



High Art

Public Art on the High Line

Edited by Cecilia Alemani

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Skira RIZZOLI
NEW YORK

Marianne Vitale, *Common Crossings*, 2014.
Part of *Archeo*, a High Line Commission.
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On view December 2–30, 2011.

Art for All: A History of High Line Art

Cecilia Alemani

The \$100,000 Question

On December 2, 2011, the enigmatic image of a \$100,000 bill appeared on a giant billboard next to the High Line at West 18th Street and 10th Avenue. Visitors and passersby were puzzled: Was it an ad? And if so, it featured no product image or brand name, so what was it actually trying to sell? Or was it some kind of comment on the financial crisis that continued to cripple the global economy? Was it simply a statement about the perfect picture of happiness? In many ways, the appearance of the giant bill seemed to signal someone's attempt to publicly air someone else's dirty laundry. But even if it intended to reference some clandestine business dealing, it nevertheless continued to defy interpretation and understanding.

The billboard elicited many reactions: people pointed, laughed, took photos, scratched their chins, and shook their heads in disbelief; each person had an opinion and a different reaction, and each person was left guessing as to its meaning or purpose. Very few could imagine that the \$100,000 bill was actually an artwork conceived by legendary artist John Baldessari as the inaugural project in a series of interventions called High Line Billboard, a new signature platform of High Line Art, the public art program of the High Line in New York City.

An exact replica of a high-currency bill issued in 1934 as a gold certificate to allow transfers among banks, Baldessari's \$100,000 note—carrying the severe face of Woodrow Wilson—stood above the hectic corridor of 10th Avenue for the entire month of December 2011, a perfect complement to the holiday season. With his characteristically irreverent wit and tongue-in-cheek approach, Baldessari had delivered a powerful public artwork: at once ironic and provocative, funny and critical, open to an endless drift of interpretations, and capable of initiating a chain reaction of conversations and opinions, all legitimate and plausible, all equally correct and erroneous.

Although each viewer interpreted the unexpected image in different ways, each shared the goal

of coming to terms with this artwork-turned-advertisement and this advertisement-turned-artwork. This public image was indeed a public artwork, and not simply because it was installed outside for all to see, but because it demanded a collective form of awareness and participation in order to be understood, engaged with, criticized, unpacked, and, ultimately, exist in all its complexity. As Gilbert & George, whose work was also featured as part of High Line Billboard, remind us every day with their renowned motto "Art For All," art has a civic function, one that extends beyond the limiting boundaries of the art world.

Baldessari's project—the first I organized after joining Friends of the High Line in October 2011 as the Donald R. Mullen, Jr. Curator & Director of High Line Art—came to encapsulate many of the values that I have worked to imbue in the art program: a dedication to bringing important contemporary art to a wide and diverse audience; a desire to surprise viewers with artworks that utilize public channels of communication in new and challenging ways, prompting them to question the role and function of images in public space; and a conviction that artworks are first and foremost sites of encounter and exchange of opinions and experiences.

The High Line and Friends of the High Line

The High Line is certainly not the most traditional, or easily navigable, place for public art: it is a repurposed abandoned elevated railway transformed into a relatively narrow green walkway perched thirty feet above the ground. With its elegantly minimal, yet highly sophisticated design, the High Line snakes through the neighborhood's buildings, providing an unusual backdrop for art. Lush vegetation runs in and out of the old rail tracks, adding a unique natural layer to the setting that further augments the viewer's contemplation of the works of art. When presented on the High Line, art appears to be at once deeply rooted within the park itself, hidden among

the vegetation or camouflaged among the architectural landscape, and yet strangely foreign, perennially out of place. As the High Line flies above the city's streets and coasts along its avenues, opening up rare panoramas onto the surrounding built environment, it weaves art into the fabric of the city. There is something perfectly photogenic about encountering art on the High Line: As a suspended promenade, it encourages multiple viewpoints both onto the city and onto the art that dots its path. This aspect of its construction, one of the High Line's most extraordinary features, enables viewers to experience art under completely different conditions than those facilitated by traditional gallery spaces or corporate plazas. Floating above ground, the High Line functions as a natural pedestal: Any object placed on it is instantly isolated, framed, and elevated, while simultaneously catapulted into the network of relationships between the neighboring buildings, greenery, vistas, and the constant scrutiny of passing viewers.

The High Line was built as an elevated freight railroad between 1931 and 1934 as part of the West Side Improvement Project. Originally, it ran from 34th Street all the way down to the St. John's Park Terminal on Spring Street in SoHo. Built thirty feet above ground to avoid the danger of trains running at street level—until the construction of the High Line, 10th Avenue was known as “Death Avenue” because of the many fatal accidents that occurred there—the High Line intersected the industrial neighborhoods of Chelsea and the Meatpacking District, delivering goods and products directly to the area's various warehouses and storage facilities, many of which have since been converted to art galleries and other exhibition spaces. But the High Line was slowly abandoned following the increasing popularity of more affordable means of transportation that resulted, primarily, from the deregulation of the trucking industry, which has dominated commercial transportation in the United States ever since. Its southern section was demolished in the 1960s and, in 1980, the last train was sent on one final voyage—carrying a load of frozen turkeys, as legend has it.

Constantly under threat of demolition, the High Line was left eerily deserted and isolated for more than two decades. With its imposing steel structure ornamented with thousands of rivets and its distinctive dark gray color, the elevated bridge was only visible from the street level: raised above the boulevards of New York as a relic of a futuristic past, it also evoked the ultramodern landscapes of a science-fiction megalopolis—a sight worthy of Fritz Lang's delirious dreams, as embodied in his legendary movie *Metropolis*, which was released just two years before the High Line railway was built. In contrast to its hyper-technological beginnings,

the then-abandoned High Line slowly began to turn time backwards: Among the old rusty train tracks and accumulated dirt and debris, a self-seeded garden of wildflowers and native grasses began growing, indifferent to a city bursting all around it. In 2000–2001, twenty years after the High Line's forced obsolescence, artist Joel Sternfeld shot breathtaking photographs of the High Line over four seasons, capturing a stunning wildness amid an urban landscape and a sense of pure isolation that characterized the spontaneous park.

In 1999, two community residents, Joshua David and Robert Hammond, founded Friends of the High Line, a non-profit organization with the mission of saving the elevated structure from the threat of demolition by transforming it into a public space. After ten years of legal battles and constant fundraising, and with the overwhelming support of the local communities and the city, the High Line opened in 2009 as a public park owned by the City of New York and managed and operated by Friends of the High Line—a partnership between private and public that is common in many parks throughout the city. The High Line is known for its thoughtful design and horticulture, which was overseen by James Corner Field Operations in collaboration with the architecture firm Diller Scofidio + Renfro and Piet Oudolf, a Dutch horticulturalist. Oudolf substituted the plants that had been growing on the High Line with a carefully conceived botanical garden that preserved, with studied nonchalance, the impression of a spontaneous, wild, and luxuriant landscape not too dissimilar from the one captured in the photographs of Joel Sternfeld only a few years prior.

The first section of the High Line, from Gansevoort Street to West 20th Street, opened in 2009; the second section, snaking through Chelsea all the way to West 30th Street, opened in 2011; and the northern and most scenic section, which runs from West 30th to 34th Street, opened in 2014, wrapping around the rail yards that lead into Penn Station and commanding sweeping views of the Hudson River. In its first five years, roughly twenty-one million people have visited the High Line, a number that competes with some of New York's major attractions, including the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, and the Museum of Modern Art.

High Line Art

High Line Art was inaugurated in 2009 in conjunction with the opening of the park's first section. There were many reasons to launch an art program on the High Line: First, the park runs through Chelsea, which, beginning in the early 1990s, had

become the heart of New York City's art district, hosting more than three hundred commercial galleries, non-profit organizations, and artists' studios. The art program was a way of acknowledging and paying tribute to the artistic history of the neighborhood, while at the same time aiming to introduce contemporary art in a more democratic way, and to a wider, non-professional audience, far from the intimidating spaces of the white cube galleries found on the street level. Furthermore, some of the early supporters of the efforts of Friends of the High Line were the galleries themselves, such as Mary Boone, Paula Cooper, Barbara Gladstone, and Matthew Marks who strongly believed in using art as a tool to revitalize an area that had previously hosted mainly gas stations, car shops, and storage facilities. An art program was also a way to bring further dynamism to the neighborhood, to encourage the park's constant evolution, and to invite the local communities to return to the High Line again and again.

In 2008, Friends of the High Line Co-Founder Robert Hammond met with Donald R. Mullen, Jr. in the hope that he would join the capital campaign for the High Line. Mullen was interested in supporting the organization, but as a passionate art lover, his true vision lay with the art program, which at that time was planned and overseen in collaboration with Creative Time. Mullen foresaw the importance of public art on the High Line, and underwrote the first gift to support a full-time curator position for Friends of the High Line. In 2009, curator Lauren Ross was appointed the first Donald R. Mullen, Jr. Curator & Director of High Line Art, the newly formed art program, and began commissioning and producing temporary artworks. Five years later, High Line Art presents ambitious and important art every day of the year, rain or shine, and always free of charge.

With the new site of the Whitney Museum of American Art at its southern terminus, Culture Shed at its northern end (scheduled to open in 2018 at the time of this writing), and the many galleries and non-profit organizations that line the streets of Chelsea, the High Line has become the bridge that connects these myriad art institutions, as well as a major artery introducing millions of visitors to contemporary art. Over the years, the High Line has transformed not only into a stunning park, but also a cultural institution: through art and its rich public programs, the High Line believes in cultivating intellectual curiosity along with physical well-being, promoting a culture of wellness for both mind and body.

High Line Art presents a wide range of artworks, which can be encountered in different locations along the length of the park and on surrounding properties. Artists use the High Line and the city

as an open-air platform for their projects: spanning from traditional sculptures to complex installations, from video projections to street-level billboards, from hand-painted murals to live performances, the artworks presented on the High Line engage with the uniqueness of the park, its architecture, and its horticulture, while incorporating its vistas of the city and its visitors as fundamental components of a new urban art experience.

The High Line Art program is articulated across four different formats: High Line Billboard, High Line Channels, High Line Performances, and High Line Commissions.

High Line Billboard: What Do Pictures Want?

Baldessari's \$100,000 bill was part of High Line Billboard, a series of artworks commissioned for a large-scale billboard located at the intersection of West 18th Street and 10th Avenue. Every other month for more than three years, High Line Art has invited artists to use this hybrid space as a canvas on which to exhibit new and historical works. Begun in 2010, the series has featured twenty billboards to date, presenting the works of a diverse group of artists, including Thomas Bayrle, Thomas Demand, Elad Lassry, Louise Lawler, Ryan McGinley, Paola Pivi, Faith Ringgold, and Jonas Wood, among others. By inviting some of today's most influential artists to participate, the High Line Billboard series has become a regular and much-awaited happening for the community. With its imposing size of 25 by 75 feet, the billboard interrupts the commercial bombardment so typical of contemporary cities by inserting into the public space powerful artworks, which play with the imagery and seductive photography associated with advertisements, subverting promotional strategies and viewers' expectations alike.

While at first it appears camouflaged among a constellation of commercial billboards, the High Line Billboard is distinguished by its surreal visual statements and ambiguous messages that appear, at turns, slightly absurd or quietly discomfiting, installed as they are within the city's larger semi-otic landscape. On whom is Anne Collier's giant eye spying? What are Paola Pivi's zebras doing on top of a mountain? And what are Gilbert & George's youths staring at? Perhaps they fear Maurizio Cattelan and Pierpaolo Ferrari's giant fingers that are about to grasp the city itself.

Other artists have created subtler atmospheres: Darren Almond, Thomas Demand, and Joel Sternfeld utilized the billboard as a lookout from which to view a vast panorama—a vantage point for observing

the city's landscape, and beyond. David Shrigley and Allen Ruppersberg turned the billboard into a giant notice board, respectively scribbling in the sky free verses of self-deprecating poetry and scattering posters that compose telegraphic romantic messages. Raymond Pettibon and Faith Ringgold responded to the collective, spontaneously political dimension of the billboard, while Jonas Wood overlapped domestic and public spaces.

Like advertisements stripped bare of any product, the High Line Billboard series often suggests a conflicting attitude towards images: At the same time highly seductive and poignantly critical, the works displayed reflect a deep skepticism and an irresistible attraction towards the power that is invested in the images populating public spaces in contemporary cities. While they stand bold and frontal, the High Line Billboard series is perhaps less assertive than it is interrogative. For all their immediacy and demand for attention, they bring to the fore a question whose elusive answer is often taken for granted: Who has the right to disseminate images in the city, what strategies bring some images to dominate over others, and to what ends? Simultaneously loud and stubbornly silent—for they have no commodity to advertise—the High Line Billboard works invite us to question the function of visual stimuli in urban space, engaging with the ways in which desires are created and attention is manipulated through images and advertisements.

High Line Channels: The Symphony of the City

High Line Channels, two video programs on view since the fall of 2011, use the city itself as an urban screen. High Line Channel 22 exhibits a series of video works that are projected on a wall next to the High Line at West 22nd Street in a setting that resembles an open-air cinema, complete with bleachers for the public. High Line Channel 14, which was introduced in the summer of 2012, plays every day in the 14th Street Passage, its cavernous spaces forming an ideal site to present films and videos. With its video channels, High Line Art has introduced art films and moving images to the High Line, making it the only park in New York City with a daily multimedia program. High Line Channels have featured both new and recent productions, with works by a diverse cast of international artists, including Victor Alimpiev, Haris Epaminonda, Cinthia Marcelle, and Nicole Miller, as well as more historical works by video art pioneers such as John Cage, Shigeo Kubota, Gordon Matta-Clark, and Sturtevant.

In spite of their diversity, the works shown

as part of High Line Channels share a fascination with the city as a living entity, a pulsating organism that thrives under the pillars of the High Line itself. Watching Sturtevant's remake of Warhol's film of the Empire State Building with the actual skyscraper in the distance turns the viewing experience into a series of mirroring images that bounce off, both metaphorically and physically, the surfaces of neighboring buildings. Similarly, Matta-Clark's architectural slivers and cuts take on an entirely different meaning when observed in close proximity to the construction sites that continue to transform the landscape of Manhattan's West Side, where in 1975 Matta-Clark himself had carried out *Day's End*, one of his most legendary cuts, on Pier 52.

This urban archeology is very much part of the texture of High Line Art. Even a joyful piece such as Fischli and Weiss's mesmerizing *The Way Things Go* (1987), when projected on the wall of Channel 14, takes on a more epic tone. It becomes a character who participates in that cacophonous symphony of the city, a symphony that perpetually repeats itself in the endless chain reaction of cars and trucks stopping and starting at every crossroads; of traffic lights blinking red, yellow, and green; of people streaming uptown and downtown like schools of fish. Fischli and Weiss's Rube Goldberg-esque film slowly comes to resemble a miniaturized version of the mechanic ballet that takes place on the streets below the High Line. As experimental filmmakers Dziga Vertov and Walter Ruttmann knew perfectly well, cinema and the modern metropolis are intimately connected. The videos of High Line Channels engage with this tradition, inviting artists to juxtapose their works with the canvas of the city, as in an ever-changing collage.

High Line Performances: A Face in the Crowd

In her performance *One Mile Parkour Film* (2012), Los Angeles-based artist Jennifer West pushed to a dramatic extreme the integration of cinematic experience, urban life, and the sense of the architectural sublime that pervades contemporary cities; situated on the High Line, the performance took on an even more heightened intensity. On September 13, 2012, West affixed one mile of film to the length of the High Line and, for a whole day, she encouraged visitors to leave their marks on the 35mm strip of expansive celluloid. Passersby distractedly walked onto the film, while children and school groups were invited to draw on it with crayons and markers. Other visitors etched into it using keys or scratched it with pebbles. A group of parkour jumpers cast by the artist even pirouetted and stomped on the

Carol Bove, 14, 2013. Part of *Caterpillar*, a High Line Commission. On view May 2013–April 2014.



film. These collective acts of subtle vandalism were literally inscribed onto the surface of the film, which was then transferred onto a digital support and projected onto a wall next to the High Line the following month. The result resembled a Structuralist movie from the 1960s or an abstract film of the early twentieth-century avant-garde, evoking memories of Hans Richter's rhythmic abstractions and Paul Sharits's pulsating vibrations. But unlike its predecessors, West had turned the film itself into a map, or better, a palimpsest, preserving the traces of one day in the life of the city. More accurately, it was the city itself that had left its imprint on West's film, pressing onto both the strip of celluloid and onto the High Line all its mythology of Modernist shocks and Postmodernist frictionless entertainment. By casting the history of cinema onto the very surface of the city, West's project underscored the cinematic quality that characterizes any promenade along the High Line. After all, a walk on the High Line is like an embodied tracking shot: the viewer turns into a camera on a dolly, the High Line into a track sneaking through the canyons of skyscrapers.

While it resulted in a video, West's project was created as part of High Line Performances, a program of live actions and incursions taking place on and around the High Line. The High Line's elevated platform has an unmistakable theatrical quality: It immediately reads as a stage. Diller Scofidio + Renfro instinctively responded to this peculiar quality and even emphasized it by creating various amphitheatres and spaces in which the city and the public are to be experienced as if a spectacle, framed on a stage and cropped into a scene. The narrowness of the High Line also has a strong, unusual impact on the interaction between visitors. As an endless catwalk or one of the promenades that are so typical of many European cities, the High Line is a place where strangers actually look at one another as they walk in opposite directions, turning a stroll into a spontaneous performance of sorts.

Artists invited to present their work on the High Line have enthusiastically responded to these features, imagining performances or staging interventions that engage with both the architecture and the social space of the park. Some have taken advantage of the crowds that form along its length; with a record single-day attendance of over sixty-two thousand people, the High Line can impart an almost viral effect on any performance, amplifying every gesture into a moment of collective exuberance. Performances such as Alison Knowles's classic Fluxus event score *Make a Salad*, for example, take on a different degree of magnitude when presented on the High Line and with the complicity of hundreds of participants. The absurdist, slightly esoteric

irreverence so typical of the 1960s avant-garde turns into a communal ritual in which participants from neighboring communities, art world professionals, and passersby are all pressed side by side. What is perhaps lost in specificity is gained in pervasiveness. And simply remarkable is the sheer energy that a crowd like this can pack as part of a performance. When hundreds of people join in the slightly senseless act of preparing a salad, the subversive verve and the joyful sense of belonging and participation so enthusiastically pursued by Fluxus artists are unleashed with renewed potential, elevated to a new level of volume and strength.

Various classic 1960s and 1970s dance and performance artworks, both obscure and celebrated, have been restaged on and around the park as part of High Line Performances. Channa Horwitz presented *Poem/Opera, The Divided Person* (1978) and Simone Forti, an influential pioneer of contemporary dance, carried out a new version of her work *Huddle* (1961), while the restaging of legendary choreographer Trisha Brown's *Roof Piece* (1971) on the buildings surrounding the Meatpacking District was visible from the elevated walkway. When presented on the High Line, these historic pieces encounter a vast audience who is often unaware that it is being confronted with art. The effect can be exhilarating, inebriating, and at times even infuriating, but it is precisely this multilayered experience of art that High Line Art seeks to create and promote.

Without carting out the usual army of Situationists—or the choir of Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault, and Henri Lefebvre—one cannot help observing how the High Line, isolated on its “stilts,” tends to function as a temporary autonomous zone that is separated both physically and conceptually from the everyday routines carried out at street level. As any park might, the High Line seems to encourage a certain degree of freedom and spontaneity, a carnivalesque, joyful atmosphere of participation and individual expression. It is into this sense of the temporary and festive suspension of rules that many of the artists presenting their performances on the High Line have tapped. The concerts of Mungo Thomson and Jamal Cyrus, for example, had an almost slapstick quality to them, a circus-like absurdity that made them both estranged and endearing. Other artists have connected more directly with the crowd, addressing it as one would during a political assembly. Ryan McNamara, for example, transformed one of the speeches of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter into a music and dance score performed by a group of dancers dressed in psychedelic 1970s pajamas. As they declaimed their mantra of political slogans and promised more blood, sweat, and tears, the per-

High Line Commissions: Monuments in Reverse

While all those projects brought together under the different formats of High Line Billboard, Channels, and Performances are temporary, and in some cases even fleeting in their immediacy, the artworks presented under the rubric of High Line Commissions are kept on view for a full year. They are usually more easily identifiable with the type of sculptures one would expect to find in parks and cities: medium-to-large-scale objects in durable materials such as bronze, cement, marble, and steel. As with all of the projects of High Line Art, the process of curating is always driven by a conscious effort towards complicating and playing with the expectations and stereotypes surrounding public sculpture. As such, along with more traditional monumental or individual sculptures installed in the landscape, High Line Commissions often feature environmental installations, sound works, and murals that animate as well as foster dialogue with the High Line and its surroundings. As Pop Art pioneer Ed Ruscha said when presenting his mural painting *Honey, I Twisted Through More Damn Traffic Today* (1977/2014), his very first public art project in New York City, “I like that it's near trees, so birds and squirrels and lizards can see it too.”

On view throughout the year, High Line Commissions seemingly change appearance with each passing season. In the spring, when the majority of the projects are unveiled, the artworks might be the only visible presence in the park, towering over the budding trees and the low grass. In the summer, hidden among the lush vegetation, the sculptures play hide-and-seek with the natural environment. In the fall, the shiny surfaces of some artworks capture the colors of the incipient foliage, while in winter they are dusted with a layer of snow. The changing conditions of the landscape have both challenged and inspired the artists showing on the High Line; when participating in High Line Commissions, artists know they are working in a context that cannot be found anywhere else, and that they can take full advantage of the unique location in which their work is presented.

This contextual sensibility can lead to a variety of different approaches. Ghanaian artist El Anatsui, for example, installed his vast *Broken Bridge II* (2012) on the side of a building adjacent to the High Line, spanning an entire block between West 21st and 22nd West Streets. Woven into this giant tapestry of rusty metal shards were large swaths of mirrored surfaces that captured and refracted the surrounding landscape and the constantly changing colors of the sky. This hyper-Cubist combination

formers struck acrobatic poses worthy of a pack of cheerleaders at a Merce Cunningham event.

But it was perhaps David Lamelas's discrete intervention *Time Line on the High Line* (2014) that most clearly and subtly revealed the complex interaction of personal freedoms and regimented behaviors that define public space and leisure activities. In *Time Line on the High Line*, Lamelas invited participants and passersby to stand on a line taped on the ground and to spend, or perhaps waste, time together, as they tried to keep track of the passing of a single minute. The performance began with the artist, standing at one end of the line, announcing the current time out loud. The person next to him then kept the time for one minute, and at the end of the minute, recited what he or she thought to be the current time before passing it on to the following participant. In this game of telephone, the relationship between individuals and crowds, between the private and the public, was made quietly visible.

This tension between one's own perception of his or her own personal space and one's location within a collective environment is at the center of another High Line Art project born at the intersection between performance, installation, and urban intervention. *Pier 54* was a special project organized in 2014 as a tribute to a historical event called *Pier 18*, which was curated in 1971 by visionary artist and curator Willoughby Sharp. Over the course of a few days, twenty-seven male artists were invited to stage art events on Pier 18; from simple actions to complex performances that involved several people, the events were all held for the camera and not for a live audience. *Pier 18* resulted in a photo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, where the walls of a project gallery were covered with over three hundred black-and-white photographs immortalizing the gestures of a group of artists who were yet to become some of the most important Conceptual artists in New York City. In a similar spirit, we invited twenty-seven artists for *Pier 54*, this time all female, to stage actions on Hudson River Park's Pier 54, a disused pier at West 13th Street, visible from the High Line. Artists Rosa Barba, LaToya Ruby Frazier, Liz Glynn, Sharon Hayes, Margaret Lee, Marie Lorenz, Jill Magid, and Sara VanDerBeek, among others, staged actions that spanned from giant sentences written on the asphalt surface and subsequently photographed from a helicopter to boat rides under the pier to explore the limestone stalactites encrusted underneath, and from a cinematic beam of light projected from an adjacent building to a drag queen performing at the end of the pier in full costume. The photographs, shot by Liz Ligon, were exhibited in the fall of 2014 in a gallery space in Chelsea and as part of High Line Channel 14.

of architecture, nature, and city life is perhaps one of the defining characteristics of art as experienced on the High Line. Sarah Sze created an installation that doubled as birdhouses, suggesting poetic correspondences between the stacked volumes of condos and housing projects and aviary nests. Marianne Vitale took inspiration from the history of the High Line and erected a series of train track crossings that she transformed into totemic figures. Josh Kline, instead, worked with a specific audience in mind, directing his installation to, or perhaps against, that multiform group of families, students, young professionals, tourists, and out-of-towners who make up the vast majority of the visitors of the High Line. His *Skittles* (2014) was a giant fridge filled to the brim with energy drinks with suspicious contents, such as ground-up sneakers and pulverized credit cards mixed with kale chips, quinoa, and hand sanitizer. Locked behind transparent glass, Kline's shiny commodities satirized the aspirational messages fabricated by lifestyle brands. Other artists have chosen unusual locations, working with High Line neighbors to disseminate art in even more unexpected contexts. Virginia Overton's artwork, for example, consisted of a pickup truck parked on a stacked parking lot next to the High Line at West 20th Street, while Richard Artschwager, in what was his last public art work before his death, had one of his *Blps* painted at ninety feet above the ground on a giant smokestack.

High Line Commissions have also featured thematic group exhibitions, which have typically included up to ten artists whose works are presented in locations scattered throughout the park. *Lilliput*, the first group exhibition presented in 2012, was a playful response to the traditional assumption that public art should be large and monumental, and displayed instead a series of miniature works that offered a counterbalance to the unnecessarily self-important bronze mammoths that permanently invade city squares. In spite of their modest scale—or perhaps in virtue of it—many of the sculptures in *Lilliput* became immediate landmarks. *Carson* (2012), a sculpture by Japanese artist Tomoaki Suzuki, was so beloved, and endlessly touched, caressed, and photographed, that it required periodic conservation sessions and multiple repainting jobs. Similarly, after a particularly chilly night, miniature scarves woven by a secret art lover appeared around the necks and heads of the bronze monkeys sculpted by Francis Upritchard. This participatory interaction with sculptures in public space cannot be simply dismissed as a superficial manifestation of a goliardic culture of spectacle, overexcited by the passion for selfies. These behaviors in fact cast their roots much further back, at least all the way to the

sixteenth-century Roman tradition of the *pasquines*: satirical poems often accompanied by objects and drawings that were affixed on what were known as “talking sculptures,” dating back to ancient Rome. The squares and streets of cities around the world are still filled with sculptures that are touched and consumed for religious or superstitious reasons. And gifts of clothes and food are regularly brought to effigies in cities and countries around the world, even in cultures that proudly consider themselves secular and enlightened. This love for sculptures, and in particular for those that are figurative, reveals a complexity of emotion towards images and effigies in public space. It is from such responses that we can learn a lot about the power and function of visual objects in constructing identities and in endorsing beliefs.

Some of these questions were directly addressed in the works presented as part of the 2013 group exhibition *Busted*, which offered a series of contemporary interpretations and reflections on the life of public monuments and civic sculptures that have dotted city streets and squares for centuries. The hyper-realistic sculpture *Human Statue (Jessie)* (2011) by American artist Frank Benson became another frozen heroine of the High Line—or some kind of ritual fetish—as visitors left her money and even dressed her in rainbow colors for Gay Pride. The group exhibition on view in 2014, titled *Archeo*, also took inspiration from the High Line itself, this time focusing on artworks dealing with the interconnection between technology and planned obsolescence, between novelty and history. As the relic of an industrial era gone by, the High Line is itself a beautifully preserved example of industrial archeology.

The combination of different temporalities that seem to coexist in the unique landscape of the High Line was made even more apparent in a project by Brooklyn-based artist Carol Bove, who in 2013 was invited to conceive a large site-specific installation for the High Line at the Rail Yards, a half-mile-long section of the High Line that was still closed to the public at the time. Bove installed a series of seven abstract sculptures, which comprised large volutes of white powder-coated steel, rusted I-beams, and oxidized slabs of bronze, all gently reclining on the High Line like beautiful, exotic beasts mysteriously trapped in a backyard. Installed among the self-seeded vegetation and the derelict, not-yet-revitalized landscape, Bove's interventions treated the final stretch of the High Line as a giant found sculpture, an urban readymade, onto which her precious constructions were mounted like jewels in a crown. At the time of their installation, the site was only accessible via free tours led by park rangers (more than five hundred public tours were organized

for this occasion), which contributed to the illusion of having stumbled upon the vestiges of a mysterious and elegant ancient civilization.

A similar combination of overgrowing nature and architecture was at the core of the project by Adrián Villar Rojas, an Argentinian artist who was invited to conceive a large-scale installation at the High Line at the Rail Yards, to coincide with the opening of the northernmost stretch of the High Line in September 2014. Villar Rojas's commission presented a series of abstract geometric sculptures built in cement, clay, and soil, which incorporated both organic and inorganic materials in an environmental installation that seemed to respond to the architectural surroundings and the minimalist aesthetic evident throughout New York City.

A Nomadic Idea of Art

The artists exhibited on the High Line come from diverse backgrounds and different countries. High Line Art is a highly international program, which in five years has presented artists from more than twenty-five nations, in addition to a wide array of artists from New York City. Emerging and mid-career, established and overlooked, the artists who have shown on the High Line all seem to share one same belief despite their many differences: Just like everyone involved with the High Line, they are deeply committed to the idea that art should speak to a wide and non-professional audience and that it should initiate inspiring conversations and provide meaningful encounters.

There is a centuries-long tradition of art being presented and experienced in the city, and, in the contemporary city, often the problem with such presentations is that they reduce art to, at best, a landmark, and at worst, a dull complement to the urban décor, dissolving any sense of friction within the texture of the work of art and its relationship with the public and the surrounding environment. With its temporary character and changing locations, High Line Art proposes a nomadic idea of public art, one in which the disruptive potential of art is not simply neutralized and turned into the static, innocuous vulgate of civic sculpture. As part of High Line Art, the artwork is not simply placed and identified as such, but is kept alive and allowed to take the viewer unannounced. To survive in the city, in fact, art needs to be constantly moving and constantly surprising, learning from—and competing against—that same kaleidoscopic landscape of endless shocks and spectacles that animate contemporary cities. The problem then will be creating art that avoids falling into the trap of innocuous entertainment, which today is the consolatory coun-

terpart of the experience of shock that used to define the modern metropolis. But this is precisely the job of the artist, whose works help us preserve a critical awareness of our experience of life in the city, jolting us awake when we are just about to passively sink into the humming of the megalopolis.

The High Line might resemble a street or an elevated walkway, but it actually functions more as a square, as an agora: It is a place where opinions must be exchanged and distances reconciled. As a space where the act of seeing is very much at the center of every activity, the High Line stimulates a constant negotiation of points of views, which is precisely what High Line Art encourages.



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