

July 6, 2011

Steel and Grass: Art comes to the Park

By Adrian Cabreja

This past Tues., June 28th, the Van Cortlandt Park Administration and Conservancy, in partnership with the Arts Students League of New York, unveiled a 12-foot tall theatrical mask made of aluminum and steel. The sculpture was created by seven artists from the Arts Student League.

The unveiling was a significant occasion, as it celebrated a five year partnership between the Arts Students League of New York and the City Department of Parks and Recreation. The partnership, named the Model to Monument program (M2M), is an innovative program that promotes sculpture and other arts in public areas and parks.

"We are hoping that this art piece attracts people to see the charms of this park," said Ira Goldberg, Director of the Arts Student League of New York.

The City Parks Department is initiating M2M as a city-wide project that will look to ensure that art is brought to all communities throughout New York.

Van Cortlandt Park is participating in the city-wide initiative.

"Van Cortlandt is one of our preeminent parks, but has been historically under served by public art projects," said Jonathan Kuhn, Director of Art & Antiquities at the Parks Department.

Margot Perron, Administrator and President Van Cortlandt Park Conservancy, hopes that the sculptural piece will serve to attract more visitors to the park.

"It is our pre-eminent park," explains Perron of the City's fourth largest park. There are more than a thousand acres of parkland in Van Cortlandt Park, where playing fields and playgrounds abound.

The park also boasts the country's first public golf course, the borough's largest freshwater lake, and the oldest house in the Bronx.

And it is at the site of that house, the Van Cortlandt Park Museum House, that the sculpture was erected.

The theatrical mask was placed just south of the house, a gathering space where, traditionally, visitors have come to enjoy live theater and music, and other presentations. The area was also favored because the student artists were attracted to its open space.

Still, there were challenges.

Anchoring the structure to the ground was said to have been the largest hurdle. Engineers had planned a specific way of securing the structure, but when digging holes, they came upon landfill. The students had to dig it out by hand because they couldn't get large equipment into the location.

"I'm very proud and exhausted," said student artist Nao Shay. "We did a lot of last minute work."

Other League student artists who worked on the mask include Elizabeth Allison, John Balsamo, Allston Chapman, Akihiro Ito, Selva Sanjines, and Matthew White.

The project took a year to build and place.

Perron encourages residents to visit and view the mask for themselves.

"It will be fun to watch in different seasons with the leaves changing colors around it," she explained, "how it weathers with the rain, how it will look in the snow."

The mask will remain on-site at Van Cortlandt Park until May 2012.



The 12-foot tall aluminum and steel sculpture was born out of the Model to Monument program (M2M), a five year partnership between the Arts Students League of New York and the City Department of Parks and Recreation, that promotes sculpture and other arts in public areas and parks.

