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Lincoln Center Installation 'Like Magnets'

Aaron Curry's Abstract Sculptures Go on Display

By ANDY BATTAGLIA



Adrienne Grunwald for The Wall Street Journal

Artist Aaron Curry's 'Melt to Earth' site-specific sculptures on display in the Josie Robertson Plaza at Lincoln Center.

After midnight at Lincoln Center, after the patrons have gone home, the most compelling action of late has come from a crew installing giant sculptures to perform on the plaza.

"It could be an orgy, a dance, a play—I'm going to leave it up to the viewer," Aaron Curry said of the scene, part of an ambitious public-art project opening Monday. Called "Melt to Earth," this collection of 14 of Mr. Curry's abstract sculptures—some as high as 19 feet and as heavy as 1.2 tons—will call the plaza home until January.

First, however, they had to be arranged, in bursts of ingenuity under cover of night. Since last Monday, crews of 20 or so workers have assembled nightly from 10 p.m. until about 6 a.m.



Adrienne Grunwald for The Wall Street Journal

A woman takes a photograph of 'Lazy Comet.'

Mess"—were conceived specially for the site, as part an initiative for free public art on Lincoln Center's redeveloped grounds.

"It's a challenge," said Reynold Levy, Lincoln Center's president. "There aren't many spaces on the island of Manhattan as iconic and formidable in size and scope. I personally think the figures, their sense of animation and playfulness in contrast to a rather formidable plaza, really enlivens the place."

He was appraising a project only partially complete, but the exhibit has drawn attention with each day, as more of it appeared. "They're like magnets, kids hanging on them and running all over, tourists holding on to them and taking pictures with iPads," Mr. Curry said. "People recognize there is something here that's vibrating."



Adrienne Grunwald for The Wall Street Journal

Mr. Curry

"It gets to be pretty quiet," said Mark Rossi, a fabricator who works with Mr. Curry in their shared hometown of Los Angeles. In the dark at Lincoln Center, they talked logistics and specs on their third such night as Wednesday turned to Thursday.

"I apologize," Mr. Rossi continued, "I just think of them as objects with weights in numbers, but each sculpture has a title."

Indeed, all of the pieces—bright, dynamic and graced with names like "Mushmind," "Lazy Comet" and "Ugly

Mess"—were conceived specially for the site, as part an initiative for free public art on Lincoln Center's redeveloped grounds.

To move the sculptures into place, workers lay down industrial plastic matting to make way for forklifts ferrying heavy plates of painted aluminum. "It's like the plastic brick road," the artist said. The sounds of beeping machinery mingled with orders to lift and move things around. The largest sculpture, "Big Drag," stood at the front of the plaza.

"This might be the most modernist one in a way," Mr. Curry said. "It's a bit sexual. Maybe we shouldn't talk about that."

[Gordon Veneklasen](#), one of Mr. Curry's art dealers on hand to watch the late-night affair, praised the artist's relationship to "modernism" as practiced by the likes of Picasso and Miró. "He's making classical sculpture in a certain sense, keeping in mind what's come before him," said Mr. Veneklasen, a partner at Michael Werner Gallery.

Mr. Curry cited as an influence Alexander Calder, whose steel sculpture "Le Guichet (The Box Office)" is a longtime Lincoln Center resident. To such hallmarks of art history he added a less familiar influence: skateboarding.

"I didn't grow up around art, and that was somehow a connection to an artistic practice," he said, comparing his pieces to patterns and designs he remembers from skating in the 1980s.

Workers around him caught rides on carts with wheels, used to transport smaller sculptures to their spots on the plaza. A few pieces lurked behind layers of tape and Bubble Wrap yet to be

removed. Still others lingered in wooden crates, in which all of the work traveled on six trucks from Los Angeles to New York.

Mr. Curry chose the show's title to evoke a sense of a further journey still.

"I like the idea that no matter how strong something is, it does melt to Earth," he said. "Buildings crumble. No matter how fabricated these are, they'll eventually disintegrate."

Still, he said, there's something to be said for the chance to make art for the public.

"You can have a gallery, but this is an ultimate space," he said. "I don't know what else I'll do. If I die on a plane leaving this place, I'll be OK," the artist said.

Corrections & Amplifications

The sculptures featured in "Melt to Earth" at Lincoln Center weigh as much as 1.2 tons. A previous version of the story incorrectly said they weigh as much as 12 tons.

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