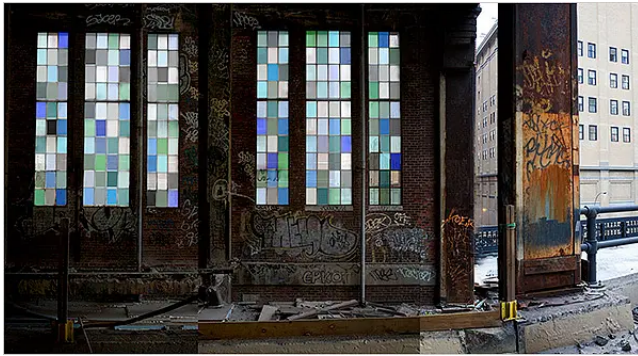


INSIDE ART

Seeing the Hudson River Through 700 Windows



A rendering of Spencer Finch's installation on the High Line.
Creative Time

By Carol Vogel

May 21, 2009

It was the sight of 700 mullioned windows covered with greasy plastic sheeting that inspired the Brooklyn artist Spencer Finch to create the first temporary public art commission for the High Line, that \$170 million park being built on the elevated freight rail structure that stretches 22 blocks, from Gansevoort Street to 34th Street, near the Hudson River.

“Those industrial New York spaces are disappearing,” said Mr. Finch, who is known for work that explores the relationship between light and color. His new piece will be housed in a tunnel-like former loading dock between 15th and 16th Streets. “I thought that rather than drop something of my own making in the space, I would use the existing architecture.”

Since the Hudson River is visible from the site, Mr. Finch wanted the art to capture the narrative of the river. So last June 12 he fastened a high-resolution digital camera to the railing of a tugboat and documented an 11-hour 40-minute journey on the river in a single day.

Traveling on Manhattan's West Side past the High Line, Mr. Finch photographed a single point on the river's surface every minute of his journey. He then chose a single pixel from each photograph, sandwiched each one between glass and has arranged them chronologically in the former loading dock's steel mullions.

He organized the panels as though viewers were "reading a book," he said, placing them in a sequence that starts at 9:15 a.m. and goes until 8:54 p.m., from left to right, top to bottom, capturing the changing reflective and translucent conditions of the water's surface.

"It's lighter at the top than at the bottom," he explained. "I wanted to make this as much a narrative as a composite."

Because this is one of the few semi-enclosed spaces on the High Line, Meredith Johnson, a curator and producer at Creative Time, the organization that has helped present Mr. Finch's project, said "it has a cathedral-like feeling." The space will be illuminated at night to approximate daylight, so viewers can see the panels around the clock.

The title of the work, "The River That Flows Both Ways," is a translation of Muhheakantuck, the American Indian name for the Hudson, and refers to the river's natural flow in two directions, like the trains that once ran on the High Line.

The project, which will be on view for a year starting in mid-June, was commissioned by two nonprofit organizations Creative Time, which presents art around the city, and Friends of the High Line as well as the New York City Parks and Recreation Department.

“Art has always been an important component,” said Robert Hammond, co-founder of Friends of the High Line. “From the beginning dealers and artists were some of our most ardent constituents. We knew we wanted something that was temporary and didn’t want plot art. We also didn’t want to make it an outdoor sculpture park.”

To ensure a continuing stream of art projects, Friends of the High Line recently hired Lauren Ross, a former interim curator at the Brooklyn Museum who was also a director and chief curator at White Columns, to oversee its arts programming with a focus on emerging artists and site-specific commissions.

THE ART OF STEEL BEAMS

In 1984 the conceptual artist Chris Burden created “Beam Drop,” a sculptural project in which a hydraulic crane hoisted 60 steel beams a hundred feet into the air and then dropped them into a pool of wet concrete 30 feet square.

The site was Artpark, a 200-acre state park in Lewiston, N.Y., about 10 miles north of Niagara Falls on the Canadian border.

Three years later “Beam Drop” was dismantled and destroyed.

Now an even bigger version of the work has risen again, this time in Brazil at the Inhotim Center for Contemporary Art, a three-year-old museum and botanical garden on 3,000 acres outside the city of Belo Horizonte. The center was founded by Bernardo Paz, a Brazilian collector and mining magnate who began collecting art in the early 1990s.

The center is known for outsized permanent projects by artists like Matthew Barney, Pipilotti Rist, Olafur Eliasson and Doug Aitken.

“I think ‘Beam Drop’ is one of the most important large-scale sculptures in modern art,” said Allan Schwartzman, the chief curator of Inhotim. “It’s both a summation and a deconstruction of sculpture.”