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Samaha, Barry. "Frieze New York Unveils the Inaugural Frieze Sculpture at Rockefeller Center." *Surface*. April 25, 2019.

SURFACE



Jose Dávila presented by Sean Kelly, Frieze Sculpture at Rockefeller Center, New York, 2019. Courtesy of Timothy Schenck/Frieze.

Today, at Rockefeller Center, Frieze New York, the famed contemporary art fair, unveiled its inaugural Frieze Sculpture, a behemoth installation that will encompass most of the New York landmark's grounds. There, it will showcase works by 14 artists, including Kiki Smith, Walter De Maria, Sarah Sze, Hank Willis Thomas, Nick Cave, Aaron Curry, Jose Dávila, Rochelle Goldberg, Goshka Macuga, Joan Miró, Jaume Plensa, Paulo Nazareth, Pedro Reyes, and Ibrahim Mahama.

Indeed, it is not the first time that Rockefeller Center has displayed pieces on such a grand scale... But this is the first instance that will have more than one work taking up the majority of the area—a characteristic that Brett Littman, the curator of the exhibition, intended from the onset.

"One thing that I was very concerned about was doing something that was different from what other institutions have done there, which is generally just one monumental sculpture, either on 5th Avenue or in front of 30 Rock Plaza," he said. "The thing that I really wanted to do [was to] curate an alternative sculpture park that was more human scale. I really wanted to force the viewer to be a flaneur and to walk the whole campus, so not everything is consolidated in one place."

To be sure, Littman is an authority on creating expansive spaces that allow the masses to idly walk around, observe and really envelope themselves in art. He

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is, after all, the newly-instated director of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum... “No one stops to really look anymore,” she expressed. “We run through these spaces because they are places of transit.”

It is for this reason that Rockefeller Center was the ideal place for Randolph to stage the first Frieze Sculpture. Since Frieze New York’s inception eight years ago, the fair has shown on Randall’s Island (and still does), which doesn’t get as much foot traffic as would an area in central Manhattan. And considering how it is a “selling exhibition,” the more eyes and focus on it, the better it would be for the organization.

That said, with great visibility comes even greater scrutiny. Equal representation across the board has been a cause célèbre lately, and receiving the ire of the public wouldn’t be conducive for such a public-facing event. For Littman, who corralled artists from diverse backgrounds, it wasn’t so much about being politically correct. Rather, the stage that he was given called for it.

“Given the fact that Rockefeller Center is an international site with lots of tourists, I felt, in general, that all sculptors [should] be represented,” he said. “It was important for me that if I was going to do a sculpture park in the middle of New York City that I better try and do the best that I could to show what was happening. I would say that that was my genuine intention. Obviously, I don’t want to be attacked for showing all men, or all white men; or showing only people of color.”

From there, unintentionally, political leanings began to ensue. Though Randolph was greatly inspired by a piece seeped in the war on the press, Littman had free rein to create. To wit, it happened that many of the sculptures had politically charged statements. “I don’t think that was necessarily part of the calculation—maybe subconsciously, of course, one thinks about that,” he said. “But I think that my intentions were hopefully more about doing something in this gigantic public realm.”

...

Even though Littman didn’t intend for the first Frieze Sculpture to be thematic show, he did, after doing all the legwork and surveying the entire project, realize the way it serves as a commentary on civic unrest, explaining how great sculptors reflect the time frame they live in. “I see how it is bit political and surely a little about critiquing ideas of the dissemination of information—the ideas and ways in which we discourse about race and gender,” he said. “In some ways, that seems to have risen to the surface, but not necessarily by conscious choice.”