

Stephen Friedman Gallery

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Outdoor Art, Summer 2021
Holland Cotter
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All in very different but concrete ways, these artists' "live" public works speak of healing, history, and a fragile material world.



Image: "Maya Lin: Ghost Forest" at Madison Square Park. White cedars from the Pine Barrens, a habitat infiltrated by salt water as a result of climate change, talk back. Madeline Cass for The New York Times

In post-lockdown New York, art has busted free from months of digital quarantine. Museums are open; objects are present, and people are pouring in — or at least queuing up for admission. The entrance line at the Met last weekend stretched across the plaza, and forward motion was slow. So, if you're in need of a "live" art-fix fast — like, right now — you might consider another option: a self-guided tour of new outdoor art across town.

Much of this work was planned well before the pandemic. The originating idea for Maya Lin's new installation, "Ghost Forest," a cathedral-like grove of dead and dying trees at the center of a midtown Manhattan park, dates back some eight years. Similarly, David Hammons's "Day's End," a wiry riverside monument to the just-pre-AIDS New York of the 1970s, began as a pencil sketch sent to the Whitney Museum in 2014.

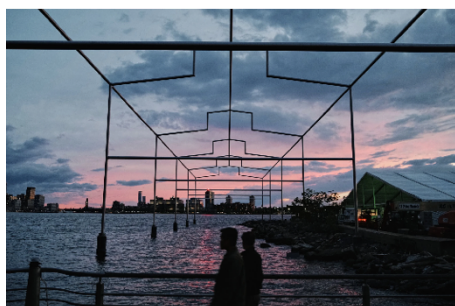


Image: David Hammons's "Day's End" in Hudson River Park. Simbarashe Cha for The New York Times

Neither piece is "political," in an out-loud way. But after the layered traumas that have slammed this country over the past year and a half — killer plague, racist violence, California on fire — they can't help but read that way. This is true of several other new outdoor works — by Sanford Biggers, Christian Boltanski, Melvin Edwards, Rashid Johnson, Guadalupe Maravilla and Mary Mattingly — described inside by Martha Schwendener. All in very different but concrete ways speak of healing, history, and a fragile material world.

And for those deeply addicted to digital, there's something vital too, as Arthur Lubow reports: The High Line and the Shed have collaborated on a line of virtual projects experienced entirely on a smartphone app picked up on site — outdoors.