

Mad. Sq. Art 2006. Jene Highstein.

October 20, 2005, to April 3, 2006
Madison Square Park
Presented by the Madison Square Park Conservancy



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Foreword.

Alongside the mesmerizing concretes of Sol LeWitt in Madison Square Park, Jene Highstein's exhibition offers an alternative experience for park visitors. While Sol's two giant concrete structures broadcast their presence across the park, Jene's eleven enigmatic pieces nestle into the setting. Visitors come across the Minimalist sculptures almost by accident. Viewing the exhibition is a process of discovery that can require several visits. The careful juxtaposition of the pieces rewards repeated viewings. Jene's exhibition in the park alongside Sol LeWitt's work demonstrates the tremendous flexibility of Madison Square Park as a free outdoor art gallery. The park can comfortably host the intimate and the extroverted, the small as well as the large.

With *Madison Square Art: Jene Highstein*, for the first time the Madison Square Park Conservancy shows a large body of work by a single artist created over a significant amount of time: almost twenty years. Park visitors have an unusual opportunity to get to know how an artist thinks, works and develops.

We owe our introduction to Jene to Mad. Sq. Art's *eminence grise*, writer and curator Martin Friedman. A guiding hand in the development of Mad. Sq. Art, Martin is a longtime admirer and patron of Jene's work.

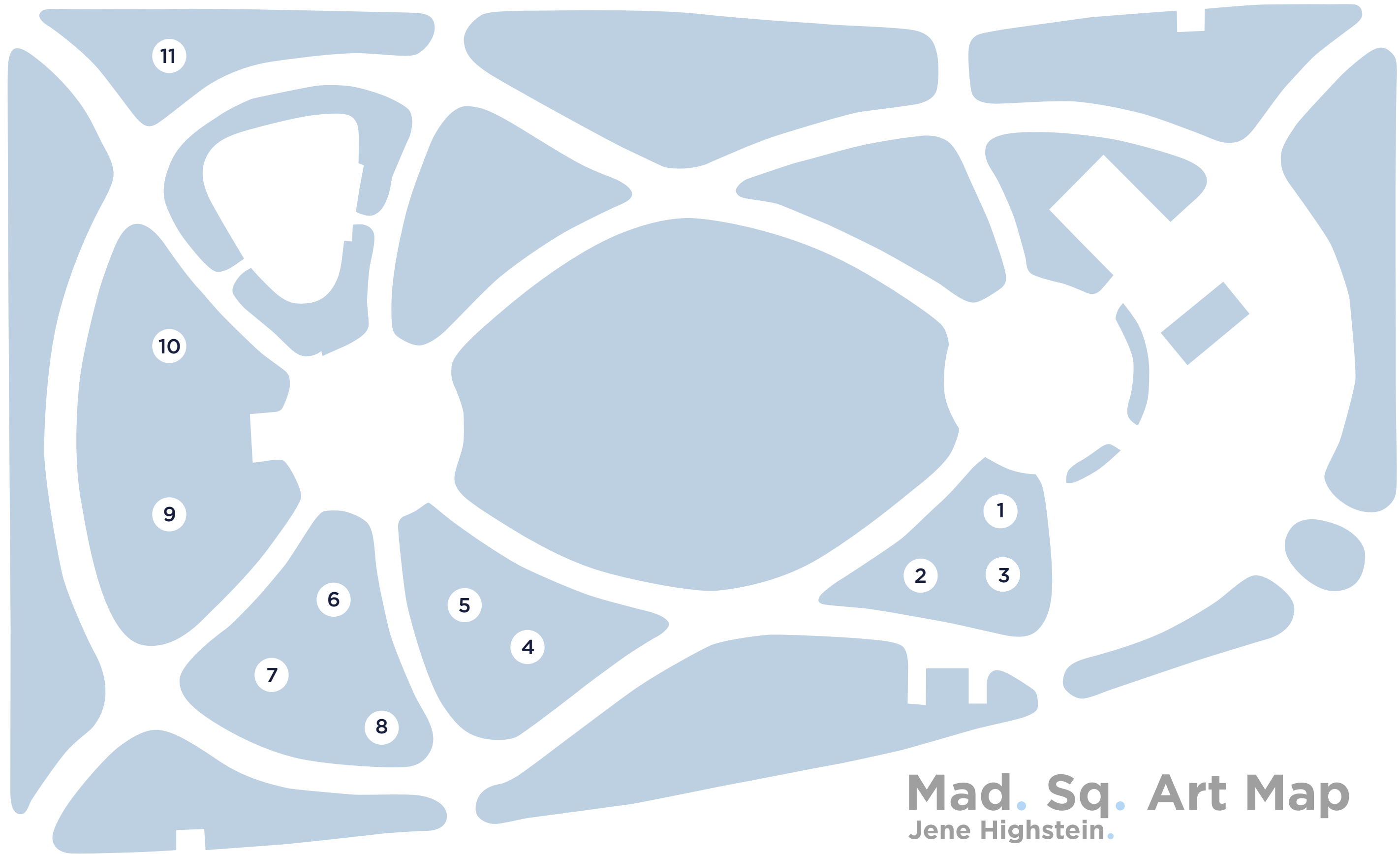
I am also grateful to Jene for throwing himself into the project of locating his pieces on five lawns throughout the park. It was a great pleasure to observe the artist finding the ideal background for each piece in the park.

Mad. Sq. Art is possible because of the generosity of Founding Patrons of the program: Agnes Gund & Daniel Shapiro, the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation and Anonymous. Significant funders include the Leucadia Foundation and New York Community Trust.

Through their enthusiasm for public art, Mayor Bloomberg and his administration also help bring about Mad. Sq. Art. We are especially grateful to Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe and First Deputy Mayor Patricia Harris.

Finally, I would like to thank the growing public of Mad. Sq. Art—curious, opinionated, protective—who make it a pleasure to bring art to a historic park.

Debbie Landau
President
Madison Square Park Conservancy



Mad. Sq. Art Map

Jene Highstein.

- 1. Jacobean Staircase
- 2. Iceberg
- 3. Tri-Cornered Poplar Casting
- 4. Dangerous Object (Interior)
- 5. Dangerous Object (Exterior)
- 6. One Meter Tornado (Interior)
- 7. One Meter Tornado (Exterior)
- 8. Tornado
- 9. Female Figure
- 10. Cedar Staircase
- 11. Double Tornado



While strolling through the park one day. • By Lilly Wei

Jene Highstein has often been referred to as a minimalist but he is not now, if minimalist sculpture is defined as affectless, impersonal and systematic, made from the mass-produced and industrial. Highstein's sculptures have almost always consisted of essential but expressive forms, idiosyncratic variations of cones, spheres, cylinders or rectangular blocks. Ultimately, however, he is more of a materialist—even a sensualist—than he is anything else, possessed of a discriminating and avid eye for stone, wood, the patina of steel and other mediums and has more in common with the classic modernism of Constantine Brancusi and Isamu Noguchi than with Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Richard Serra or Sol LeWitt, with whom he shares a temporary tenancy of Madison Square Park.

LeWitt occupies the south and southeast sector of the park while Highstein's eleven stone, wood and steel sculptures—a mini-survey of the past sixteen years, from 1988 to 2004—make a loop from the northeast corner westward and south: two independent projects, both part of the recently initiated rotating public installations called Mad. Sq. Art. Opening in October 2005 in five demarcated areas, which Highstein likens to a series of rooms in a salon or museum, the exhibition will extend through April 2006. Context is important to Highstein and he has sited his sculptures in relationship to the landscaping—hedges, lawns, walkways and especially the interspersed trees, which function as a series of intermediately scaled vertical elements; to the architecture that frames the park; and to each other, embedding the pieces into the fabric of the park through multiple alignments and points of reference. Highstein is particularly pleased that the six-month length of the installation spans three seasons with three radical shifts in the appearance of the park, from the blaze of autumnal foliage to wintry starkness to the bloom of spring, each season providing a different setting for the work.

Although there is no set itinerary, Highstein likes to start from the northeast entrance, the “room” or lawn near Madison Avenue, where *Double Tornado* (2004) is situated. Made of milky, coffee-colored granite quarried in Sweden and approximately ten-feet tall, it consists of two cones joined at their apices, emblematic of wind compacted into solid, of vertiginous forces held in check. Weighty and dense with physical factuality, it is similar in presence to many of Highstein's other works. The surface is roughly textured and subtly granulated, the crystals of the stone evident. As light splatters against it, the granite appears to glow, diamonded. A ridged, spiraling line descends clockwise from the upper cone and ascends counterclockwise from the lower to meet in the middle. Incised into the surface, the line suggests the revolutions of a tornado as Highstein's non-objective shapes, often on the verge of representation in the past, have become more overt and do double-duty, shifting between the abstract and the representational. Highstein placed *Double Tornado* as a marker and mediator of sorts, a delicately balanced, finite column commensurate with the compass of the human figure set against the different scales of the buildings directly behind it, from a white pillar that is a Holocaust memorial to a dazzlingly white neoclassical marble court house with Corinthian columns to a soaring office building, its glass and steel piers an ambitious rush of skyward verticality.

Double Tornado, 2004
Granite

In the second room, on a nearby lawn, are two cedar pieces, a sculpture from 1999 made from Canadian red cedar hewn from an 800-year-old tree and a female figure from 1991, one view pure form, the other clearly a lower torso. *Cedar Staircase* has a warm, ruddy glow while *Female Figure* is paler, the surface rubbed, worn, a surrogate for flesh, gleaming gold in certain lights. Highstein has always preferred singular, monolithic forms as a way to define the sculpture and emphasize the physicality of the material. His intent is still formal and perceptual but also increasingly theatrical and architectural, the sculpture carefully integrated into the site and subject to the contingent relationships between object, space and viewer. *Cedar Staircase*, encircled by carved steps, is architectural but also linked to the body, a connection implicit in the gentle swelling of its 16-foot shaft that recalls a similar organic give in Greek Doric columns. The silken *Female Figure* is also essentially columnar but much more overtly representational, its interior a void, like the human body, its mass reduced to skin, to surface. Both sculptures are beautifully sited in accordance with the trees around them, which become a framing device, and incorporated into the installation.



Cedar Staircase, 1999
Western Red Cedar



Female Figure, 1991
Western Red Cedar



Foreground: *One Meter Tornado (External)*, 2004
Quartzite
Background: *One Meter Tornado (Internal)*, 2004
Quartzite



Foreground: *One Meter Tornado (Internal)*, 2004
Quartzite
Background: *One Meter Tornado (External)*, 2004
Quartzite



Tornado, 2004
Granite

In the third room are three more *Tornadoes*, all recent, all of stone. *Tornado* is similar to *Double Tornado* but with only one cone, balanced *en pointe*, the spiral tighter, the lines closer at the bottom. The others are smaller, one meter in height, and rosy in hue. Playing off each other, one is smoothed, flame finished, its surface striated, banded in a mix of pale reds and white and hollow, while the other is crunchier, the raised corkscrew lines terminating on the level plane of the upper surface in a vortex, a reprise of the idea of crystallized movement, a solidity based on energy and flux in a state of suspension.

The fourth room contains *Dangerous Object (Internal)* and *Dangerous Object (External)*, complementary ovals of elegantly bulky black granite that appear to be pulled downward by gravity into the ground, compressed, with a midriff bulge, tops tilted. At first, *Dangerous Object (External)* seemed to be scooped out of *Dangerous Object (Internal)*, its pocked, chiseled sides matching the rough hollow of the latter but since they are almost the same size, this is merely a visual feint on the part of the artist. Likewise the titles, somewhat incongruous, recall the kind of associations the surrealists toyed with. The angled face of *External*

is immaculately polished to a mirror-like sheen, its opacity almost transparent, permeable, as if it were a magic portal into the underworld while *Internal* is the opposite, its excavated interior bumpy, its exterior burnished smooth. Highstein says the title and the shape come from a stage set he designed for an opera with a similar form holding a mirror that shot light upward while dancers performed on the edge. This smaller version attests to Highstein's interest, apparent throughout this exhibition, in fantastic structures, in utopian or surreal architecture, in theater and dance and in narrative.

Below Left:
Dangerous Object (External), 2004
Black Granite

Below:
Foreground: *Dangerous Object (External)*, 2004
Black Granite
Background: *Dangerous Object (Internal)*, 2004
Black Granite





The last room, on the southwest lawn near the fountain, holds two of the earliest pieces in this grouping, *Iceberg* (1988) and *Tri-Cornered Poplar Casting* (1989-2001). Made of cast iron, the works have weathered to a dull orange, the surface patterns streaked, in slow transition. The fat, crumpet-like shapes sit low to the ground and are both formal and irregular, evidence of Highstein's longstanding impulse to tweak the impersonality of the geometric and make it quirrier, merging it with the organic. The third and last piece is called *Jacobean Staircase* (2001), a sleek black rectangular column divided into three sections and placed on a low slab that acts as a pedestal. *Jacobean Staircase* is the antithesis of *Cedar Staircase*: colder, more geometric and adamant, stone instead of wood.

All of these sculptures, for the most part subtractive, carved by hand or machine, are dedicated to the primacy and specificity of matter. Highstein, who has been making objects for over thirty years, has returned to some of the classic tropes of his discipline, wrestling, like Jacob and the angel, with his chosen material's intractability to reveal its susceptibilities and hidden beauties in a collaboration that is also a kind of choreography, a dance, an act in progress.

Lilly Wei is a New York-based art critic, essayist and independent curator who writes frequently for Art in America and other publications. She is a contributing editor at ARTnews and Art Asia Pacific.

Left:
 Foreground: *Tri Cornered Poplar Casting*,
 1989-2001
 Cast Iron
 Background: *Iceberg*, 1988
 Cast Iron



Left:
Iceberg, 1988
 Cast Iron

Right:
Jacobean Staircase, 2001
 Black Granite



About Jene Highstein.

Recent Solo Exhibitions

- 2004 Anthony Grant, New York.
2003 Gallery 668, Battenville, New York.
P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, New York.
2002 Ace Gallery, Los Angeles
Texas Gallery, Houston
Grant Selwyn Fine Art, New York
Art Museum of Memphis, Tennessee
2000 Grant Selwyn Fine Art, Los Angeles
Joseloff Gallery, Hartford Art Center, University of
Hartford, Connecticut
Set design for ELD Dance Company, Moderna
Museet, Stockholm
1999 Eric Stark Gallery/Crosby Street Project Space, New York
Pamela Auchincloss /Project Space, New York
Set design for ELD Dance Company, premiere at
Dansens Hus, Stockholm
Set design for Nina Winthrop Dancers,
St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery, New York
1998 Todd Gallery, London
Anders Tornberg, Gallery, Lund, Sweden
5501 Colombia Art Center, Dallas, Texas
Hill Gallery, Birmingham, Michigan
Video project for Nina Winthrop Dancers, New York
1997 Stark Galley, New York
Baumgartner Gallery, Washington, DC
New Theatrical Trends performance of *Flatland* at
Belgrade International Theatre Festival
1996 Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston
Salem, North Carolina
Ace Gallery, New York
Art Space Seoul/Hakkojae, Korea
Snug Harbour Cultural Center, Staten Island, New York,
and an installation of *Flatland*, a collaborative theatre
work with Hanne Tierney, produced by the Brooklyn
Academy of Music's NEXT WAVE Festival
Set design for Nina Winthrop Dancers, New York
1993 Baumgartner Galleries, Washington, DC
Katonah Museum of Art, Katonah, New York
Michael Klein, New York
Ace Contemporary Exhibitions, Los Angeles
Three Installations, Portland Art Museum,
Portland, Oregon
Laura Carpenter Fine Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico
St. Gauden's Memorial, Cornish, New Hampshire

Public Works

Musée de la Sculpture en Pleine Aire, Paris; Nathan Manilow
Sculpture Park, Governor State University, Lake Forest,
Illinois; Panza di Biumo, Villa Litta, Varese, Italy; Florida
International University, Miami; Old City Hall, Lincoln,
Nebraska; Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; General
Mills Corporation, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Walker Art Center,
Minneapolis, Minnesota; Rutgers University, New Jersey;
Wanas Sculpture Park, Sweden; Mobil Oil Corporation,
Richmond, Virginia; Laumeier Sculpture Park, St. Louis,
Missouri; Stockholm, Sweden; Houston, Texas



Previous Mad. Sq. Art Exhibitions.

2005	Sol LeWitt	<i>Circle with Towers, Curved Wall with Towers</i>
2004	Mark di Suvero	<i>Aesope's Fables, Double Tetrahedron, Beyond</i>
2003	Wim Delvoye	<i>Gothic</i>
2002	Dan Graham Mark Dion Dalziel + Scullion	<i>Bisected Triangle, Interior Curve Urban Wildlife Observation Unit Voyager</i>
2001	Nawa Rawanchaikul Teresita Fernandez Tobias Rehberger	<i>I ♥ Taxi Bamboo Cinema Tsutsumu</i>
2000	Tony Oursler	<i>The Influence Machine</i>

From 2000-2003, exhibitions were co-curated by the Public Art Fund.

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New York City Department of Parks & Recreation



Adrian Benepe, Commissioner
Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor

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Mad. Sq. Pk.

The Madison Square Park Conservancy, dedicated to keeping Madison Square Park a bright, beautiful and active park, is one of New York's newest not-for-profit organizations. The Conservancy raises the funds that support lush and brilliant horticulture, park maintenance and security. The Conservancy also offers a variety of cultural programs for park users of all ages, including Mad. Sq. Art.

The Madison Square Park Conservancy is a public/private partnership with the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation.

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