

Nina Katchadourian

HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

Experience Sunset-Colored Ice Cream Cones and Other Art Interludes in Central Park

by Allison Meier on May 14, 2015

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As the Central Park Conservancy celebrates its 35th year, it's hard to imagine the decrepit shape much of the park was in when they started revitalization efforts in 1980. In particular the northern area of Manhattan's grandest park was in major disrepair, a far way from its original 19th-century grandeur, with trash floating in the Harlem Meer, and its waterfront facilities boarded up and abandoned. As part of its anniversary celebrations, the Conservancy partnered with the arts nonprofit Creative Time, which through June 20 is hosting eight participatory pieces that revitalize the northern region of the park on Fridays and Saturdays.



Nina Katchadourian, "The Lampost Weavers," installed on the West Drive of Central Park

Drifting in Daylight, co-curated by Cara Starke and Nato Thompson, opens tomorrow (Friday, May 15), with performances, music, installations, and other projects meant to draw visitors into the different spaces that Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux designed back in the 1850s. It's largely the kind of art that is easy to like on a summer day, like a free ice cream cone

colored a shade of a Central Park sunset from a solar-powered truck by artist Spencer Finch, or artist David Levine's project, which restages scenes from well-known Hollywood films shot in the park, like *Bullets Over Broadway* (1994) and *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001), for unsuspecting viewers. There's even a shining silver orb where you can drop off postcards for people without an address here on Earth (i.e. the dead) from Alicia Framis. However, it's unfortunate that with such a prominent platform, *Drifting in Daylight* doesn't highlight any of the current issues surrounding Central Park, such as the encroachment of shadows from super tall skyscrapers or pedestrian safety, which could have in turn emphasized why the Conservancy is still so essential.



Nevertheless, by encouraging exploration and serendipitous encounters, it does offer moments of pause and engagement with the environment of the park, each tree, rock, and vista carefully designed by Olmsted and Vaux. In the Ravine and Loch of the North Woods, Lauri Stallings with her performance collective *Glo* has dancers moving through the trees and out into open spaces, breaking from modern choreography into movement that blends with the constant action of the park. A lenticular billboard by Karyn Olivier shifts from glacier to rock, recalling the glacier that once covered New York City 18,000 years ago. Up on a light post on the West Drive, Nina Katchadourian has made nests from tennis shoes wrapped in string, as if birds had mugged human joggers, who are ubiquitous in the park. On a nearby hill Marc Bamuthi Joseph has choreographed a team of poets, dancers, and string players in "*Black Joy in the Hour of Chaos*," where viewers can help raise up a parachute tent. It's in part a tribute to the death of Michael

Brown and others, with a spoken word performance as the group lifts up their arms together, referencing “hands up don’t shoot.”

And over in the Harlem Meer, the S.S. Hangover by artist Ragnar Kjartansson sails in a reclaimed Icelandic fishing boat, carrying a brass sextet clad in black-tie attire. Back when Olmsted worked on the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, he encouraged a small armada of whimsical ships to sail in the central Court of Honor with its huge waterway, including Venetian gondolas and a Viking ship. While the Central Park of today has been augmented over the years, and fallen into disrepair at various points in its lifetime, it’s likely Olmsted would have loved to sit alongside the manmade lake and listen to the band as it makes its leisurely loops around the Harlem Meer.