



“Van Gogh’s Ear” Is Coming to Rockefeller Center April 13, 2016

March 25, 2016

by Andrew Botsford

There have to be a lot of considerations when artists choose the title for a Public Art Fund sculpture installation. Consider, for just one great example, *Van Gogh’s Ear*, the large-scale new work by the artist duo Elmgreen & Dragset being installed this spring at the Fifth Avenue entrance to the Channel Gardens at Rockefeller Center in New York.

The exhibition, on view from April 13, 2016 through June 3, 2016, was organized by the [Public Art Fund](#) and [Tishman Speyer](#), which lists Rockefeller Center as one of its key New York City Assets. Following its presentation at Rockefeller Center, *Van Gogh’s Ear* will travel to China under the auspices of the [K11 Art Foundation](#).



“Van Gogh’s Ear” by Elmgreen & Dragset, 2016. Artists’ rendering, Courtesy the artists and Public Art Fund, NY.

But let’s get back to the name of the piece, or what Public Art Fund Director and Chief Curator Nicholas Baume calls in a press release its “cleverly macabre title.” For anyone hearing or reading the title without any visual reference, it could easily suggest the somewhat grisly image of an oversize sculptural representation of the severed ear of the notoriously tortured artist.

In fact, *Van Gogh’s Ear* is the artists’ witty and evocative shorthand way of describing the curvilinear shape of their piece, which is an outdoor swimming pool, replete with diving board and stainless steel ladder, standing upright on the curving wall of its shallow end as if on display in a cavernous outdoor showroom. Framed by the Fifth Avenue entrance to Rockefeller Center between 49th and 50th streets, the pool’s blue interior and different depths will open up to passersby on Fifth Avenue and everyone making their way into the Channel Gardens.



“Van Gogh’s Ear” by Elmgreen & Dragset, 2016. Artists’ rendering, Courtesy the artists and Public Art Fund, NY.

Here's what artists Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset had to say about the piece, and its title, in their joint statement in the Public Art Fund's press release:

"The sculpture recalls the 1950s-style pools found in front of some Californian private homes, in contrast to this very public East coast urban setting. It is as if an alien spaceship had landed in the midst of this prominent and busy environment. One can dream of lazy days under the sun while surrounded by all the traffic and business going on at Rockefeller Plaza. The title *Van Gogh's Ear* plays on the mythological versus the ordinary. We thought it was a perfect name for a swimming pool of this shape. It opens up the possibility for a different perception of the form itself. And like the myth of Van Gogh cutting off his ear in despair, the dislocated pool will hopefully make people wonder 'why?' and pursue their own reasoning behind this inexplicable scenario."

For his part, the Public Art Fund's Baume noted in the release that "the artists have revealed the stunningly sensuous potential of the garden-variety swimming pool, enhancing and revealing its curvaceous form, blue interior volume, and immaculate hardware. The result is a sculpture of extraordinarily strange beauty."

Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset are based in Berlin and have worked together as an artist duo since 1995. Amongst their most well-known works are *Prada Marfa* (2005)—a full scale replica of a Prada boutique in the middle of the Texan desert—and *Short Cut* (2003)—a car and a caravan breaking through the ground, which was first shown in Milan and now resides in the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago.



Artist duo Elmgreen & Dragset (Ingar Dragset, left; Michael Elmgreen, right) Photo by: Elmar Vestner.
Courtesy the artists & Public Art Fund, NY.

Moving the piece to China after June 3 is probably a good idea. Even though the pool can't hold water in its upright position, on a hot midsummer day sweltering New Yorkers could be too easily tempted to crawl into the sculpture's ice blue shallow end in a bid to cool off.

Copyright 2016 Hamptons Art Hub LLC. All rights reserved.