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Monumental art and walks on water: New Orleans Museum of Art opens expanded sculpture garden

Works by Frank Stella and Ursula von Rydingsvard
take their place in lagoon landscape of New Orleans
City Park

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Frank Stella's Alu Truss Star (2016) and the Sculpture Pavilion in the distance, as seen from one of the walkways Photo: Richard Sexton

The expansion of the Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden at the New Orleans Museum of Art (Noma), opening today, shows off new monumental acquisitions and commissions, but has also created “a very balanced ecosystem, which in fact is a prototype for other possible broader treatments in the city”, says the museum’s director, Susan Taylor.

The \$15m privately funded project sits on 6.5 acres in New Orleans City Park, which had not been re-worked since Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and was designed by the landscape architects Reed Hilderbrand to prevent flooding as well as treat water runoff. Work included cleaning the lagoon, planting indigenous flora like magnolia, cypress and live oak trees, and a building a weir. Visitors can cross the lagoon on a new 280ft canal link bridge—the first such structure in the US, which gives the impression of walking on water—to reach the five-acre Modern and contemporary area, adjacent to Noma.



The garden's new extension shows 26 recent acquisitions of large-scale, mostly 21st-century sculptures by artists including Ursula von Rydingsvard, Frank Stella, Yinka Shonibare and Shirazeh Houshiary, gifted by the Besthoffs or purchased with funds they provided. A new site-specific commission by Elyn Zimmerman, the 70ft glass bridge *Mississippi Meanders* (2019), links the two parts of the garden, and references a 1940s geological study of changes in the river's course over 7,000 years.

The other commission, Teresita Fernández's flowing mosaic mural evoking the river, *Viñales (Mayombe Mississippi)* (2019), decorates the courtyard of a new 5,000 sq. ft pavilion designed by Lee Ledbetter & Associates. Taylor hopes that the pavilion, which will have free admission and show indoor sculptures from Noma's collection, can "demystify the museum experience" for new visitors.

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