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3 Outdoor Art Shows and One Trusty Dog (With Tricks!)



Donald Lipski's "Spot," at the Hassenfeld Children's Hospital at NYU Langone, features a 24-foot-tall Dalmatian balancing a taxi (yes, that's a real New York City cab) on its nose. Credit: George Etheredge for The New York Times

By Nancy Princenthal
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Summer is winding down, but outdoor art in New York City is thriving, as this sampling of fresh new work shows. From political art on the High Line to a playful sculpture outside a children's hospital on the East Side, these exhibitions across the city will make you want to linger outdoors.

VARIOUS ARTISTS High Line

The High Line is nearly 10 years old, and its precisely chosen plantings have gotten as tall and unruly as the new buildings rising around it. Amid this rampant growth, works by nine artists from seven countries have been brought together for the exhibition "Agora." The art makes its mark even while taking cover in the greenery.



Andrea Bowers's sign lights up at night and reads "Somos 11 Millones" on one side and "We Are 11 Million" on the other, referring to undocumented immigrants. Credit: George Etheredge for The New York Times

The exhibition's title is the ancient Greek word for town square, and here refers particularly to the use of such public space by those whose right to speak has been challenged. In the most forthright expression of this theme, Andrea Bowers has created an eye-catching sign that

lights up at night and reads "Somos 11 Millones" on one side and "We Are 11 Million" on the other, drawing attention to the number of undocumented immigrants in the United States. The immigrants' rights group Movimiento Cosecha chose the words, at Ms. Bowers's invitation.

Other signage appears, by Pope.L and by Sable Elyse Smith, whose "Ironwoodland" mimics the Hollywood sign in Los Angeles. It also refers to the whites-only housing development that the Hollywood sign was originally built to promote — and to Ironwood State Prison.

However rich in meaning, these boldfaced artworks are made for legibility; they can be read quickly and from a distance. Indeed, looking at art along the High Line, with its steady procession of pedestrians and the high-tech circus of construction beyond, may bring to mind viewing Michelangelo's "Pietà" at the 1964 World's Fair. (The 27 million people who saw the work, which was sealed behind glass, were herded along on a moving walkway.)

Sculptures in "Agora" that are worth stepping out of the procession for include the Irish artist Mariechen Danz's "The Dig of No Body (soil sample)," an elegant, fragmented life-size figure assembled from disparate parts: charred-looking, pitted black plaster feet; wooden calves; a resin torso embedded with bits of colorful junk; and a variegated head. Hinged to a black vertebral column, they form a striking, if provisional, alignment.



Mariechen Danz's "The Dig of No Body (soil sample)," on the High Line. Credit: George Etheredge for The New York Times

Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa's "Void Ratio of a Bunk Bed," a two-tiered aluminum bed frame nearly hidden among a clutch of leafy sassafras trees, is more fugitive, and more haunting. Mr. Ramírez-Figueroa, who is Guatemalan, seems to invoke the illicit orphanages created for the adoption — often by Americans — of children whose parents had been killed in his country's civil war.

Promising little in the way of rest or safety, the bed is cobbled together from casts of frail tree limbs. Slats are missing; some of the supports seem to have been broken and bandaged. The work isn't easy to spot while marching in the High Line parade, but it sounds a piercing, lingering alarm.

Through March 2019 at the High Line, which extends from Gansevoort Street to West 34th Street on Manhattan's West Side; art.thehighline.org.

MAREN HASSINGER

Marcus Garvey Park

There are fewer tourists in Marcus Garvey Park than along the High Line, but this Harlem agora, dedicated to the Jamaican-born black nationalist who envisioned a global, Africa-centered community, is enormously active, with basketball courts, a pool and sprinklers for toddlers. The eight “Monuments” that the esteemed sculptor (and Harlem resident) Maren Hassinger has placed around this park honor its rich sociability as well as its history and, not least, the big, grand trees that shade its varied topography.



One of Maren Hassinger's “Monuments,” bundled branches shaped into geometric and organic forms, at Marcus Garvey Park in Harlem. Credit George Etheredge for The New York Times

Made of bundled branches shaped into alternately geometric and organic forms, the “Monuments,” a project of the Studio Museum in Harlem, converse easily with elements of the park. They include a generously scaled ring near a big swimming pool, and a substantial standing cube, its surfaces a checkered weave of horizontally and vertically placed branches, near chess tables and patterned pavers. A surging river of branches is nearly camouflaged by the curving stone wall it hugs; a low, sloping form emerges from the grass like an outcropping of schist.

Ms. Hassinger first worked with gathered tree limbs 40 years ago, and in the intervening decades has often chosen materials, from unbraided wire to twisted strips of newsprint, that echo the branching forms of trees. Returning to branches stripped of their bark, she exploits both their raw power and their vulnerability.



Ms. Hassinger has returned to gathered tree limbs, the material she first worked with 40 years ago. Credit George Etheredge for The New York Times

Through June 10, 2019, at Marcus Garvey Park, along Madison Avenue between 120th and 124th Streets, Manhattan; studiomuseum.org.

DONALD LIPSKI

Hassenfeld Children's Hospital at NYU Langone



Permanently installed at the entryway of the Hassenfeld Children's Hospital at NYU Langone, Donald Lipski's “Spot,” a 24-foot-tall fiberglass Dalmatian, balances a New York City yellow taxi on its nose. The taxi is real — it's a gutted Prius — and dog and cab are eye to eye. When it rains, the cab's windshield wipers go on.

“Spot” invokes a couple of generations of animated films starring anthropomorphic cars, as well as even more familiar children's movies featuring dogs, specifically “101 Dalmatians.” Jeff Koons's giant floral puppy is somewhere in the mix, too.

Mr. Lipski, a veteran public artist with an acute sense of materials, purpose and place, is canny about all these references. But this colossal canine (made with the assistance of the realist sculptor Chris Collins) is uniquely irresistible. Its eyes bright, stance firm, tail curled happily and ears trustingly down, it seems ready to hold this impossible balancing act forever.

Mr. Lipski has said that besides wanting this work to be playful, he intended it “to have assets we hope to find in our doctors: focus, confidence, patience and sweetness.” At the same time, “Spot” opens a little door in the real world, wormholing straight to the joyful absurdity of a happy kid's dream life, a destination that never gets old.

Hassenfeld Children's Hospital at NYU Langone, on 34th Street between First Avenue and the Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive; nyulangone.org.

B. WURTZ

City Hall Park

Surrounding City Hall Park's quatrefoil fountain, an early Gilded Age confection abounding with gushing water jets and repurposed gaslights, are four insouciant "Kitchen Trees" by the sculptor B. Wurtz, which were commissioned by the Public Art Fund. Their trunks are tall, Brancusiesque columns of enameled metal colanders, stacked rim to rim and foot to foot, each column a different cheery color (blue, orange, yellow, green); springing from their tops are heavy-gauge wire branches, each bearing a pot or a pan.

Suspended from these cooking vessels, in turn, are gaily colored plastic fruits and vegetables — bananas, peppers, pears, ears of corn — that bounce around in the breeze in irreverent colloquy with the park's well-tended greenery. Mr. Wurtz's indoor sculpture tends toward wry conjunctions of unassuming materials, including the kinds of flimsy plastic shopping bags that festoon so many urban trees, unintended ornaments to which these interloping "Kitchen Trees" nod happily.



The branches of one of B. Wurtz's "Kitchen Trees," on display in City Hall Park. Credit George Etheredge for The New York Times

At the south end of the park is a fifth tree, this one's trunk a distinctly phallic red. It is planted on a plaque that outlines, in etched-granite images and text, a history of the site, beginning with the arrival of the Dutch (the native population is scarcely mentioned) and concluding with the triumphalist mayoralty of Rudolph W. Giuliani (who oversaw the park's renovation). Around the plaque's perimeter, in imperative uppercase, is a text that begins, "It must not be forgotten that the park is still the refuge of the people." Mr. Wurtz helps make sure that we feel at home.

Through Dec. 7 at City Hall Park, Broadway and Chambers Street, Manhattan; publicartfund.org.