

The New York Times

By Carol Vogel 24 January, 2013

Struggling in Bronze: Figures Visit Central Park

Two pairs of cast bronze male figures, bound together with rope and balancing on a tripod of sticks, were a bizarre sight on the grounds of Kensington Gardens in London last fall. Their faces were gnarled and grimacing, their heads facing different directions, as if they were fighting to break free from each other. The sculptures are from the “United Enemies” series by the German artist Thomas Schütte. He started the series in the early 1990s, and this installation was part of a larger exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery.

These same sculptures — each stands 13 feet tall — are coming to New York, where they will be installed on the Doris C. Freedman Plaza, at the southeast corner of Central Park, from March 5 through Aug. 25.

“They are emotional things that we can all relate to,” said Nicholas Baume, director and chief curator of the nonprofit Public Art Fund, which is presenting the work. “Think dysfunctional family or simply the battles within ourselves. That’s what’s so brilliant about the sculptures. They operate on many different levels.”

During the Serpentine exhibition Mr. Schütte explained that the faces were partly political caricatures inspired by a visit to Rome in 1992, when “heads of state and others were being exposed and discredited and sent to jail,” he said. “So the caricature and the satire were a reality.” The figures, he continued, were “modeled in isolation but bound in pairs, emerging in parallel.”

They also could be seen as 21st-century examples of the kinds of distorted faces made famous by the “character heads” of the 18th-century German sculptor Franz Xaver Messerschmidt or the satirical political caricatures that the French artist Honoré Daumier created nearly a century later. “They do relate to that tradition,” Mr. Baume said. “Thomas Schütte’s work always balances the political and personal.”

A LANDMARK LINEUP

The Cuban artist Alexandre Arrechea took inspiration from the past when conceiving “No Limit,” a show of 10 site-specific metal sculptures that will be on view March 1 to June 9 along the Park Avenue medians from 53rd to 67th Streets. Each sculpture is based loosely on a New York architectural landmark: the Chrysler Building, the former Citicorp Center, the Empire State Building, the Flatiron Building, the Helmsley Building, the MetLife Building, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company Tower, the Seagram Building, the Sherry-Netherland hotel and the Thurgood Marshall United States Court House. The tallest will rise 20 feet.

“This project has been entirely designed for Park Avenue,” Mr. Arrechea said. “I’ve picked buildings like the Seagram Building or MetLife that define the city and define Park Avenue.”



The Thomas Schütte bronzes "United Enemies" will be installed at the southeast corner of Central Park in March.

the giant event every March in Maastricht, the Netherlands. The fair includes all collecting categories, including textiles and antiquities, jewelry, old-master paintings and manuscripts. At the time the organizers hoped to shore up the contemporary art section to compete with dedicated contemporary art fairs like Art Basel (held in Switzerland each June) and the Frieze Art Fair (in London in October). But as fast as these dealers blew in, most, including Gagosian, dropped out.

When this year's fair opens on March 15 Gagosian will reappear.

"When we did it back then we didn't have as big a European presence as we do now," Larry Gagosian said in a telephone interview. "Now we're all over Europe, so it makes sense to be there."

The centerpiece of the Gagosian booth will be "Metallic Venus," a monumental stainless-steel sculpture by Jeff Koons from his new "Antiquity" series. More than eight feet tall, it depicts a buxom woman lifting her robe over her head to expose her body. Mr. Koons has said the model refers to the ancient Roman marble statue Callipygian Venus, or "Venus of the beautiful buttocks."

"I will be also doing a major show of new and recent work with Jeff in May," Mr. Gagosian said, "that will take up all of the 24th Street gallery."

The timing is no coincidence. It is in May that another Chelsea gallery, David Zwirner, will also hold a show of Mr. Koons's new work. Despite rumors that Mr. Koons is planning to leave the Gagosian Gallery, he has told friends he intends to show in several different places: Gagosian, Zwirner and the Sonnabend Gallery, where he has had perhaps the longest relationship.

Presented by the Magnan Metz Gallery in Chelsea, together with the city's Parks and Recreation Department and the Fund for Park Avenue's sculpture committee, the installation is Mr. Arrechea's first public art exhibition in New York. While most of the sculptures retain some of the buildings' most recognizable features, they often meld new forms and sometimes even moving parts. His Citicorp Center has a spinning top, a metaphor for the fiscal crisis; his Flatiron is literally flat, and while the outline will be obvious, it will be flying on a flagpole, set on ball bearings so it moves with the wind.

"Some of the sculptures appear to be almost dancing in front of the buildings," Mr. Arrechea said. One in particular does not obviously reflect a building. At first glance this work, in front of the Seagram Building, seems to be a straightforward fire hose wrapped around a bright-red spool. But unraveled, the hose begins to abstractly resemble that International Style landmark.

VENUS IN STEEL

In 2006 the Gagosian Gallery and its competitors began to exhibit at the European Fine Art Fair, which is held in London each year. The fair includes all collecting categories, including textiles and antiquities, jewelry, old-master paintings and manuscripts. At the time the organizers hoped to shore up the contemporary art section to compete with dedicated contemporary art fairs like Art Basel (held in Switzerland each June) and the Frieze Art Fair (in London in October). But as fast as these dealers blew in, most, including Gagosian, dropped out.