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Travel

Artist uses lobster rope to create installation in NYC park; exhibit moves to Mass. in Oct.

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NEW YORK — A New York City artist has lassoed a small public park, creating a whimsical landscape of bright red, yellow and blue enclosures out of recycled lobster rope for visitors to explore.

Madison Square Park, the city's "museum without walls" opposite the landmark Flatiron Building in Manhattan, is the site of the latest monumental installation by Orly Genger, a Brooklyn artist known for her rope creations.

Using miles of the thick and rigid rope, Genger uses a "crochet" stitch to give it a braided look, then paints, twists and stacks it before wrestling it into intriguing and continuous shapes. In one area of the 6.2-acre park, a red undulating wall spills out on the grass. In another, the rope creates a blue, hedge-like feature. Elsewhere, tall waves of yellow form a pleasing space that cascades at one end like spilled water — or paint.

The rope looks a bit like chainmail; some of it winds around the blossoming trees in the

park.

“She takes the domestic art of crocheting to a masculine level,” said Debbie Landau, president of the Madison Square Park Conservancy, adding that Genger uses only her hands to create the shapes. “When you look at the rope you could think they’re nautical knots but it’s repurposed lobster rope. It’s scratchy, it’s hard. You have to use muscle to tame it. She takes what we think of as traditional knitting to a very different realm of wrestling an unforgiving material.”

And wrestle she does.

The labor-intensive installation required 1.4 million feet of rope — nearly 20 lengths of Manhattan — weighing 100,000 pounds. It took 9,000 hours of labor and 3,000 gallons of paint to transform the dull rope into a vibrant material.

The rope comes from a New England foundation that recycles nautical rope, which is unusable after a year, so it doesn’t damage the environment, Landau said.

The 34-year-old Genger starts off by laying out the rope on the ground and then with the help of a handful of interns knots it into lengths of 100 to 200 feet and widths of about 2-feet. Any lingering fishy smell dissipates by then, Landau said.

The result is part craft, part sculpture — a creation that is simultaneously sturdy and soft in appearance. “Red, Yellow and Blue” is Genger’s largest installation to date.

The site-specific installation was commissioned by Mad. Sq. Art, a free contemporary art program of the park conservancy. It’s the first time that one of its commissioned artworks will tour outside the park.

In the past, Mad. Sq. Art has featured other acclaimed artists including William Wegman and Jaume Plensa.

“The marvel of the work that we do in the park is watching the public discovering it,” said Landau, adding that it took two weeks to install the work that is reinforced with rods that are invisible on the outside.

“I consider installation in the grand fishbowl of Madison Square Park as an artist in residency in full view of the public,” she said.

Genger “created a vertical painting in the park,” she added. “It’s for the people. It’s meant to be touched and used and sat on. The interactivity with the public, that is what she wants.”

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