Art in the Open
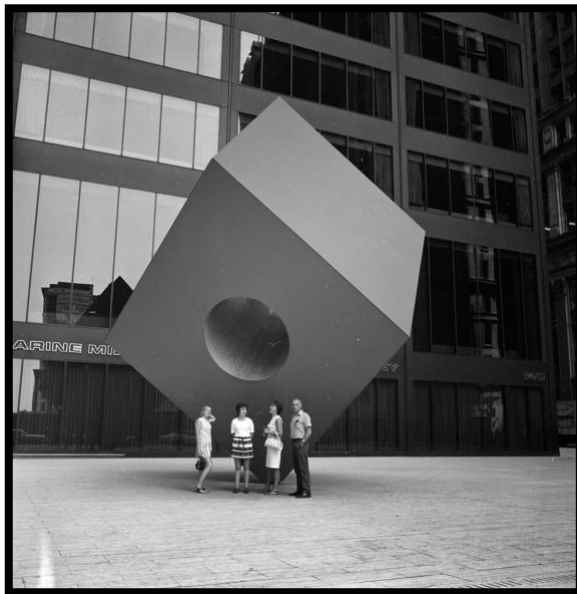# *Fifty Years of Public Art in New York*
at the Museum of the City of New York

Credits Below*

Exhibition Highlights Works That Have Transformed Public Spaces and Revolutionized Expectations of Art Outside the Walls of Museums and Galleries

ON VIEW: Friday, November 10, 2017 – Sunday, May 13, 2018

(New York, NY) The Museum of the City of New York presents *Art in the Open: Fifty Years of Public Art in New York*, an exhibition chronicling, celebrating, and examining the last half century of art and innovation that has made the city the most vibrant environment for public creativity in the world. Opening 50 years after revolutionary public art initiatives were first staged in the city's parks and plazas, *Art in the Open* takes visitors through five decades of city history and on a whirlwind tour of the five boroughs, all with public art as a guide. This wide-ranging exhibition features over 125 objects on display highlighting artists and works of art as diverse as the city itself, including pieces by Kara Walker, Keith Haring, Roy Lichtenstein, and Christo and Jeanne-Claude. The exhibition is presented to mark the 40th anniversary of the pioneering Public Art Fund.

"The ubiquity of public art is a big part of what makes New York City so special," said Whitney Donhauser, *Ronay Menschel Director* of the Museum of the City of New York. "From parks to the subways, from Staten Island to the Bronx, creativity is all around us. Experiencing the wide variety of art created for public spaces gathered together within the walls of a museum offers visitors a new lens for appreciating and understanding our city's extraordinary 50-year commitment to public art."

All around New York—in parks, plazas, and subways, in empty lots and abandoned buildings, on the water, and even in the air—artists turn public spaces into settings for their creations. Not only do thousands of works of art, both temporary and permanent, animate the sites where they are located, but they also transform the public's understanding of the city itself. Underlying all of this is a remarkable array of public and private programs that provide the infrastructure for some of the most ambitious urban art programming in the world.

Art in the Open sheds light on the often-overlooked roots of public art in the city by exploring the social and historical reasons that New York City has proved to be such fertile ground for outdoor art. The exhibition highlights the ways in which the story of the city's shared artworks have reflected the dynamic of the city itself. Several critical threads connect the numerous and diverse public art initiatives New York has hosted in the last 50 years: cycles of urban decay and renewal; evolving understandings of how the city's built environment can and should interact with its art and artists; and differing notions of community engagement and public dialogue. *Art in the Open* presents public art not as ornamentation, but as a fundamental lens through which to interpret New York City.

"The audacity of public art programs in the five boroughs in the last half-century reflects the ambition, energy, and controversy that define New York City," said curator Lilly Tuttle. "In our attempts to beautify our public spaces, we see the diversity of people, places, and ideas that make the city great. Visitors to this show will be able to explore 50 years of public artwork in one exhibition, and hopefully they will emerge eager to join the conversation about outdoor art that doesn't show any sign of slowing down."

The modern public art movement in New York had its origins in a bold idea: bring contemporary art out of galleries and museums and into public space. Although New York had long had a history of civic art in

the form of murals and statues (including the iconic Statue of Liberty), the 1960s ushered in a new era. In a time marked by growing urban crisis, New York City activists and officials chose a path of revitalization through creativity inspired by the nationwide Kennedy Era–commitment to promoting art and culture as a symbol of American world leadership. Their daring model for public art incorporated both the voice of individual artists and dynamic trends in contemporary art making. This modern approach kicked off in New York in 1967, when landmark exhibitions placed abstract artworks in such high-profile locations as Bryant Park, Astor Place, and the Seagram Building.

These efforts took on new meaning in the context of the unfolding urban crisis in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as Mayor John V. Lindsay considered a range of strategies to keep the city relevant, dynamic, and attractive. Numerous programs, embracing a vision to locate cutting-edge artworks in unconventional sites, and supported by both government agencies and generous philanthropies, took on the challenge. Private organizations such as Creative Time (1973) and Public Art Fund (1977), the publically funded Percent for Art (1982), MTA's Arts for Transit (1985), an array of programs that locate temporary art in our city's parks, and many other entities continue to cultivate a rich landscape of outdoor art that is a model for cities the world over.

Art in the city's shared spaces boomed, particularly during the years when Mayor Michael Bloomberg left his mark on the city's built environment. As New York moved into the 21st century, innovative public art projects reflected the city's resurgence and the revitalization of its parks and public spaces. Today, New Yorkers not only expect public art as a feature of urban life, they anticipate and champion new projects that enrich, delight, challenge, and occasionally outrage audiences across the five boroughs.

Art in the Open connects the past, present, and future of public art in New York City. *Art in the Open* corrals the beauty, controversy, and creativity of 50 years of public art from every corner of the five boroughs and presents them together for visitors to experience, enjoy, and debate. In bringing outdoor art back within the walls of a museum, the show illuminates the power and ingenuity of the once novel idea to release artists and their creations from such constraints.

The exhibition is designed by Tsao & McKown Architects with graphic design by Project Projects LLC.

**Photo Credits:*

Isamu Noguchi, Red Cube, 140 Broadway, 1968. Photograph by Edmund Vincent Gillon. Museum of the City of New York, gift of Blair Davis, 2013.3.2.1667;
Ugo Rondinone, Human Nature, Rockefeller Center, 2013. Presented by Nespresso, Organized by Tishman Speyer and Public Art Fund. Photograph by Bart Barlow. Courtesy Public Art Fund, NY;
Times Square Mural (2002) © Roy Lichtenstein, NYCT Times Square-42nd Street Station. Commissioned by MTA Arts & Design.

About the Museum of the City of New York

Founded in 1923 as a private, nonprofit corporation, the Museum of the City of New York celebrates and interprets the city, educating the public about its distinctive character, especially its heritage of diversity, opportunity, and perpetual transformation. The Museum connects the past, present, and future of New York City, and serves the people of the city as well as visitors from around the world through exhibitions, school and public programs, publications, and collections. To connect with the Museum on social media, follow us on Instagram and Twitter at @MuseumofCityNY and visit our Facebook page at Facebook.com/MuseumofCityNY. For more information please visit www.mcny.org.

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