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High Line Opens Last Section With Adrián Villar Rojas Sculptures

'The Evolution of God' Incorporates Sneakers, Watermelon Rinds and Even an iPod Into Its Design; 'This Is the Primordial Soup'

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By ANDY BATTAGLIA

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Adrián Villar Rojas's 'The Evolution of God' opens Sunday along with the final stretch of Manhattan's High Line. *Timothy Schenck*

To the list of construction materials currently in use along the fast-rising High Line, add the following: potatoes, sprouts, beans, sneakers and watermelon rinds.

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Mix them all together with soil, cement or clay, and the elements are in place for a public art project opening Sunday on Manhattan's far West Side.

Over the summer, the High Line at the Rail Yards—a stretch of the elevated

park between 30th and 34th streets that also opens to the public for the first time Sunday—played host to the Argentine artist Adrián Villar Rojas and a team of collaborators who liked to get their hands dirty. The results of their work are 13 stylized cubes that look like they were dug up from the ground.

Photos: The Growing High Line

"This is the basics of life on earth," Mr. Rojas said during the installation of the sculptures, which weigh around two tons each. "Inside you have all these tiny



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things that are happening, going back to billions of years ago when the first primitive organisms appeared. This is it. This is the primordial soup."

Cecilia Alemani, the curator of High Line Art, offered a different interpretation: "Half of them look like chocolate, no?"

Mr. Rojas was commissioned in the spring to [create the sculptures for the new section of the park](#), whose landscape, aside from the entrance and a few small exceptions, will remain untouched. The area had been accessible before only to guided tours of "Caterpillar," a series of sculptures made of bronze, brass and steel by Carol Bove.

For his project, Mr. Rojas turned to more perishable materials, opting for organic matter that will crack, decay and change shape over the seasons. He created his sculptures at the site, which itself changed over the months that he worked.

In June, it was empty. By July, parts of the Rail Yards had been fitted for walkways and benches.

In August, the entrance took on the familiar look of the stretches of the High Line farther south. All the while, luxury construction abounded on blocks nearby, with 10 Hudson Yards, the so-called Coach Tower, rising up and attaining skyscraper status.

Mr. Rojas grew fond of the clamor, he said. "I couldn't think of a better landscape to contrast the two situations. It's a sort of symbolic equation of how past life and contemporary life meet."



The installation in progress. *Timothy Schenck*

He used clay and cement as the main structural materials in the cubes, then added elements like seeds and vegetable matter strategically placed to sprout from within the sculptures themselves. The germination will reflect the wild vegetation of the Rail Yards.

"We had to be respectful of the weeds," Ms. Alemani said of the sculpture-making process, which enlisted Mr. Rojas along with three studio assistants from Rosario, Argentina, where he is normally based, and 10 workers hired by the High Line. They mixed the materials in wooden boxes, removing the supports once the sculptures dried.

On a hot day in July, with tourists gathered by the locked gate trying to steal a look in, Mr. Rojas, in town on one of several trips from Argentina, reflected on the process of

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making the sculptures, which he titled "The Evolution of God."



Finished pieces of Mr. Rojas's work on the High Line. *Timothy Schenck*

"It has this kind of childish attitude, playing with mud and soil, vegetables and seeds," he said. "We humans have a super-strong connection. Our first moments as hominids and homo sapiens were all linked to a relation with nature and agriculture and farming. The moment you work with soil, you feel some sort of pleasure in reconnection."

"I think the world of nature is much closer to him than most artists," said Marian Goodman, whose gallery represents the 34-year-old Mr. Rojas. "He's very well able to live in that space between culture and nature."

Along with the organic materials, some of which have already rotted away and left gaping spaces, Mr. Rojas incorporated a few synthetic components, including old sneakers, shirts and even an iPod. Some are barely visible, but they add a human element to an artwork with a complex relationship with the natural world.

"A cube is a very comforting shape for us," Mr. Rojas said. "It's controlled, perfect—it comes out of the human mind. A cube you don't find in nature. A cube needs mind power to create an abstraction. And inside this comforting cube, this huge mess is going on. How are we going to deal with this?"

Adrián Villar Rojas's "["The Evolution of God"](#)" opens Sunday at the High Line at the Rail Yards.

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