

F R O N T
P A G E

The Great Outdoors

The intersection of Fifth Avenue and 60th Street in Manhattan may not be what it once was (the storied Plaza Hotel, which faces it, is in the unsightly process of conversion to private residences), but it's still a major crossroads of international tourism and a global high-water mark for real estate values. And the Public Art Fund's program of temporary public art there thrives. All of which matters for the work installed now through Oct. 22 by Sarah Sze, whose *Corner Plot* is as gleefully—and literally—subversive as anything yet commissioned for the site. The titular corner is not just of two streets, but also of a deceptively nondescript blond-brick building towering above them. Sze simulated a chunk of one of its upper-story apartments down to its metal railing, and seemingly thrust most of it underground. A roughly 12-foot-wide, pyramid-shaped portion rises (to about 4 feet) above the sidewalk, associa-



Ursula von Rydingsvard, *Czara z Babelkami*, at Madison Square Park.

tions to ancient, buried civilizations surely intended. At shin-level are two windows, through which a squatting, craning viewer can glimpse a small underground world of real and invented household goods. Most are ordinary but fetchingly massed—white-wrapped bars of soap, round cartons of Morton's salt, a variety of small desk lamps, wads of cotton balls, and quantities of writing paper, pencils and pushpins. Among the most appealing of other, artist-made items is an old-fashioned desktop microscope made of corrugated cardboard.

As with any Sze installation, longer looking rewards the patient viewer. Canny formal decisions abound; little weirdnesses are rife. Though everything at first seems spatially consistent, some interior appointments (shelves, countertops) crop out at wrong angles. A floor lurches up, innocent things proliferate to the verge of menace. And

simple objects trail questions: what are two (fake) lily pads doing in this hermetically sealed environment, the drops of water at their centers threatening to turn the whole interior into a misty terrarium? Why, even more disturbingly, is the business end of a box cutter poking out from a tidy stack of fluffy white towels? It's possible to read these anomalies as metaphors for the personal disorder that surely lurks in the picture-perfect buildings nearby. But symbolism at that level belongs to the cruder end of Sze's vocabulary. Most of it is taken up with more nuanced varieties of confusion, delight and delayed gratification.

The Public Art Fund is also now presenting work by Alexander Calder, with five metal stables, dating from the late '50s to the mid-'70s, at City Hall Park in Lower Manhattan through Mar. 18, 2007; a mobile also hangs in the rotunda of City Hall. The centerpiece of the outdoor work is a one-third scale version of the majestic *Jerusalem Stable* (1976); the vibrant red model itself has a substantial 24-foot span.

At the unbeatably lovely roof garden of the Metropolitan Museum, new work by Cai Guo-Qiang, on view through Oct. 29, addresses life in these parlous post-9/11 times. Most explicit is *Nontransparent Monument*, a 32-foot-long limestone relief that mixes up the horrific and the prosaic. Carved in China by professional artisans, it reflects a painfully literal view of headline-grabbing events, from terrorist hits to same-sex marriages. Edging toward metaphor, *Move Along, Nothing to See Here* is a pair of life-size open-mouthed crocodiles made of resin, though looking ferociously real. Skewered and raised up on bamboo

Cai Guo-Qiang, *Move Along, Nothing to See Here* (detail), at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Sarah Sze, *Corner Plot*, at Doris Freedman Plaza.

poles, they are studded with many hundreds of dangerous objects confiscated, we're told, at airport security checkpoints. The colorful plastic and bone handles of the trophy knives, screwdrivers and other sharps bristle gaily, making the drag-onlike crocs as festive as they are scary. More elegiac is *Transparent Monument*, a very big (15-foot-high) unframed pane of heavy glass at the base of which, on both sides, lie a handful of dead birds (in convincing effigy, the feathers are the only parts that are real). And most mournful of all is the daily event called *Clear Sky Black Cloud*, which involves firing off three black-smoke shells at noon Tuesdays-Sundays for the run of the show. Elusive and elliptical, the inky little cloud doesn't have the expressive wallop of Cai's other work here, which is blunt enough to be disturbing in the usual gut-grabbing way, and also—precisely because of its bluntness—just slightly obtuse.

Thanks to the Madison Square Park Conservancy, a stretch of green facing the Flatiron Building in downtown Manhattan is not only well-tended horticulturally but also regularly abloom with art. Last summer, the featured artist was Sol LeWitt, and this winter it was Jene Highstein; now through Dec. 31, it is Ursula von Rydingsvard's turn. The biggest of her four sculptures, the 14-foot-high *Damski Czepek* (Polish for, roughly, lady's cap), is made of polyurethane resin, which von Rydingsvard chose for its translucency; the sunlight that falls arcs through the park traces a shifting pattern on the sculpture's beveled surfaces and is also admitted to the sheltered area beneath its crown. The other three works (all but one are new) are made from the artist's trademark milled cedar; two are tall, vase-shaped forms, their undulating surfaces alive with texture both fine-toothed and grand. The knobby protuberances that surge across the piece titled *Czara z Babelkami*

are indebted to the popcorn-stitch knitting of a sweater remembered fondly from the artist's childhood. But a distinctly tactile kind of memory plays a big part throughout.

The Riverside Park Fund, steward of the park along the Hudson River, is celebrating 20 years of conservancy with a program of sited work called "Studio in the Park," on view through Sept. 16. Curated by Karin Bravin and produced by BravinLee Programs, it brings together 10 artists, many of whom are not known for public art, and not a few of whom are painters. Among the latter are Fabian Marcaccio, who has often brought his turbulent "paintaints" outdoors, and Alexis Rockman, ranking visual poet of the toxic sublime. Works span the considerable length of the park, from 70th Street to 151st; Elana Herzog has woven hers into a grated median that runs north from 84th Street, and Gary Simmons's digital print *Wishing Field* is mounted on the backstops at two baseball fields, at 107th and 148th Streets.

Just a little upriver, the gallery and grounds at Wave Hill (in Riverdale, the Bronx) are the site of "Garden Improvement" (June 11-Aug. 27), in which artists bring the spirit of domesticity to the great outdoors, and vice versa. Ceramic birdhouses, and a lawnmower and portable fountain that are both solar-powered, will be among the projects on the grounds (which also boast one of New York's finest, if smallest, public gardens); inside the gallery will be several works—a scintorium, a portable herbarium—that bring the outdoors in. Artists include Jimbo Blachly and Lytle Shaw, Joan Bankemper, Paula Hayes and Andy Yoder. Also at Wave Hill this summer is a project by Nina Katchadourian (June 11-Oct. 31) that involves human performances of birdcalls transliterated as English (e.g., the chestnut-sided warbler's song becomes the "Please, Please, Pleased to Meet/cha" of the project's title). The recordings will be played through solar-powered speakers installed in trees; visitors will be excused for moments of species-bending confusion.

At Socrates Sculpture Park on the Queens waterfront, Andrea Zittel's "High Desert Test Sites," which offer opportunities for artists to do experimental work, will have a temporary East Coast outpost. Those participating here, in an exhibition called "Interstate: The American Road Trip," include Katie Grinnan, the Los Angeles Urban Rangers (Sara Daleiden and Emily Scott) and Virginia Poundstone.

—Nancy Princenthal