

THE NEW YORK OBSERVER
Culture

New York Parks Add Two Mammoth Metal Men



By Victor Epstein
July 6, 2010 | 9:22 p.m

Two New York area parks have recently installed colossal sculptures by prominent artists. It's all part of an uptick in public sculpture commissions in the last decade due to the once-roaring real estate and art markets, but also to memorial commissions related to 9/11.

On West End Avenue and 42nd Street, real estate developer Larry Silverstein has installed Tom Otterness' giant Gulliver of a jungle gym, *Playground*, and opened it to the public. With legs for slides, seats in the hands and a hiding place on his neck, the smiling bronze creature sits in front of Silver Towers, an apartment complex which will be completed this summer, according to the company. But, already, the sculpture is being swarmed by little Lilliputs.

While many artists would be appalled at the prospect of children climbing, crawling, jumping and sliding on their work, Mr. Otterness welcomes it. It brings art "off the pedestal; it's on the ground with you." (The cost is undisclosed, but major public art commissions average in the mid- to high six figures.)

Originally designed for a 2004 competition in Milwaukee, *Playground* is the fourth in an edition of six, according to Marlborough Gallery, where the artist shows. The first three were installed in the homes of Massachusetts, Florida and Colorado collectors. The piece was cast in Arizona, hauled by flatbeds to New York and assembled on site.

The artist worked with Teri Hendy, a playground safety consultant, on the project. "There's a fine balance between art and playground equipment," said Ms. Hendy. To prevent the problems caused in Brooklyn Bridge Park by overheating metal domes, the area was landscaped to keep

the sculpture in the shade. There's also state playground criteria to meet: "The average slide cannot exceed 30 degrees," Ms. Hendy said, and a swing half-hidden under the knees had to go.

Mr. Otterness, who has a teenage daughter, said he has spent a lot of time at playgrounds "thinking about how kids play" and realized he could combine his love of anthropomorphic art with childlike imagination. "I like that [the sculpture] gets inhabited by kids," he said. "They can look out of the eyes-it becomes like Kafka; you wake up with a 30-foot body. I think kids get that."

Last week, in Mountainville, N.Y., *Three-Legged Buddha*, a 12-ton, 28-foot-high deity, was installed at Storm King Sculpture Garden. Made of copper and steel, the work, by Zhang Huan, is flanked by five-dozen maple trees.

The artist's monumental sculpture represents a three-legged man from the waist down, one foot resting on an 8-foot-high human head that's either being pressed into the earth or is rising up from it. The work was a gift from the artist and his dealer, Pace Gallery.

Born in Anyang City, China in 1965, Zhang Huan's family was forcibly relocated during China's Cultural Revolution. The sculpture at Storm King was inspired by the artist's travels through Tibet, where he encountered Buddhas destroyed during the Revolution.

These two new 30-foot-high metal men join New York's already extensive menu of public art. But some of the best works are virtually unknown. Annually, Americans for the Arts flags several of the best new public art installations in America and two of the works singled out in recent years have been installations at Staten Island schools: Diana Cooper's *Out of the Corner of My Eye*, at H.S. 43, at the Jerome Parker Campus, and a student work at P.S. 58.