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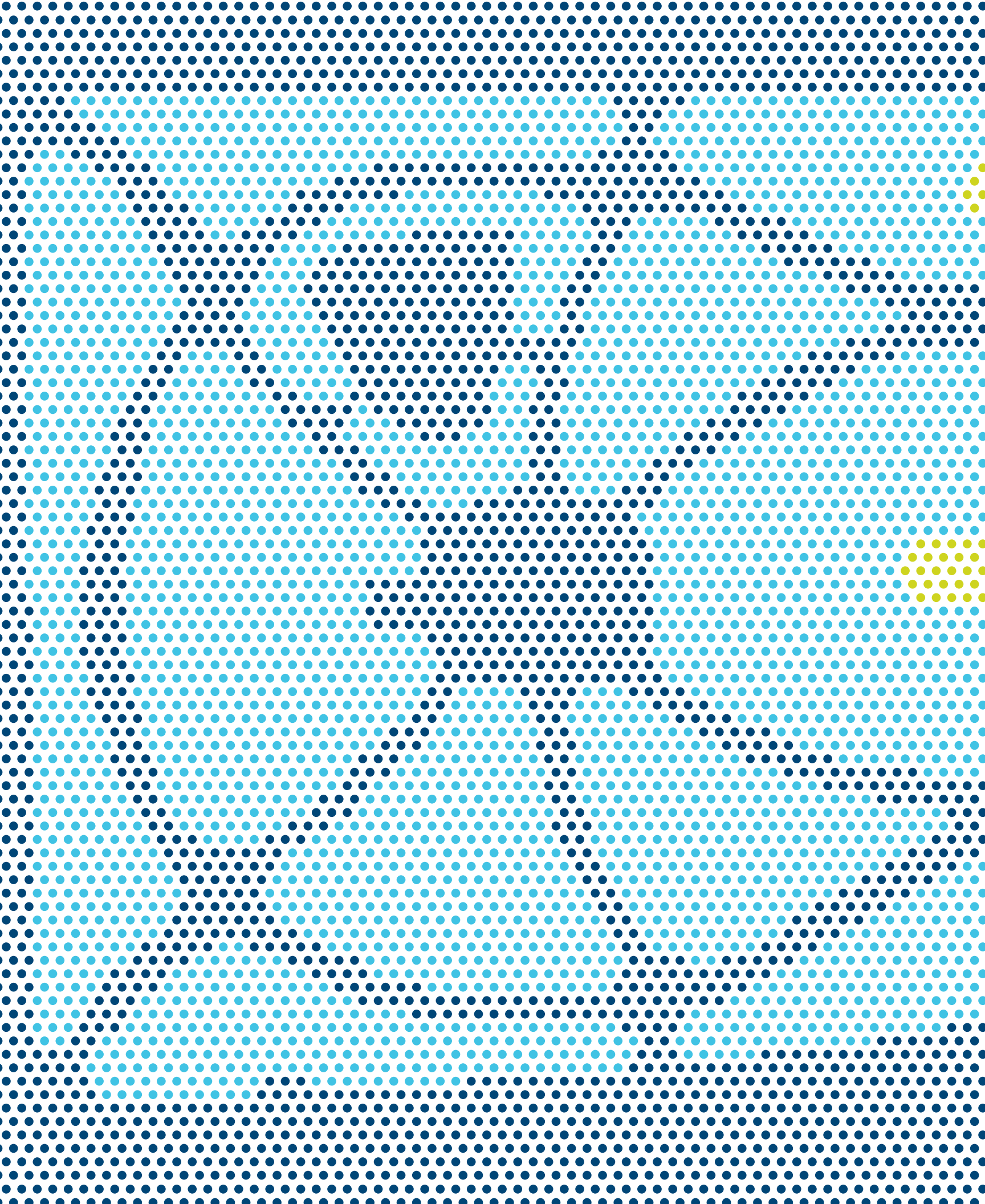
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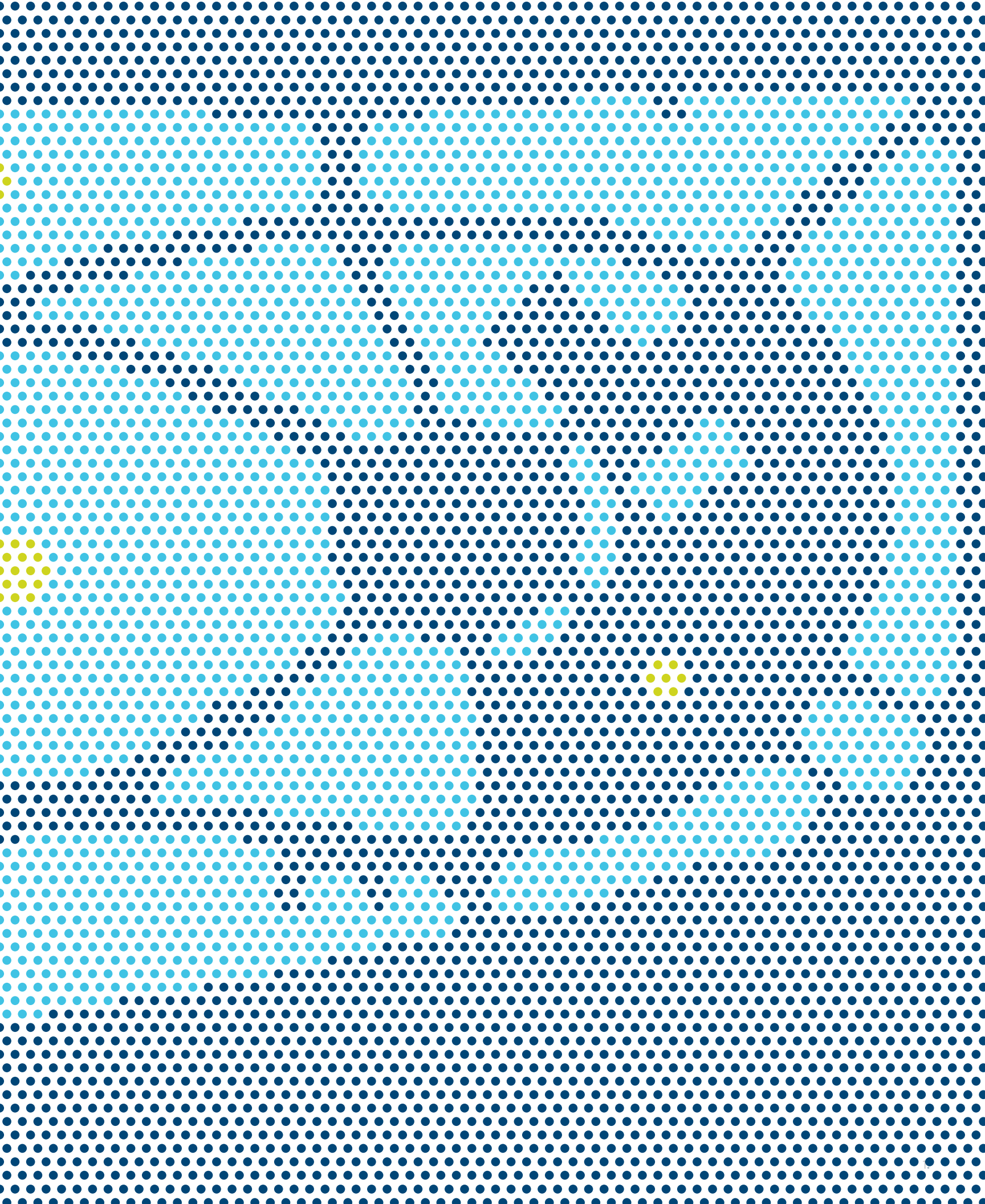
ART.

ROXY

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MAD. SQ. ART 2007. ROXY PAINE.

May 15 to December 31, 2007
Madison Square Park
Presented by the Madison Square Park Conservancy



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FOREWORD.

Roxy Paine's three works create a new way of looking at the Madison Square Park landscape. The limbs of his stainless steel trees knit our green space to the surrounding buildings—creating a seamless cityscape from the lawns of the park to the tips of icon skyscrapers like the Empire State Building, the Flatiron Building and the Met Life Tower. No visitor to the park fails to notice Roxy's bravura performance—to stop, to look up, to wonder, to admire, to touch. We thank Roxy deeply for putting his vision, his fertile brain and deft craftsmanship to work in the park.

When an artist works with the Madison Square Park Conservancy on a project so complex, he or she becomes a member of our family. It has been a pleasure to get to know Roxy Paine and his wife Sofia Mojadidi Paine and we are sure that their talents will continue to be a part of the park long into the future. Jim and Jane Cohan of the James Cohan Gallery (and the entire gallery staff) are also generous and accomplished friends grown closer through this project.

As Eleanor Heartney recounts in her insightful catalog essay, Roxy built *Conjoined* and *Erratic* in the studio in Treadwell, New York. Late last year we visited the studio in the rolling Upstate hills. An early snow had fallen on the fields. Shining limbs of what would be *Conjoined* were placed around the yard—because the work was too massive to be kept indoors. Inside the studio, two massive trunks were taking shape. It was the first time my colleague Stewart Desmond and I grasped the scale of the project for the park—a work of art so ambitious that it could never be assembled into one piece until Roxy and his crew put it up in the park.

Roxy, thank you for surprising our visitors with your masterful visions in stainless steel. We await in awe your next steps as an artist.

Debbie Landau
President
Madison Square Park Conservancy

ROXY PAINE AND THE CHANGING NATURE OF NATURE.

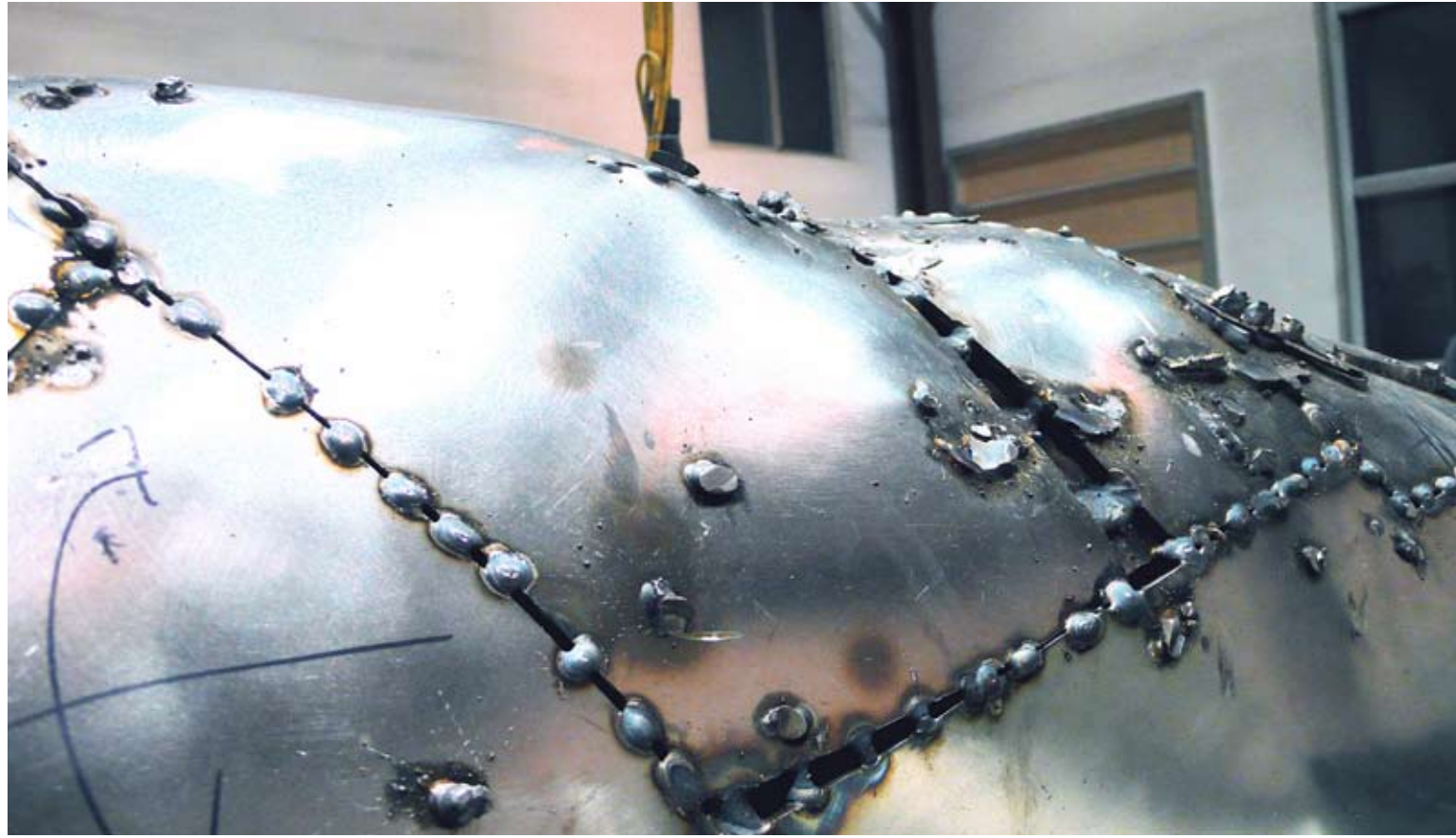
by Eleanor Heartney

Conjoined, 2007
Stainless steel

Rising from a patch of green within the urban grid, Roxy Paine's metal trees and boulders have the unsettling character of industrial artifacts masquerading as natural phenomena. Their outlines are familiar, but they glint in the light and offer reflective surfaces never to be found in nature. Closer examination reveals that they defy natural law, not just in terms of material, but also in terms of form. *Conjoined*, for instance, consists of a pair of life-size metal trees which seem to have grown toward each other rather than toward the light. The interwoven branches are entangled in a dense pattern that suggests an energy field, or perhaps a diagram of the intermingling of synapses in the brain. *Erratic*, meanwhile, is a stainless steel boulder seven feet high and fifteen feet wide. At first glance, it resembles the huge deposits of stone left behind in Upstate New York by the melting glaciers. But, again, closer examination reveals that its form appears to consist of an unnatural combination of elements of granite and sedimentary rock, two very different and incompatible geologic types. And, finally, *Defunct* appears to be a fungus-riddled dead or dying tree, but, fashioned of metal, it is in fact twice dead—or, more accurately, never alive in the first place.

Such visions of simulated Nature offer an unsettling but familiar experience. We have come a long way from the kind of ecstatic vision expressed by Jackson Pollock in his famous declaration, "I am nature." For Pollock, nature was a mystical, unchanging reality and the quest for authentic experience involved surrender to its sway. Such visions are no longer possible in an age when we are constantly reminded of nature's vulnerability to human intervention and continually faced with evidence of humanity's apparent ability to manipulate and possibly even alter natural laws. Instead, today's attitude may be closer to that of painter Peter Halley, who has remarked, only partly in jest, "The jungle ride at Disney World may





in fact be more real to most people than the real jungle in the Amazon . . . More and more people are becoming more comfortable in the simulated world than in the real one.”¹

Far from being an absolute, nature today is seen as manipulable, at least up to a point, an entity which exists more as a human construct than as the solid substrate of existence. With the advent of genetically modified vegetables, cloned animals, *in vitro* fertilization and designer genes, as well as unplanned modification of the natural order in the form of Global Warming or antibiotic-resistant strains of disease, distinctions between nature and technology begin to dissolve. Paine works in the intersection between nature and technology. His sculptures expose the paradoxes inherent in our current relationship with nature. He raises existential questions about our place in the natural order, about whether we exist inside or outside of nature, if we are becoming more like the machines which we have created and to what extent we can draw a firm line between the processes of nature, whose forms are determined by an invisible template imposed by genetic or geologic law, and those of technology, which operates in an apparently similar manner by mathematical algorithms.

Paine grapples with these issues in works that deliberately confuse natural and mechanical operations. For example, he has created a number of machines that purport to simulate human creativity. His *PMU (Painting Manufacture Unit)*, 1999–2000, is a computer-

programmed apparatus that self-paints canvases in an ironic send up of the rhetoric of individuality that surrounds modernist abstraction. It operates by mechanically spraying the canvas from a spray nozzle that moves back and forth, adding a layer each time as it goes. The final result is a thick surface of paint that sags at the bottom into a fringe of icicle-like drips. *SCUMAK*, 1998, performs the same operation for sculpture, mechanically producing blobs of plastic that bear some resemblance to modernist biomorphic sculpture.

These apparatuses claim to erase the distinction between man and machine although the banality of the end products seems a vote for the superiority of human creativity. In other works, Paine erases the distinction between natural and mechanical forces. *Erosion Machine* (2005), for instance, is a machine for producing the controlled erosion of a block of sandstone. Using a compressor, vacuum devices and a computer programmed with various sets of data, Paine’s machine creates patterns of stratification which are also physical records of stock market data (1998-2002), crime and drug use statistics (methamphetamine and marijuana) or the weather reports in Binghamton, New York, in the summer of 1990. Thus he suggests a parallel between the randomness of the information that bombards us daily and the apparent unpredictability of natural forces.



(Left)
Roxy Paine
Erratic in the studio
(detail), 2007

(Above)
Roxy Paine
Erratic, 2007
Stainless steel

¹ Peter Halley, in “Criticism to Complicity,” roundtable discussion moderated by Peter Nagy, *Flash Art* (Summer 1986), 46.



Another series of Paine's work involves the creation of large fields of meticulously realistic weeds and fungi. Here, Paine eschews machines and instead painstakingly creates the individual elements by hand. He presents them in various ways, sometimes placing them in vitrines like museum dioramas or displays of scientific specimens. Or they may be placed so they seem to sprout directly from the gallery floor or wall, the artifice of the surroundings adding to the strangeness of the scene. However, despite the verisimilitude of these manufactured organisms, Paine is less interested in *tromp l'oeil* effects than in the underlying generative principles which produce a diverse set of forms that are all recognizable as members of the same group. As he notes, "These works are really about inputting parameters of a language and outputting elements. So what you end up with is not so much the portrait of a mushroom as the portrait of a species and the variations possible within that species."² Like the mechanically created paintings and sculptures, they exist less as individual entities than as members of a tribe.

The three works that have descended upon Madison Square Park come out of similar considerations. While their contours are generic approximations of biological or geological forms, the patently inorganic nature of the material out of which they are fashioned, as well as the visible joints and obvious signs of human fabrication, suggest a genealogy that derives, not from nature, but from the infrastructure of the surrounding human-made environment.

² Conversation with the author, February 2007

In particular, the obviously hollow tree trunks bear more than a passing resemblance to aluminum pipes or conduits, while the boulder is clearly patched together from sections of stainless steel plate. And indeed they have been fabricated elsewhere, in Paine's Upstate studio, where they were hammered, cut and welded together manually to be transported to the park in pieces.

As a result, ironies abound. From the weather-beaten surface of *Erratic's* faux stone to *Conjoined's* broken, leafless branches to the parasitic fungal growths that sprout from *Defunct's* lifeless trunk, these works bear the signs of organic growth and decay. Yet their unchanging metallic forms will long outlast the vibrant, living trees that surround them. There is further food for thought in their relationship to Paine's other work. While machines may be programmed to simulate human creativity through the mechanical production of paintings, it takes the human hand to create the manufactured trees and boulders on view here.

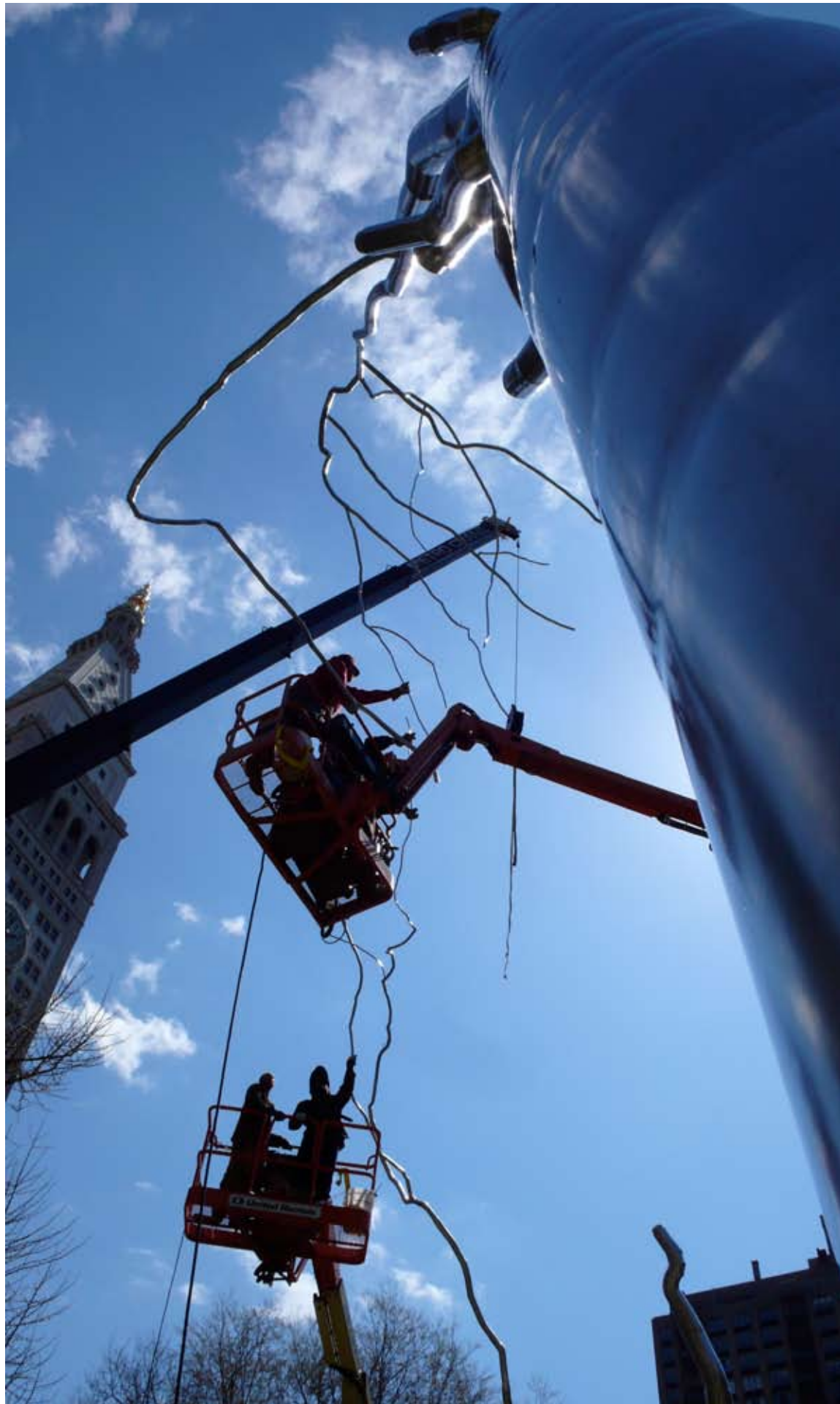
(Previous Page)
Conjoined, 2007
Stainless steel

(Bottom Right)
Defunct, 2004
Stainless steel

(Bottom Left)
Defunct (detail),
April 2007

(Right)
Defunct and *Conjoined* installation,
April 2007





(Left Page)
Conjoined installation,
April 2007



(Right Page, Top)
Conjoined (detail)
Stainless steel



(Right Page, Bottom Left)
Artist with *Conjoined* Maquette,
April 2007



(Right Page, Bottom Right)
Conjoined Maquette, 2006
Stainless steel

The precursor of these works was *Bluff*, a fifty-foot high stainless steel tree set in New York's Central Park as part of the 2002 Whitney Biennial. As many commentators mentioned, the deliberate artifice of the tree underscored the artificial nature of the park designed by Frederick Law Olmstead and Calvert Vaux to transform a swampy swath of low income neighborhoods into a credible replication of a natural landscape. *Conjoined*, *Defunct*, and *Erratic* function in a similar way in Madison Square Park, dramatizing the way that nature has again here been tamed and regularized to conform to the urban grid. In this light, these metal versions of trees and a boulder are actually not that different from the carefully cultivated arrangements of flora within a system of pathways and fences.

But for all the startling contradictions of his work, Paine eschews the Romantic pessimism of artists like Alexis Rockman or Patricia Piccinini, for whom the manipulation and mechanization of nature portends a future wracked by doomsday scenarios. Instead, Paine's work seems to point toward an accommodation between nature and industry. It comes out of a sense that both these entities have common roots in the logic of structure. He is interested in the relationship of underlying rules and surface variation, in the manifestation and unraveling of the underlying order of human and natural phenomena, and in the possibility that we can't really draw a strict line between the two. We partake of both nature and machine, these three unnatural versions of nature seem to be telling us, and the parts of us that conform to each can never be disentangled.

Eleanor Heartney is a contributing editor to *Art in America*, and *Artpress*. Among other books, she is the author of *Postmodern Heretics: The Catholic Imagination in Contemporary Art* and co-author of *After the Revolution: Women Who Transformed Contemporary Art*.

(Bottom Left)
Conjoined in the studio, 2006

(Bottom Right)
Erratic in the studio, 2007



ROXY PAINE.

Roxy Paine was born in 1966 in New York and studied at both the College of Santa Fe in New Mexico and the Pratt Institute in New York. Roxy Paine lives and works in Brooklyn and Treadwell, New York.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2007** *Mad. Sq. Art. Roxy Paine*, Madison Square Park, New York
Art Machines - Machine Art, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt; traveling to Museum Tinguely, Basel
- 2006** *Roxy Paine: PMU*, curated by Bruce Guenther, Portland Museum of Art, Portland, Oregon
Roxy Paine: New Work, James Cohan Gallery, New York
Meditations in an Emergency, Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit
- 2005** *Ecstasy: In and About Altered States*, organized by Paul Schimmel with Gloria Sutton, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (group exhibition)
- 2003** *Work Ethic*, Baltimore Museum of Art; traveled to Des Moines Center for the Arts
- 2002** *Roxy Paine: Second Nature*, co-curated by Joseph Ketner and Lynn Herbert, Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts. Traveled to Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston; SITE Santa Fe; De Pont Foundation for Contemporary Art, Tilburg, Netherlands (April 2002 through January 2004)
Roxy Paine, James Cohan Gallery, New York
The Whitney Biennial in Central Park, curated by Tom Eccles, organized by the Public Art Fund, New York, in collaboration with The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Early Acclaim: Emerging Artist Award Recipients 1997-2001, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut
- 2001** *Roxy Paine*, Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, Florida
Roxy Paine, Galerie Thomas Schulte, Berlin
- 2000** *From a Distance: Approaching Landscape*, curated by Jessica Morgan, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston
Working in Brooklyn: Beyond Technology, Brooklyn Museum of Art
5th Lyon Biennale of Contemporary Art: Sharing Exoticism
Greater New York: New Art in New York Now, PS1 Contemporary Art Center in collaboration with the Museum of Modern Art, New York
- 1999** *Roxy Paine*, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York
- 1998** *Roxy Paine*, Musee D'Art Americain Giverny, France. Traveled through 1999 to Lunds Kunsthall, Lund, Sweden
- 1997** *9 to 5 at Metrotech: New Commissions for the Common*, Public Art Fund, Brooklyn
- 1996** *Human/Nature*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York
- 1995** *Roxy Paine*, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York
- 1994** *Garden of Sculptural Delights*, Exit Art/The First World, New York
- 1993** *Popular Mechanics*, Real Art Ways, Hartford, Connecticut
- 1992** *Roxy Paine*, Herron Test-Site, Brooklyn

AWARDS

- 2006** John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship
- 1997** Trustees Award for an Emerging Artist, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

De Pont Museum of Contemporary Art, Tilburg, The Netherlands
Denver Art Museum, Denver
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.
Israel Museum, Jerusalem
Museum of Modern Art, New York
The New School for Social Research, New York
NMAC, Cadiz, Spain
Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts
Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska
Wanas Foundation, Knislinge, Sweden
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York



PREVIOUS MAD. SQ. ART EXHIBITIONS.

2000 Tony Oursler *The Influence Machine*

2001 Nawa Rawanchaikul *I ♥ Taxi*
Teresita Fernandez *Bamboo Cinema*
Tobias Rehberger *Tsutsumu*

2002 Dan Graham *Bisected Triangle, Interior Curve*
Mark Dion *Urban Wildlife Observation Unit*
Dalziel + Scullion *Voyager*

2003 Wim Delvoye *Gothic*

2004 Mark di Suvero *Aesope's Fables, Double Tetrahedron, Beyond*

2005 Sol LeWitt *Circle with Towers, Curved Wall with Towers*

2005 Jene Highstein *Eleven Works*

2006 Ursula von Rydingsvard *Bowl with Fins, Czara z Babelkami, Damski Czepek*

2007 Bill Fontana *Panoramic Echoes*

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

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.

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Special thanks to the Board of Trustees of the Madison Square Park Conservancy for their visionary commitment to art in the park.

We gratefully acknowledge the enthusiastic support of New York City Department of Parks & Recreation


 Adrian Benepe, Commissioner
Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor

Photo Credits

Sheila Griffin: 19
Jason Mandella: 6-7, 9, 15 (top)
Madison Square Park Conservancy: 10-11
Roxy Paine Studio: 8, 12, 13, 14, 15 (bottom left and right), 16-17

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Conjoined and *Erratic* are presented in Madison Square Park courtesy of the artist and the James Cohan Gallery. *Defunct* is presented courtesy of Dimitri Kostygin, Switzerland.

MAD. SQ. PK.

The Madison Square Park Conservancy, dedicated to keeping Madison Square Park a bright, beautiful and active park, is a public/private partnership with New York City Parks & Recreation. 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.

Madison Square Park Conservancy
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New York, New York 10010
www.madisonsquarepark.org

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Project Manager: Stewart Desmond