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art for all

New public sculpture installation opens at Riverside Park South

BY PATTY LEE

Riverside Park South is becoming an outdoor gallery for aspiring sculptors from the Art Students League of New York this summer.

Seven talented artists – Elizabeth Allison, Selva Sanjines, John Balsamo, Noa Shay, Allston Chapman, Matte White and Akihiro Ito – are putting their life-size statues on display as part of the League's Model to Monument program. (The public opening is tomorrow at 11 a.m. at 61st St.)

Led by Greg Wyatt, sculptor-in-residence at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine on Amsterdam Ave., the students spent nine months conceiving, sculpting and producing these large-scale works.

The partnership with the Department of Parks & Recreation has been a different experience for artists who are normally holed up in their studios.

"It was a very big challenge because it took me to a different place from where I usually work," says Shay. "When you go to that area in the park, it's a time of pause."

Originally from Israel, Shay, 36, came to New York to get a MFA

from Brooklyn College. Class assignments had her running to galleries across the city, and it was during those trips that Shay, who started her art career as a painter, discovered a passion for sculpture.

But the transition from painting to sculpting wasn't an easy one.

"It's a different way of thinking. Instead of flattening things, you have to think in the round, and that takes time," Shay explains.

Looking to learn from the best, Shay enrolled in the Arts Student League of New York in 2005, where notable alumni include



Georgia O'Keeffe and Jackson Pollock. She applied for Model to Monument last year.

The seven winners jumped right into the public-art process, with Wyatt as their supervisor. They began in September by visiting

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Sculptor Greg Wyatt leads the league's Model to Monument program.



Artist Akihiro Ito's sculpture "Forever" being installed at Riverside Park South



Allston Chapman intently works on her piece.



Noa Shay works on her fish-child sculpture. Below, Elizabeth Allison studies her piece "River Gazers."

the site, a stretch of waterfront between W. 59th and W. 72nd, and producing rough sketches of what they wanted to sculpt.

Her final piece, a statue of a fish with a child's face peeking out from its mouth, was inspired by the motif of water.

"I chose the tale of the golden fish as inspiration," says Shay. "The fairy tale is a story about wishing – wishing for what you want, wishing too much and being caught in a net."

She hopes that her work will have New Yorkers reflecting on their environment as they stroll through Riverside Park.

"The child is a theme I've been dealing with in my previous works," she says. "It's a symbol of hidden wishes and

hopes for the future, innocence and renewal. That's what the piece is about for me."

In addition to their individual pieces, all seven artists worked together to create a sculpture for Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx. Because the location is often used for outdoor theater performances, the students settled on a large mask.

Like their statues for Riverside Park, the one at Van Cortlandt Park required not only artistic skill and vision but a collaboration with other professionals. Wyatt, who has dedicated his career to creating

art for the public, serves as their guide through the process.

Wyatt leads a teen apprenticeship program at the church for kids in the eighth to 10th grades. "I train the youngest of the young artists," says Wyatt, who teamed up with the league seven years ago.

"It's been a lot of hard work and a lot of pleasure, meeting them weekly and bringing them into an educational process that they've never been exposed to. They're learning to design exhibits, they're learning to create models that are tested for design. And right now, at the

end of this process, I recommend different foundries and metal shops and molding and casting shops."

With her sculpture finally ready for New Yorkers to see, Shay will work to finish several personal projects before returning to the public art scene.

"This particular sculpture in the park opened a new place for me to work and a new subject matter to explore," she says. "I'm very grateful for the opportunity to put my sculpture out there and talk to people. I think that's what all artists want."

