

Lenka Clayton

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## Why Is a Parrot Living in the Guggenheim Museum?

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Pinkie and her handler Phoebe, at the Guggenheim. Photo: Kristopher McKay.

Pinkie has a specially curated selection of "non-objective" films to watch in the rotunda, and will be leading "birds-eye tours" around the collection.

This summer, one very lucky bird is getting a big break. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York is hosting a Salmon-crested Cockatoo named Pinkie in its rotunda for the entire month of June.

Why, you ask, is a bird living in the museum? She is taking part in a large-scale, city-wide project conceived by Pittsburgh-based artists Lenka Clayton and Jon Rubin. The six-month-long endeavor is the latest chapter in the Guggenheim's

ongoing social practice initiative, which launched last year and seeks to present community-engaged projects.

For her part, Pinkie is serving as the ambassador for a Bronx-based independent pet supply store, one of six venues across the city participating in Clayton and Rubin's ambitious work.

During her month-long "residency" at the Guggenheim, Pinkie provides inspiration for "birds-eye-view tours" in the galleries (with help from her trusty handler). The museum has also set up a monitor beside her cage on the rotunda floor that plays a selection of non-objective films, which visitors are welcome to enjoy alongside. (Who knew birds had a taste for avant-garde cinema?)

Pinkie's stay at the Guggenheim is just one piece of a much bigger project. The artists chose six points in New York City along a loosely-drawn circle that encompasses Harlem, the South Bronx, Queens, and the Manhattan's Upper East Side. Each point represents a local institution the artists invited to take part in a citywide cultural exchange program.

Each institution selected a local "ambassador" (Pinkie represents the pet store, for example, while a drama class represents a Queens high school) that will move one step along the five-mile-wide circle each month, until every "ambassador" has visited every site.

Clayton and Rubin told artnet News via email, "We've inserted a somewhat absurd system into the city, a circle that transgresses the grid, an orbit of things and places that would never naturally occur."

The artist duo spent a year planning the show, which has a long but also very descriptive name: *A talking parrot, a high school drama class, a Punjabi TV show, the oldest song in the world, a museum artwork, and a congregation's call to action circle through New York* (2017). The project began in March, and will continue to traverse the city through August.

As the show's title notes, the participants include: Pinkie from Pet Resources in the Bronx; a high-school drama class from the Frank Sinatra School of the Arts in Queens; a Punjabi TV show from Jus Broadcasting in Long Island City; the "Hurrian Hymn" from the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World (ISAW) on the Upper East Side; a "Call to Action" from the congregation at St. Philip's Church in Harlem.

The Guggenheim, for its part, is sending Felix Gonzalez-Torres's candy-pile work "*Untitled*" (*Public Opinion*) to all the aforementioned spots—the first time this artwork is being shown outside of a museum or gallery setting—certainly the first time a local Pet store can boast conceptual art alongside dog food.

Since the project began, Pinkie has hosted a high-school dance at the Frank Sinatra School, posed for life studies drawing classes, served as guest, subject, and "call-in" host for various segments at Jus Broadcasting; she inspired two lectures at the ISAW on Animals in Antiquity, where the staff attempted to teach

her the Ancient Green word for “democracy,” and after her stint at the museum, she will continue on to St. Philips Church before heading back home to Pet Resources.

The organizers have clearly anticipated the potential ruffled feathers that often accompanies animals being used for art. The artists published an extensive letter of intent from Dr. Alexandra Wilson, a veterinarian and independent consultant working specifically with Pinkie for this project. (Wilson also assisted in Duke Riley’s *Fly By Night*, the 2016 Creative Time project involving LED-clad pigeons.)

But in fact, Pinkie is not even the only animal in residence at the Guggenheim right now. Anicka Yi’s installation, *The Hugo Boss Prize 2016: Anicka Yi, Life Is Cheap*, includes a bevy of live ants.

After her jaunt at the museum, Pinkie will return to the pet store—bringing along with her a newly impressive provenance.