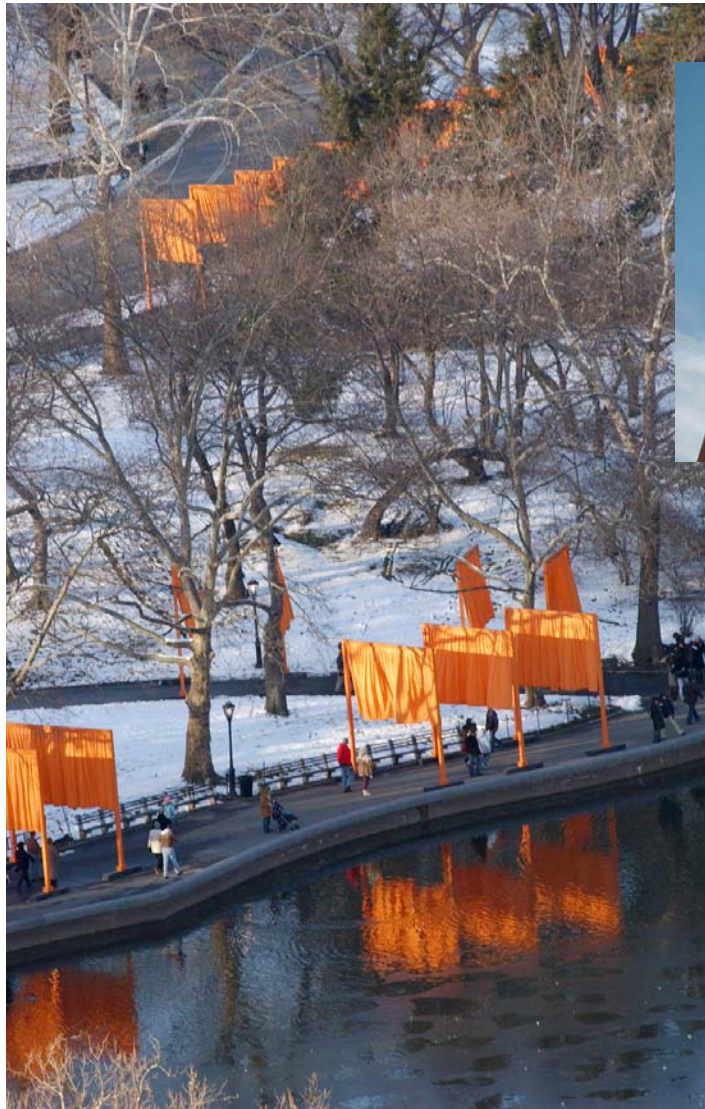
such as the SculptureCenter-sponsored *My Garden* by Julita Wojcik at Court Square in Long Island City (2003) and the multi-site installation called *The Artist's Garden After Modernism*, organized by the Queens Museum in 2005.

Yet with parks on the rebound, and park partner groups supporting their care and programming, public art is in vogue. Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and First Deputy Mayor Patricia E. Harris have recognized the value of the arts, and encouraged the support of public art as a catalyst for civic improvements and an amenity available to all New Yorkers. In addition, the Department

of Cultural Affairs, led by Commissioner Kate Levin, has facilitated many art projects through the Percent for Art program. The administration's support for *The Gates* enabled the project to happen at long last and become an international success, and for the first time in more than a decade public art was displayed in the people's "front yard," City Hall Park.



Brian Tolle, *Witch Catcher*, 2003



Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Gates*, 2005



Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Gates* (detail), 2005

A wide array of nonprofits have followed the Mayor's lead, and are enlisting foundations, corporations, commercial galleries, museums and private collectors to support these temporary "interventions" as ways to create points of dynamic interest, as well as to lure new park patrons. The use of new media, including video and wireless technology, is becoming increasingly widespread, as is the blurring of the artistic disciplines of sculpture, landscape and architecture. Yet for all of this activity, a certain raw energy, spontaneity, and improvisational quality that characterized earlier years may have been sacrificed.

There has always been an inherent tension between the art of the studio and the art of the street. Artists such as Keith Haring began their careers in guerrilla actions (Haring painted a handball court without official permission), and later were sanctioned by the commercial art world. Arturo DiModica actively courted publicity in 1989—and secured worldwide fame—when he deposited his *Charging Bull* sculpture on Wall Street. *Cow Parade* (2000) took this promotional approach a step further, turning public art into a commodity to be franchised.

A more profound challenge is how to mediate between the private act of making art and the inevitably varied public response. Does public art fulfill a basic human need of discovery, or is it merely a distraction? Does granting public artists unfettered creative license lead to self-indulgence? How much should the public be included in the choice of projects? The impulse to be democratic may be admirable, but what happens when the selection of public art is in danger of devolving into a popularity contest or is subject to political calculation? Can such a standard prove exploitative or opportunistic, ultimately appealing (in an effort to not offend) to the least common denominator? Is the encouragement of pure artistic expression in our public spaces an equally valid strategy, an affirmation of democratic ideals?

After 40 years of public art programming, a few things are certain. Four decades of more than 1,000 public art projects in our parks have raised the public's expectations. The average citizen is now much more likely to have encountered a work of contemporary art in a park. There is surprisingly little vandalism. In the media age we have been exposed to the conventions of art, and we are also more familiar with the ways in which those conventions can be flouted. Sometimes circumstances can even cause the public to create its own spontaneous ephemeral forms of expression, as was demonstrated by the temporary memorials that sprouted in the parks in the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001. New York's oldest permanent public sculpture, *George Washington* in Union Square, was reinvigorated as the focus of this activity.



Fernando Botero, *Big Hand*, 1993

Whether public art projects are viewed as intrusions into our daily lives or enhancements of the cityscape, they are certainly not governed by an overriding master plan or principle. Through their sheer cumulative force they have established themselves as legitimate parts of the mix of activities that enlivens our parks. Has this made us blasé? People's reactions would seem to indicate otherwise. Temporary public art continues to assert a strong presence in a city of virtually limitless visual competition, and at its best holds the power to surprise, stir debate, and cause the occasional scandal. And whether we stop to stare or accept them as part of our daily rounds, these public artistic expressions encourage us to rethink our physical and cultural surroundings, and our place within this complex landscape.

TIMELINE: TEMPORARY PUBLIC ART IN NYC PARKS

This timeline includes some highlights of the 40 years of temporary public art in New York City parks.



1



2



3



4



5



6

1967

Exhibition of Tony Smith's geometric sculptures is installed in January at Bryant Park.

Sculpture in Environment is organized in October by Doris Freedman.

"Sculpture of the Month" program is launched in December by the Parks Department, under the Recreation and Cultural Affairs Administration. Clement Meadmore's *Upstart* is the first in this series of short-term installations.

1968

CITYarts, a nonprofit public art organization dedicated to community-based programs with children, is founded.

Machines and Nanas, by Jean Tinguely and Niki de Saint Phalle, is displayed at Central Park's Conservatory Garden.

1969

City Walls, a nonprofit organization, is incorporated; it is dedicated to providing artists opportunities for art creation in public settings.

1970

Tal Streeter's *Endless Column* is erected at Fifth Avenue and 79th Street.

Alan Sonfist's *Crystals* is placed at the entrance to the American Museum of Natural History in Theodore Roosevelt Park.

1971

Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza sculpture garden is inaugurated with an exhibition of works by Alexander Liberman.

1972

Downtown Brooklyn Development Association starts a sculpture garden of changing exhibitions at Borough Hall Plaza.

Louise Nevelson's *Night Presence IV* is displayed in Central Park at Fifth Avenue and 60th Street. The following year the sculpture is permanently placed in the center mall at Park Avenue and East 92nd Street.

Washington Heights Neighborhood Action Program sponsors the display of public art at sites in northern Manhattan.

1973

Warren Padula's *Black Atlantis* is displayed near the Harlem Meer in the north end of Central Park; the art site is dubbed "Liberation Plaza."

Marta Pan's *Floating Sculpture* is mounted in the pond at the southeast corner of Central Park.

1974

Creative Time, a nonprofit public art programmer fostering artistic experimentation, is founded.

1975

The Whitney Museum sponsors a five-borough exhibition of sculptures by Mark di Suvero, including installations at Joyce Kilmer Park and the Bronx Zoo; Cadman Plaza and Prospect Park; Battery Park, Central Park, Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza and Seagram Plaza; Astoria Park and Flushing Meadows Corona Park; and Silver Lake Park.



7



8



9



10



11

1976

Sculptures by Igael Tumarkin are displayed in Flushing Meadows Corona Park.

1977

The Public Art Fund is founded and sponsors Ronald Bladen's *Kama Sutra* in Central Park. Mayor-elect Edward I. Koch attends the opening.

The Organization of Independent Artists is founded, and produces a group exhibition of 13 artists in Battery Park and Foley Square. The OIA organizes similar exhibitions annually in these parks through 1981.

Wave Hill, a public garden and cultural center at Riverdale Park in the Bronx, organizes its first outdoor sculpture exhibition.

1978

Art on the Beach, a group show, is staged by Creative Time on the landfill at the north end of Battery Park City. These group shows occurred there through 1985; today this location includes Rockefeller Park, apartment buildings and public schools.

Sculptor Robert Taplin and poet Daniel Wolff collaborate on *Welcome to New Haven* installation in Union Square Park.

Christy Rupp's *Food Chain Piece* is installed in City Hall Park and Central Park.

1979

Jean Dubuffet's *La Chiffoniere* is displayed in Central Park.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude propose *The Gates* for Central Park.

1980

Art Across the Park initiates a group exhibition of 20 artists in the northern part of Central Park; in 1984 *Art Across the Park* programs Central, Riverside, Van Cortlandt and Prospect parks.

Francis Hines wraps the Washington Square Arch.

1981

The Report and Determination: Christo Gates in Central Park is issued by Parks Commissioner Gordon J. Davis; the project is declined.

Kit-Yin Snyder is named artist-in-residence in Bryant Park, through a collaboration of the newly created Bryant Park Restoration Corporation and the Public Art Fund. Other artists-in-residence at Bryant Park include Kazuko (1982), Scott Pfaffman (1983) and Mel Chin (1984).

1982

The plaza at the southeast corner of Central Park, Fifth Avenue and 60th Street, programmed by the Public Art Fund, is officially named for Doris C. Freedman.

1983

The Public Art Fund organizes the *Cadman Plaza Sculpture Garden* group exhibition in Brooklyn.

The Parks Department's office of Monuments and Historic Parks appoints its first public art coordinator, to facilitate the increasing number of temporary installations.

For the Brooklyn Bridge's centennial, Pratt Institute organizes *Bridges*, a group show of 25 artists at four parks in Brooklyn and Manhattan. Collaborating organizations include the Gowanus Artyard, Organization of Independent Artists, the Public Art Fund, and the Rotunda Gallery.



12



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1984

George and Virginia Ablah loan 25 sculptures by Henry Moore for display in parks in all five boroughs.

The Lower Manhattan Cultural Council sponsors its first park public art project, Lisa Hoke's *Molecular Motion*, in Kenmare Square.

Jenny Holzer's mobile art project, *Sign on a Truck*, is displayed at Bowling Green Park and Grand Army Plaza, Manhattan.

Vito Acconci's *Face of the Earth* is installed at City Hall Park.

1985

100 Ducks, a public art project by Payton Wilkinson and Timothy Siciliano, is displayed in Battery and Bryant parks.

Jane Greengold's *A Drop in the Bucket* is installed in Collect Pond Park.

Snug Harbor Cultural Center on Staten Island organizes its first outdoor sculpture exhibition.

1986

Sculptor Mark di Suvero creates *Socrates Sculpture* Park at Hallett's Cove in Long Island City, Queens.

The Public Art Fund and Bryant Park Restoration Corporation present an exhibition of sculptures by George Rickey.

Keith Haring paints *Crack is Wack* mural on a handball court in East Harlem.

1987

Alice Ayccock's *Threefold Manifestation II* and Richard Artschwager's *Counter III* are displayed at Doris Freedman Plaza.

Scott Pfaffman's *Frankie and Johnny* is shown at Queensbridge Park.

Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel's *Pananemone* is exhibited in City Hall Park.

1988

Survival Research Laboratories, Creative Time and the New Museum stage a performance piece in the Shea Stadium parking lot at Flushing Meadows Corona Park.

Julian Schnabel's *Helen of Troy* is sponsored by Christie's Auction House at Tramway Plaza in Manhattan.

Roosevelt Park Community Coalition and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council organize a group sculpture exhibition in Sara Delano Roosevelt Park.

1989

Noah's Art group sculpture exhibition of animal-themed art is staged in Central Park.

Stefani Mar and Shirin Neshat's *Orientation* is installed in East River Park.

Charging Bull by Arturo DiModica is dropped in front of the New York Stock Exchange, then moved to Bowling Green.

1990

Karen Finley's *The Black Sheep* is mounted at First Street Park.

William Fulbrecht's *Bill of Rights* is displayed at Foley Square, Hanover Square and City Hall Park.

Willie Birch and Red Hook art students paint the *Multi-Generational Mural* at Coffey Park in Brooklyn.

Grace Knowlton's *Sphere and Shard* is sponsored by the Queens Museum in Flushing Meadows Corona Park.

1991

Melvin Edwards's *Tomorrow's Wind* is displayed at Doris Freedman Plaza. Commissioned by the Department of Cultural Affairs's Percent for Art Program, in 1995 it is placed permanently at Thomas Jefferson Park.

Artist-in-residence Robert Ressler carves wood sculptures in Flushing Meadows Corona Park; the works are later displayed at Riverside and Thomas Paine parks.

Terry Lee Dill's *Creative Blindness: Memorial to the End of Racism* is displayed at Cadman Plaza, Brooklyn.



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1992

Kenny Scharf and Citykids Foundation produce *Speak on Growth* mural at Union Square Park.

In Battery Park, REPOhistory marks the site of the "Great Negro Plot of 1741."

Nick Micros carves *World's Fair*-inspired forms from limestone as artist-in-residence at Flushing Meadows Corona Park.

Nancy Cohen's *A Community of Shelter* is installed in Thomas Paine Park.

1993

Fernando Botero's sculptures are installed along the Park Avenue Malls.

Alexander Calder's *Big Crinkly* is displayed at Bryant Park.

Socrates Sculpture Park is designated an official New York City park.

Rhonda Roland Shearer's *Woman's Work* sculpture series is displayed at Union Square Park.

1994

Melinda Hunt's *Circle of Hope*, a fenced cornfield, marks the site of a former potter's field in Madison Square Park.

Fernand Leger's *La Grande Fleur Qui Marche* is displayed at Park Avenue and 57th Street.

Sheree Kaslikowski's *Flight & Balance* is erected at Hellgate Park, Queens.

1995

Barry Flanagan's bronze hares are placed on the Park Avenue Malls.

1996

Karin Giusti's *The White House-Green House* is installed in Battery Park.

Ken Chu's *Dream Team* at Columbus Park in Chinatown is sponsored by the Museum of Chinese in the Americas.

1997

Keith Haring sculptures are displayed on the Park Avenue Malls.

Esther Grillo paints *Mythical Cavern*, the first in a series of murals in Rockaway Beach's historic bus shelters created for the New York World's Fair of 1939-40.

Gene Flores's *Love Seats* is installed at Battery Park.

1998

Sculptures are created by Marsha Trattner, Jennifer Kapnek and the Building Foundations School of Art as part of the temporary "Hunts Point Sculpture Garden" at Crames Square in the Bronx.

Willem de Kooning sculptures are featured at Bryant Park and Doris Freedman Plaza.

1999

The Empire State art show, including works by David Smith, Isamu Noguchi and George Sugarman, is held at Lincoln Center.

Wave Hill launches the generated@wavehill program of commissioned temporary artworks on its grounds.

Recreation of Leonardo da Vinci's *Il Cavallo* is placed in Peter Cooper Park.



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2000

Steve Tobin's bronze *Termite Mounds* and *Roots* are displayed at Montefiore Park and Theodore Roosevelt Park.

Tony Oursler's *The Influence Machine* launches Target Art in the Park series in Madison Square Park.

Cow Parade features artist-decorated cow sculptures at numerous sites.

2001

Voss Finn's *Dragonfly Dome* is mounted on the pier at Riverside South Park.

Art in General presents the artist duo Sontext's *Hush* in Duarte Square.

2002

The Whitney Biennial and Public Art Fund sponsor a group show in Central Park, including works by Roxy Paine, Kim Sooja, Brian Tolle and Keith Edmier.

Urban Air Forms features works by eight artists sponsored by the Rockaway Artists Alliance in Flushing Meadows Corona Park.

Nancy Hwang's *S: An Urban Oasis* is a one-month performance piece in Lt. Petrosino Park.

Brett Cook-Dizney's *Information for Peace and Democracy* murals are installed at Tremont Park and Flynn Playground in the Bronx.

2003

The Public Art Fund curates *Metrospective*, an exhibition in City Hall Park featuring works by Walter Martin and Paloma Munoz, Peter Rostovsky, Brian Tolle, Art Domanty, Ken Landauer and Do-Ho Suh.

Light Cycle, a Creative Time fireworks project by Cai Guo Qiang, is set off in Central Park.

Julita Wojcik's *My Garden*, sponsored by the Sculpture Center, is planted at Court Square in Queens.

George Segal's *Street Crossing* is displayed at Doris Freedman Plaza.

2004

Tom Otterness on Broadway, 25 sculptures, is exhibited on the Broadway Malls from Columbus Circle to Washington Heights.

Laurie Hawkinson, John Malpede and Erica Rothenberg's *Freedom of Expression National Monument* is reprised by Creative Time and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council in Foley Square. The project was first shown at Art on the Beach in 1984.

Lina Puerta's *Confesiones Desde El Vientre* (Confessions From the Womb) is hung from trees in Manuel de Dios Triangle in Queens.

2005

Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *The Gates* is installed along 23 miles of Central Park's paths, 26 years after first being proposed to the City. Four million visitors attend.

Janet Cardiff creates her audio tour, *Her Long Black Hair*, a project of the Public Art Fund in Central Park.

Alejandro Diaz's *A Can for All Seasons* is displayed on the Grand Concourse in the Bronx.

Deborah Butterfield's *Deep Time*, *Cicada* and *Wilder* are placed on the Park Avenue Malls.

2006

Sol LeWitt's *Curved Wall with Towers* and *Circle and Towers* are installed as part of the ongoing Mad. Sq. Art sculpture series.

Francisco Leiro's *Speechless I-IV* and *Caracalla* are presented by Instituto Cervantes and Marlborough Gallery at Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza.

Garden of Delights, the 24th annual group show by the Brooklyn Working Artists Coalition, includes works for the first time in Brooklyn Bridge Park.

Studio in the Park, a group exhibition, is installed in Riverside Park.

2007

Seth Weiner's *The Fortunate Islands* is displayed at Thomas Paine Park.

Bill Fontana's sound sculpture *Panoramic Echoes* is presented at Madison Square Park.

Liz Larner's *2001* is exhibited at Doris Freedman Plaza.

Leonard Ursachi's *Hiding Place* is displayed at Prospect Park.

Multi-park exhibition is mounted by Parks & Recreation in all five boroughs to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of temporary public art in the parks.

Selected Public Art Organizations

Art Commission of the City of New York

www.nyc.gov/html/artcom/html/home/home.shtml

Art in General • www.artingeneral.org

CITYarts • www.cityarts.org

BWAC (Brooklyn Waterfront Artists Coalition) • <http://bwac.org>

Bronx Council on the Arts • [www://bronxarts.org](http://www.bronxarts.org)

Brooklyn Arts Council • [www://brooklynartscouncil.org](http://www.brooklynartscouncil.org)

Council on the Arts & Humanities for Staten Island • [www://statenislandarts.org](http://www.statenislandarts.org)

Creative Time • www.creativetime.org

D.u.m.b.o. Arts Center (dac) • www.dumboartscenter.org

Lower Manhattan Cultural Council • www.lmcc.net

Mad. Sq. Art • www.madisonsquarepark.org

MTA Arts for Transit • www.mta.info/mta/aft/index.html

New York City Department of Cultural Affairs Percent for Art Program

www.nyc.gov/html/dcla/html/home/home/shtml

New York City Department of Parks & Recreation Public Art Program

www.nycgovparks.org/sub_things_to_do/attractions/public_art/public_art.html

Organization of Independent Artists • www.oiaonline.org

Public Art Fund • www.publicartfund.org

Queens Council on the Arts • [www://queenscouncilarts.org](http://www.queenscouncilarts.org)

Rockaway Artists Alliance • www.rockawayartistsalliance.org

SculptureCenter • www.sculpture-center.org

Snug Harbor Cultural Center • www.snug-harbor.org

Socrates Sculpture Park • www.socratessculpturepark.org

Storefront for Art and Architecture • www.storefrontnews.org

Wave Hill • www.wavehill.org

West Harlem Art Fund • www.myharlem.org



Keith Haring painting mural at Carmine Pool, 1987

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- Pg. 18. Kit-Yin Snyder, Artist in Residence, Bryant Park, 1981, photo by Donna Svennevik, PAF

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Pages 32–41

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Minsuk Cho, *Ringed Dome Pavilion*, Lt. Petrosino Square, Manhattan



David Hardy, *Field Display #2*, Cadman Plaza, Brooklyn



Jeppe Hein, *Modified Social Bench I*, Court Square, Queens



In October 2007, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of its public art program, New York City Parks & Recreation presents 40 art installations at parks throughout the five boroughs. All exhibitions are free and open to the public. Exhibitors include key partners such as the Public Art Fund, Socrates Sculpture Park, Madison Square Park Conservancy, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, Creative Time, and the Storefront for Art and Architecture, as well as galleries and independent artists.

Please visit the Parks website for further details and maps:

www.nyc.gov/parks