

MAD.
SQ.
ART 2008.
TADASHI
KAWAMATA
TREE HUTS

October 2 to December 31, 2008
Madison Square Park
Presented by the Madison Square Park Conservancy



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FOREWORD.

Sometimes the most incredible journeys begin with the faint flicker of remembrance. When Martin Friedman, esteemed advisor to Mad. Sq. Art, reached into his encyclopedic memory to recall the name of an artist who had captivated New York City in 1992 with a public art project on Roosevelt Island, it was the beginning of a complicated and gratifying adventure the likes of which I could never have foreseen.

I am writing, of course, of Tadashi Kawamata, an artist who lives a famously nomadic lifestyle of perpetual motion and constant creativity. Martin's challenge to find Tadashi and bring him to Madison Square Park sparked more than a year of searching, countless phone calls and emails, invitations and entreaties across three continents, both on the part of the Conservancy's staff and with the help of Claudia Gould, Tadashi's friend and the curator of his landmark Roosevelt Island project. It was well worth the effort, however, for as soon as we finally introduced Tadashi to our lovely and lively park, his sketchbook came out, his pencil flew across the page and the seeds for what would become Tree Huts were planted.

Tadashi's beautiful renderings gave us high hopes for his exhibition, but no drawing could have conveyed the level of excitement that his eight-day artist-in-residency program—a Mad. Sq. Art first—would generate among park-goers. During this period, the rhythm of daily life in Madison Square Park was punctuated by the sounds of table saws, power drills, and the beeping of boom lifts as twelve works of art came to life before the eyes of an immense and varied audience. It thrilled me to see Tadashi and his wonderful assistants explaining their concept and methods and discussing art every day over lunch with any passers-by who visited the work area. We couldn't have asked for a better testament to the potential of Tadashi's art both to transform physical space and engage the minds and memories of the public.

We owe our gratitude to the board of trustees of the Madison Square Park Conservancy who have supported the development of our free gallery without walls, as well as to our Mad. Sq. Art advisory committee who have guided us down so many exciting artistic paths. Of course, none of this would be possible without the generosity of our donors, in particular Agnes Gund, Jill & Peter Kraus, The Leucadia Foundation, The Henry Luce Foundation, The Asian Cultural Council, The Japan Foundation, The Reed Foundation and Anonymous.

It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with as generous, dedicated and daring an artist as Tadashi. We've been honored to host his return to our city, and grateful for the opportunity to introduce his brilliance to a whole new generation of New Yorkers. His journey here is one that will not soon be forgotten.

Debbie Landau
President

DWELLING PLACES FOR THE MIND.

by Peter Boswell

This fall, Madison Square Park serves as host to a group of a dozen or so diminutive tree houses that make the park seem as if it has been temporarily occupied by a migrating clan of Ewoks, elves, Lilliputians, or architecturally-gifted birds. Made from a welter of beams and boards, the houses have an improvisational quality that underscores their kinship to nests and emphasizes their temporal nature: if left in place, they do not look like they would survive the winter.

The elevated dwellings are the work of Japanese-born, Paris-based artist Tadashi Kawamata, who for twenty-five years has traveled around the globe to create public projects of a similarly temporary nature. Despite this prolific output and active schedule, it is Kawamata's first project in the United States since his 1992 "wrapping" of the ruins of James Renwick's smallpox hospital on New York City's Roosevelt Island with a scaffolding-like structure.¹ For those who experienced that landmark project, Kawamata's Madison Square Park tree houses provide occasion for a welcome reunion.

Kawamata's public interventions are inevitably inspired by the conditions of their site, whether physical, social, or historical. Madison Square Park is a vital, green oasis of nature in the Flatiron District of mid-town Manhattan (the famous Flatiron Building anchors its southernmost corner), bounded by Broadway, Fifth Avenue, and Madison Avenue, three of New York's busiest streets. In this bustling locale, Kawamata's elevated village underscores the nature of the park as a refuge for urbanites, a place of peace and calm amidst the commercial hustle that swirls around it.²

Whether built by men or birds, the primary function of tree houses or nests is to lift the occupants out of danger and allow them to rest without fear of ground-based predators or other dangers.

¹On the Roosevelt Island project, see Claudia Gould, et. al., *Kawamata Project on Roosevelt Island*, New York and Tokyo: on the table, inc. and Gendaikikakushitsu Publishers, 1993.





²Although makeshift shelters have been motifs in Kawamata's work since the mid-1980s, the tree house, or "tree hut," as he terms it, first appeared in his building vocabulary in 1999, when he affixed a single hut onto an existing steel pylon on the Museumsmeile in Bonn, Germany in 1999. Kawamata perched a similar hut high on a light pole for the Basel Art Fair in 2007, the year he proposed the tree hut project for Madison Square Park. That same year, he created his first complex of tree huts in a park in Trondheim, Norway, for the Generator 9 public art project.

The temporary and improvised nature of Kawamata's dwellings link them to shelters built by the homeless. Indeed, he has often titled his house installations "favelas"—the Brazilian Portuguese term for the shantytowns that occupy the hills around Rio de Janeiro. Viewed in this light, the tree huts could well focus attention on the plight of the segment of the population relegated by circumstance to public space—since that segment has no private space of its own—but which, as a matter of daily routine, most of us seek to ignore. Kawamata's structures underscore the homeless population's most basic needs and desires: shelter and privacy. The tree huts emphasize the vulnerability of the homeless, making us aware of our role, through laws and regulations, in excluding and threatening them.

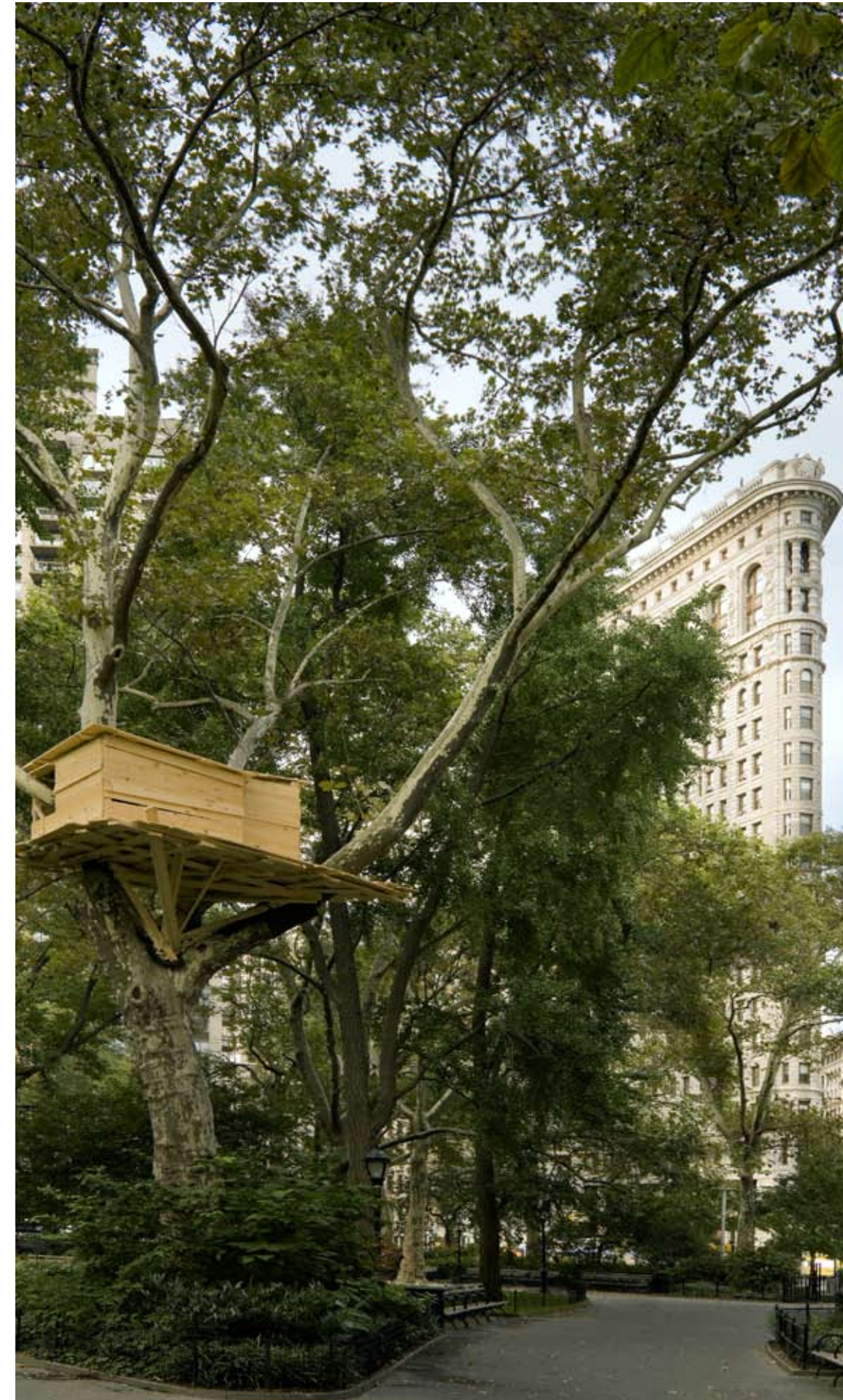
While such a reading of the artist's intentions is consistent with much of his earlier work and statements, it gives short shrift to the expansiveness of Kawamata's vision. Balancing this insight into a failure of our social system is the undeniable promise of escape. As symbols of privacy and detachment in the midst

of a sea of public activity, the tree houses appeal to our individual yearnings for peace and security.

So far as the public is concerned, Kawamata's high-rise architecture is physically inaccessible. There are no ladders that allow us to reach them. They appeal strictly to our imaginations; we can project ourselves into them or onto their platforms though we cannot physically access them. We can imagine ourselves atop these platforms gazing at everyday life below. Gazing down, in fact, at ourselves. We feel the sense of relief that comes with detachment from our daily cares, followed then by a distanced scrutiny of our condition: what has brought us to this park at this time? What are we doing, what are we feeling? These dwellings make us acutely self-conscious and intensely aware of the present. The tree houses thus give us the opportunity both to imaginatively escape and analytically examine our present circumstances.

Although architectural in form, the tree houses' inaccessibility and reduced scale distinguish them from architecture. Nor do they adhere to the traditional tenets of sculpture, or at least from the tenets of sculpture that have held since the 1960s, where sculpture is meant to be something experienced in relationship to the viewer's body. This is sculpture that is meant to be experienced visually rather than physically.

The tree houses have this in common with a number of other public works by Kawamata, which have been located in places that are more easily accessed visually than physically. This



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includes his 1992 Roosevelt Island project, which was primarily experienced through the views of it from across the water in Manhattan or Long Island City. The Roosevelt Island project was physically accessible only by appointment, meaning that only about 500 people were actually able to take a guided walk through the installation. What distinguishes the Madison Square Park project from this and others of Kawamata's visually-oriented projects is that, even though we can't get up to the tree houses, we can still wander among them, encountering them individually and sequentially rather than in a single, overall view.

Wood has been Kawamata's building staple since the beginning of his career as a sculptor. While some have sought to ascribe this to the influence of the Japanese penchant for fragility and harmoniousness with nature, the artist himself rejects such thinking. "I use wood all the time because I don't want to think about materials... The main object becomes how to use that material."⁴ It is wood's practicality, versatility, and economy that appeals to the artist. But equally significant is the material's impermanence in comparison to traditional sculptural media, which highlights the temporary nature of his projects. Kawamata, in fact, considers temporality to be the central element distinguishing installation, the form he practices, from sculpture. "The difference between sculpture and installation is time. While sculpture is conscious of permanence, the creation of an installation work is based on its eventual destruction... I want to concentrate on temporariness, not permanence."⁵

The construction and installation of his houses was carried out in full view of the public. In Madison Square Park, it was as though those processes were part of a performance in which he and his assistants collaborated. But rather than accentuate the performative aspect of building, it is perhaps more appropriate to foreground its collaborative nature. "From now on," Kawamata has said, "what goal of art is not to make objects for exhibition, but to establish a relationship between men and women in a process of work that is built up together, day by day."⁶

Such collaboration is not restricted simply to a group effort in building, but also to the way decisions are made on site. Kawamata does not draw plans of his constructions that are passed on to the workers. Nor does he bring a crew with him. Rather, he prefers to engage the labor of artist-carpenters at each site. "Various opinions are expressed, things change, even as I explain my plans [to a crew] for carrying out a project. The work no longer depends upon my intuition. It becomes separated from the sense of being my sole creation."⁷ Consequently, the improvisational look of his work thus is not simply a visual style, but also the result of decisions made by different people in the course of building. "I don't want to be a construction site foreman... What I want is for each individual to be able to find room for personal initiatives in shared work."⁸

Working in public, the artist must also take into account the local regulations concerning use of the site. Says Kawamata,

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³Other projects include the 1979 installation, *By Land*, in Tachikawa, Japan, which was best seen from a nearby commuter railroad and the 1991 *Favela in Houston*, seen from a major roadway. See Nancy Princenthal, "Out of the Ruins," *Art in America*, July 1993, pp. 75-77.

⁴"Tadashi Kawamata," in Howard Fox, *A Primal Spirit: Ten Contemporary Japanese Sculptors*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1990, p. 67.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁶Michel Ellenberger, "Tadashi Kawamata: Bridges in Time and Space", *Art Press* 238, September 1998, p. 25

⁷"Tadashi Kawamata," in Howard Fox, *A Primal Spirit: Ten Contemporary Japanese Sculptors*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1990, p.65.

⁸Michel Ellenberger, "Tadashi Kawamata: Bridges in Time and Space", *Art Press* 238, September 1998, p. 25

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“Obstacles such as laws, city codes and restrictions, forced me to consider things that have previously been outside my concerns. The extension of a work to the outside becomes a point of contact between what is private and what is public.”⁹ Because of this, Kawamata’s work is not always quite as improvisational as it appears. In Madison Square Park, he had to come up with a system involving wooden struts, rubber sheeting and fabric straps that allowed a harmless attachment of his huts to the trees.

Kawamata began his career as a sculptor presenting works in galleries for a primarily art-world audience. But public projects have increasingly become the focus of his work since the mid-1980s. “As I started working outside,” he has said, “the audience changed from art-world people to ordinary people, passersby, with no connections to the art world. What I had thought about as art began to take on a social dimension. Communication with people living in the places where I work becomes the real purpose of work like mine.”¹⁰

While it is on view, Kawamata’s project in Madison Square Park has the fortuitous effect of making us more aware of the present. We see more clearly the role this park—any park—plays in our daily routine; indeed, we see our daily routine more clearly. Soon enough, however, this project will be only a memory, a marker—“the fall the tree houses were in Madison Square Park.” Who knows what will we see from that vantage point?

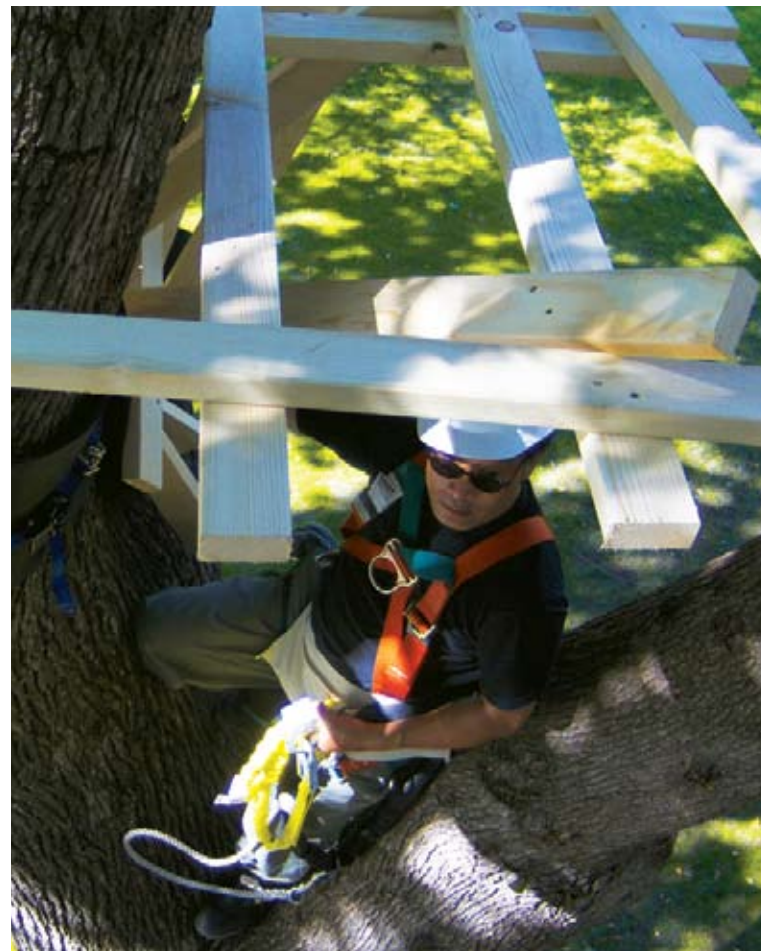
⁹ Tadashi Kawamata,” in Howard Fox, *A Primal Spirit: Ten Contemporary Japanese Sculptors*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1990, p.65.

¹⁰ Loc. cit.

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TADASHI KAWAMATA.

PROJECT CHRONOLOGY

1979 "Land", Tama Riverside, Tachikawa.

1980 "Project Work in Takayama", Takayama Architecture School, Takayama.

1982 Apartment project "Takara House Room 205", Tokyo. *La Biennale di Venezia*, Venezia.

1983 Apartment project "Otemon, Wada-So", *Materials and Spaces* Exhibition, Fukuoka.

"Project Work in Saitama", *Shape and Spirit in Wood Work* Exhibition, The Museum of Modern Art, Saitama, Urawa.

Apartment project "Slip in Tokorozawa", Tokorozawa.

Apartment project "Tetra House N3 W26",

Mr. and Mrs. Endo's House, Sapporo.

1984 "Ginza Network", Tokyo.

"Okaido Installation", collaborated with PH Studio, Matsuyama.

"Under Construction", collaborated with PH Studio,

Hillside Terrace, Tokyo.

1985 "Limelight Project", Limelight, New York.

"P. S. 1 Project", P. S. 1, Long Island City.

1986 Construction site project "Spui", The Hague.

1987 Construction site project "La Maison des Squatters", *Japon Art Vivant '87*, Grenoble.

"Destroyed Church", *Documenta 8*, Kassel.

Construction site project "Nove de Julho Caçapava", *The 19th São Paulo International Biennial Exhibition*, São Paulo.

1988 Construction site project "Fukuroi", *Aka-Renga Final*, Suruga Bank, Fukuroi.

"Hien-So", Kyoto.

1989 "Toronto Project", Colonial Tavern Park, Toronto. Begijnhof Sint Elisabeth", Kortrijk.

1990 "Sidewalk", *New Works for New Spaces: Into the Nineties*, Columbus.

1991 "Favela in Houston", *Landscape*, Bayou Riverside, Houston.

"Favela in Ottawa", *A Primal Spirit*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

"Favela in Ushimado", *The 4th Biennial / Japan Ushimado Art Festival*, Ushimado.

1992 "People's Garden", *Documenta 9*, Kassel.

"Project on Roosevelt Island", Small Pox Hospital, Roosevelt Island, New York.

1993 "Passaggio", *Museo Città Eventi: Inside Out*, Prato.

"Frauenbad", Limmat River and Helmhaus, Zürich.

1994 "Prefabrication in Hiroshima", *Asian Art Now*, Hiroshima.

"Sanatorium", Senzokuike Hospital, Tokyo.

"Transfert", Centre de Création Contemporain, Tours and Atelier Calder, Saché.

1995 "Tram Passage", Verein StadtRaum Remise, Vienna.

"Bunker", Kunsthalle, Recklinghausen.

1996 "Work in Progress", Zug (-1999).

"Sidewalk", Wiener Neustadt.

"Working Progress", Alkmaar (-1999).

1997 "Working Progress: Boat Travelling", Alkmaar, traveled to Munster.

"Relocation," Annelly Juda Fine Art and Serpentine Gallery, London.

"Le passage de chaises", Chapelle Saint-Louis de la Salpêtrière, Paris.

1998 "Working Progress: Boat Traveling", Alkmaar, Zaandam, Purmerend, Haalem and Beverwijk.

"Les Chaises de Traverse", Hôtel Saint-Livier, Metz and

Sinagogue de Delme, Delme.

"Haus der Kunst", Staatsgalerie Moderner Kunst, München.

"Garden Sheds", *every day / 11th Biennale of Sydney*, Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney.

"Tokyo Project: New Housing Plan", Tokyo.

1999 "Matsunoyama Project", Matsunoyama, Niigata.

"The Site of Archeology", *Art Focus 3: International Biennial of Contemporary Art*, Jerusalem.

"Tree Hut", *Zeit Wenden*, Museumsmeile, Kunstmuseum, Bonn.

2000 "Viewpoint Terrace", Competition *Kunst am Kanal at Mittellandkanal*, Hannover."Sur la voie", Évreux.

"Trench and Bridge", Middelheimopenluchtmuseum, Middelheim.

"Matsunoyama Project", Matsunoyama, Niigata (1999-).

"Work in Progress: Project in Toyota City", Toyota (2000-).

"Canal Boat", *As it is*, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham.

"Lodging London", London.

2001 "Lodging Tokyo", Haneda, Tokyo.

"Plan in Progress", Boston.

6th Kitakyushu Biennale + kawamata coal mine tagawa Joint Project.

"Boat Project", Tagawa >>> Wakamatsu Bay.

"Daily News", Art Tower Mito Contemporary Art Gallery, Mito

2002 "Observation Balcony", Expo 02, Neuchâtel.

"Absent Racetrack", Tokachi International Art Exhibition:

Demeter, Obihiro.

"Fayuca", *Temporary Existence* Exhibition, Ex-Teresa Arte Actual, Mexico City.

"Republic of Korea-Japan coal mine houses exchange project", *Busan Biennale*, Busan, and Kawamata

Coal Mine Project Tagawa (1996-), Project Site, Tagawa.

"Bamboo Construction", *Shanghai Biennale*, Shanghai.

2003 "Bridge and Archives", Moyland / Bedburg-Hau.

"Baroquitos", *Bienal de Valencia*, Valencia.

"Matsunoyama Project", Matsunoyama, Niigata (1999-).

"Kawamata Coal Mine Project Tagawa 2003: Summer

Seminars", Project Site in Jodoji Park, Tagawa (1996-).

2004 "Wooden Terrace Beach", Basel.

"Memory in Progress", Saint Thélo.

"Construction Fence", *5ème Biennale d'Art Contemporain d'Enghien-les-Bains*, Enghien.

"Work in Progress: Project in Toyota City", Toyota (2000-).

"Kawamata Coal Mine Project" Tagawa 2004: Project.

"Reconsideration", Project Site in Jodoji Park, Tagawa (1996-).

2005 "Détour des Tours", Le Creux de l'Enfer, Thiers and Le Château des Adhémar, Montélimar.

"Memory in Progress", Saint Thélo.

2006 "Memory in Progress", Saint Thélo.

"Elevage en fut", Fraisse des Corbiere.

"Xiringuito a Mataro", Can Xalant, Centre de Creacio.

2007 "Tree huts in Trondheim", *GENERATOR 9*, Trondheim, Norway.

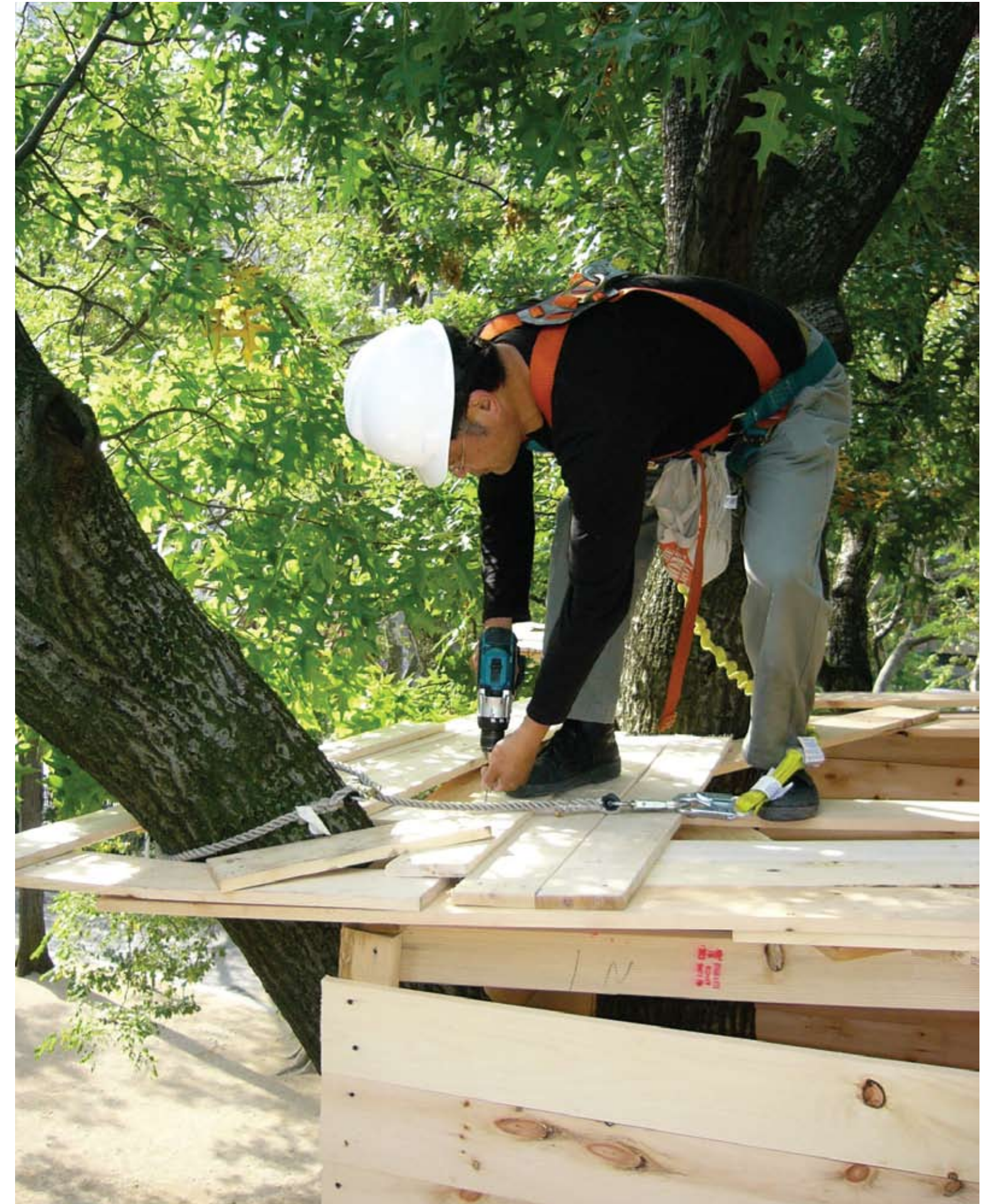
"Tree huts in Basel", *Art unlimited at Art Fair Basel 2007*, Basel.

"Observatoire", *Estuaire 2007*, Nante.

"View point terrace in Paderborn", *Tatort Paderborn*, Paderborn, Germany.

2008 "Walkway", Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo

"Tree Huts", Galerie Kamel Mennour, Paris.



PREVIOUS MAD. SQ. ART EXHIBITIONS.

2008 Olia Lialina & Dragan Espenschied *Online Newspapers: New York Edition*
Richard Deacon *Assembly*

2007 Bill Fontana *Panoramic Echoes*
Roxy Paine *Conjoined, Defunct, Erratic*
William Wegman *Around the Park*

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

2005 Jene Highstein *Eleven Works*

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

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

2003 Wim Delvoye *Gothic*

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

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

2000 Tony Oursler *The Influence Machine*

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

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The Madison Square Park Conservancy, dedicated to keeping Madison Square Park a bright, beautiful and lively public 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.



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