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Sculptures turn park into open-air museum

By Emily Ngo



Photo credit: Dave Sanders | Elizabeth Allison's "River Gazers" was one of seven sculptures unveiled along the Hudson River in Riverside Park between West 61st St. and West 69th St. in Manhattan. (June 24, 2011)

The newest visitors to Manhattan's Riverside Park South include a longhair siren from Greek mythology, a goldfish with a human visage and two metallic birds frozen in flight.

They're large-scale sculptures, created by members of the historic [Art Students League](#) of New York as part of a temporary exhibition.

"Our parks are better known for being New Yorkers' backyards, but we're working to transform some of them into open-air museums," said Manhattan parks commissioner William Castro.

The seven works were installed last week along the [Hudson River](#) waterfront park between West 59th and 72nd streets, where they will remain on display for a year.

They were crafted of different materials, including wood and bronze, in varying styles, including abstract and modernist. Each represents their creators' unique interpretation of the park space.

"This is a place where I sit and contemplate. The river provides a place to be introspective," said artist Elizabeth Allison, 35, of the Upper West Side. Her monument, "River Gazers," features two figures affixed to a bench, looking out onto the water.

The seven sculptures inaugurate "Model to Monument," a collaboration between the city parks department and the 136-year-old art league, which attracts artists internationally and counts Georgia O'Keefe, [Jackson Pollock](#) and Tom Otterness among its alumni.

The sculptors showcasing their work at Riverside Park South learned last summer that they had been chosen to participate. Over the course of the year, they created models of their proposed sculptures then methodically enlarged them into monuments.

They learned what materials and sculpting methods would ensure their final products could withstand the weather, and the wear and tear associated with being installed outdoors, said Ira Goldberg, the art league's executive director.

"These works are a great example of how artists can contribute to the community," Goldberg said.

Noa Shay, like Allison, hoped to encourage reflection with her piece. Called "Wishing," it portrays a human-esque fish suspended over water at the end of a park pier.

"This is a place where we come to meet ourselves, to clear our heads and think about what we wish for," said Shay, 36, an Israeli-born artist who lives on the Upper East Side.

Another sculptor, who stacked pieces of wood to create two towering pillars topped by abstract heads and noses, said he wanted his work, "Forever," to speak for itself.

"I wanted to express the human soul because it's eternal. The universe is eternal. Everything is eternal," said Akihiro Ito, 36, who was raised in Japan and lives in Astoria, Queens. "I can't really explain with words, so I made this."

Selva Sanjines, 60, a Chilean artist living in midtown, said her work, "Flight," of two sleek birds, represents Riverside Park South's journey from its industrial past to its recreational present.

She added that she's overjoyed by the idea that the public might enjoy it. "It was my dream growing up to be a sculptor for the masses," Sanjines said.