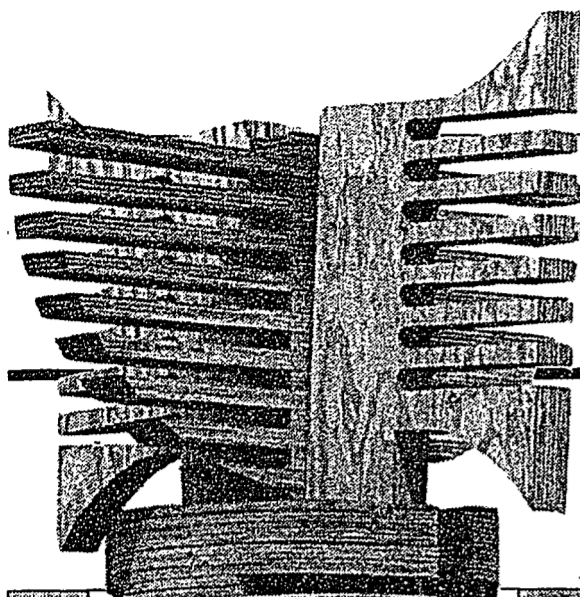


# Sculpture That Basks in Summer: Sculpture That Basks in Summer Sunlight and Air

By HOLLAND COTTER

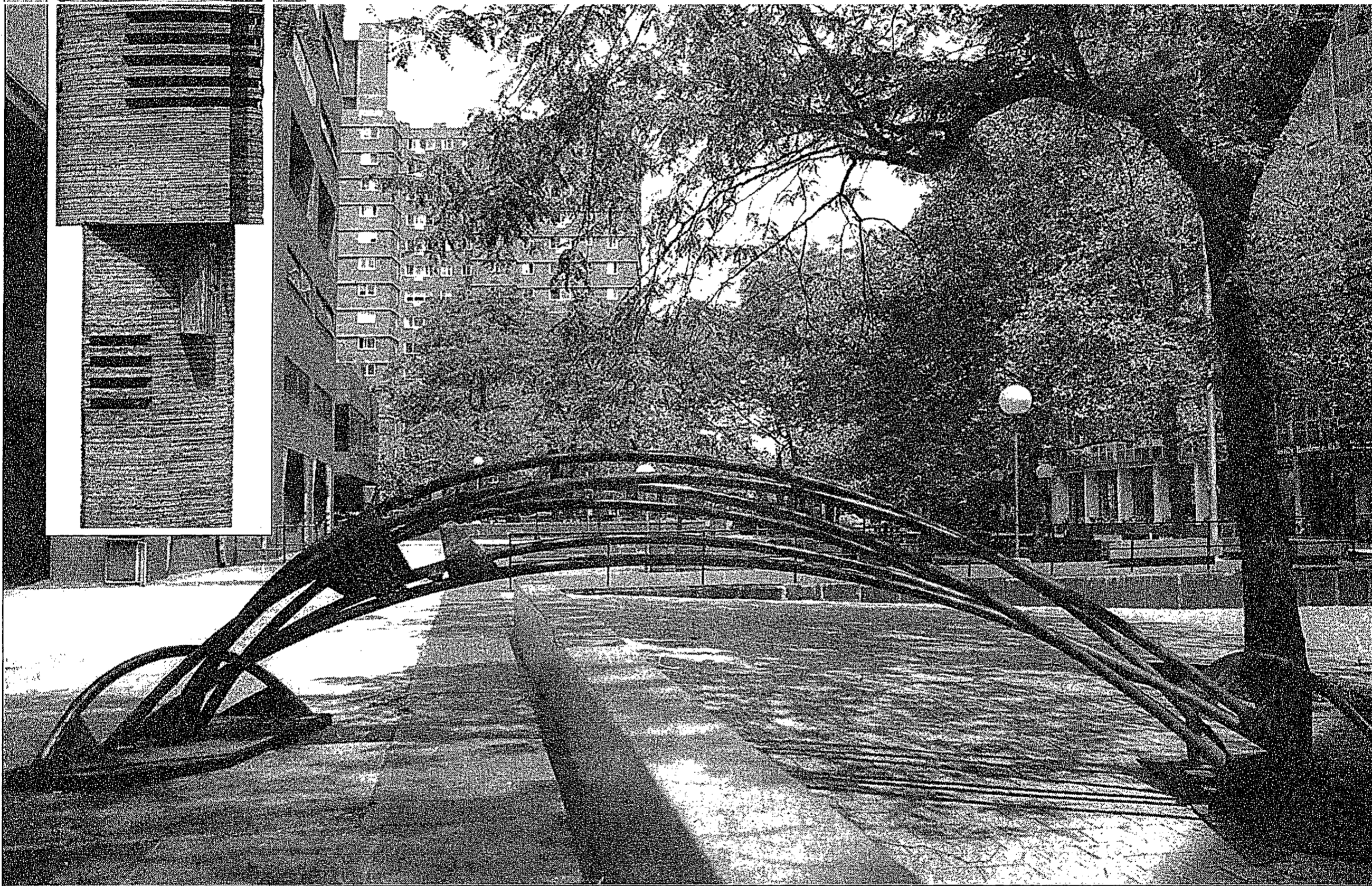
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ART REVIEW

## Sculpture That Basks in Summer



Photographs by Jim Estrin/The New York Times

Above, John Clement's sheaf of steel tubes is at the Brooklyn campus of Long Island University. Inset at left, Colin Chase's "Wind Comb" is part of a 10th-anniversary show at Socrates Sculpture Park in Queens.

By HOLLAND COTTER

**S**UMMER is the season for outdoor sculpture to make its annual appearance in New York, when the sun is out and the time is right for walking the streets and parks.

The summer of '96 has, of course, been a sweaters-and-puddles affair, at least up to now. But that hasn't prevented a substantial amount of new work — good, bad and indifferent — from taking its customary bow.

The single most impressive piece this summer is the 65-foot-high lighthouse-shaped tower and pedestrian bridge designed by Siah Armajani and recently installed at St. George Ferry Terminal on Staten Island.

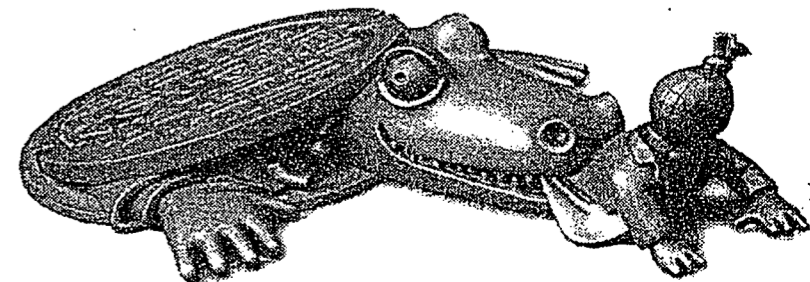
Like most of the public art projects created by this visionary Iranian-born artist, the airy open-work structure blurs the line between architecture and sculpture. Capped by an illuminated honey-colored glass cupola, it is inscribed with words by Wallace Stevens ("A bridge above the bright and blue of water").

Functionally, it provides pedestrian access from the ferry terminal's upper-level bus ramp to the

Where to find outdoor sculpture around New York City, **C24**.

waterfront esplanade below. But in time-honored utopian spirit, it also gives pure, heart-lifting pleasure, as its broad central staircase ascends skyward to a spectacular view of New York Harbor. The project was financed by various city

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A Tom Otterness work at Doris C. Freedman Plaza in Manhattan.

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agencies. Documentary material related to it can be found in the terminal itself, in a gallery run by the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences.

But it is well worth traveling two miles to the Snug Harbor Cultural Center in Livingston, S.I., for a terrific little sampling of toy-size models and drawings of other outdoor projects by this artist at the Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art through Sept. 22.

Included is a rough mock-up of the cauldron and tower Mr. Armajani designed for the Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta, and a delicate, polished maquette for the Staten Island project.

Like much of Mr. Armajani's work, the ferry tower was inspired by American vernacular architecture; its cupola echoes the shape of the wooden water towers that punctuate the New York skyline. Similar forms — railroad trestle bridges, picket fences — occur in the dozens of models in the show, supplemented in certain pieces with references to the abstract, flattened forms found in Persian miniatures.

The exhibition, organized by Olivia Georgia, is a slender but loving tribute to an unusually engaging body of American public art. And it is appropriately housed in Snug Harbor's 1833 Greek Revival Main Hall, whose images of ships and stars symbolized safe berth for the retired merchant seamen who once made this building their home.

The Staten Island Botanical Garden, situated on the Snug Harbor grounds, is also playing host to sculpture with strong links to the outdoors this summer.

In a greenhouse set amid spectacularly lush flower beds (the recent wet weather was certainly good for something), Nancy Cohen has installed a multi-part sculpture made of white, translucent waxed paper stretched over dried branches and clusters of gardening tools.

Suspended from the conservatory ceiling, the cocoonlike forms, made in collaboration with Dieu Donné Papermill, a paper-making studio in SoHo, look like enormous pods and spiky vines, suggesting that the hot-house plants in the propagation beds below have spawned ghostly but aggressive progeny.

## Lower Manhattan

Gardens, in fact, turn out to be a mini-motif in outdoor work throughout the city this year. Another greenhouse, this one a 40-foot-long structure of plastic sheeting over a steel frame, has been erected by the artist Karin Giusti in Battery Park. Titled "The White House Green House" and sponsored by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, it has a painting of the Presidential mansion on one side; that of a blown-up dollar bill on the other.

Ms. Giusti considers her work to be a public service announcement addressing interlocking issues of the environment (the "Greenhouse Effect"), politics and money. What really draws attention, though, are the dozens of varieties of rose bushes



Marilyn K. Yee/The New York Times

Siah Armajani's 65-foot-high lighthouse-shaped tower and pedestrian bridge, recently installed at the St. George Ferry Terminal on Staten Island.

she has nurtured, several of them named for American Presidents (Mr. Lincolns, J.F.K.'s and so on).

The basic idea seems to be that the White House will blossom to life when Americans take care to plant the right flowers. (Voter registration forms are available inside the greenhouse, and it's no accident that it remains in place through Nov. 5, Election Day). Altogether, Ms. Giusti's verdant horticultural admonition is both attractively phrased and well taken.

Gardening gets a scrappier workout a little farther up the West Side Highway in a sculpture exhibition titled "Pier Pressure" at the entrance to Pier 25, between Canal and Chambers Streets in TriBeCa.

The show is, in fact, just one piece, "Roe to Hoe," by Lisa Hein and Bob Seng, in which hoses fed by Hudson River water fitfully spritz a carpet of AstroTurf. The carpet is sliced down the middle, and a jumble of rusted farm tools appear to emerge from its center. Whether they're symbols of fertility or decay is hard to say, but either way the piece is visually sodden.

Another large, recent outdoor contribution in lower Manhattan is Roy Lichtenstein's "Modern Head," sponsored by the Public Art Fund and the Battery Park City Authority and installed near the World Financial Center.

A 31-foot-high, Cubist-Pop cut-out profile head painted a bright indigo, it is clearly designed for the long haul, but it is a surprisingly inert and graceless design by an artist famed for his deft touch.

## Roosevelt Island

Most of the work in the annual Sculpture Center show on Roosevelt Island appears, as usual, in the insalubrious, bunkerlike lower level of the parking complex called the Motorgate.

A Wonderland-style manipulation of scale seems to be the common link among the works this time out. Cindy Tower turns a circular bicycle rack into a giant Hibachi grill by adding an overhead curtain of painted flames; Nina Levy's strings of howling plastic babies' heads resemble key-chain ornaments; the cars in Heidi Schlatter's billboard-size image of cars are actually photographed toys, and the ramplike extension to Mary Carlson's deck chair seems designed for inhumanly long legs.

An installation of thick red doors and lavalike bubbles in an abandoned news kiosk, by Francis Cape and Liza Phillips, settles for being opaquely enigmatic. But like Cara Perlman's bannerlike yellow nylon T-shirt (which is reportedly back in place after having been temporarily disassembled), it suits the half-whimsical, half-ominous fairy-tale flavor of an intelligently chosen show.

## Socrates Park

Unfortunately, no guiding hand is apparent across the river at Socrates Sculpture Park in Long Island City, Queens, where the first half of a

two-part "10th-Year Anniversary Exhibition" is on view. With about a dozen new pieces mixed in with holdovers from previous seasons, the installation is a hodgepodge, with all but the largest sculptures lost in the shuffle.

This is too bad, because there's some good work. George Mansfield and Kazumi Tanaka, for example, have contributed a spare wooden pavilion fitted with a hidden hydraulic system that produces a gentle fall of water inside the structure itself. (The system seemed to be on the fritz during a recent visit.)

Sheree Kaslikowski surrounds a marble shaft with a fragrant planting of perennials, a pretty effect. Peter Lundberg's three lumpish concrete forms look like cinema-size versions of Chinese scholar's rocks. Colin Chase's totemic "Wind Comb: Praise Poem for Oya No. 7" draws on African forms. And the optimistic strain in Mr. Armajani's work finds a response in "Table Set in Expectation of a Miracle," by Tom Rose, with its little steel bridge and engraved text.

As always, the park's laid-back, communal feel — more like a laboratory than a gallery — is attractive. But for the last few seasons, a sense of drift has set in. A little curatorial shaping would go a long way.

## Long Island University

Such shaping is evident in the show of six sculptors organized by Marian Griffiths on the Brooklyn campus of Long Island University. Even if the

work is of varying interest, most of it relates in some way to the site.

A bronze figure by Matt Freedman, with references to military power, stands like a sentinel near the campus's main gate. Luisa Caldwell's cutout plywood curtain forms, covered with patterns of roses, add a domestic touch to two shallow bays. John Clement's arching sheaf of steel tubes gently vaults a low terrace wall. And Thomas Kotik's long boardwalk-like platform offers relief from the courtyard's prevailing black stone.

Kathleen Gilrain's clunky pairs of wings made of salvaged scraps of tin ceilings and set atop poles get a much-needed lift from their placement near a grove of tall trees. David Baskin's boxy structure of weathered window frames enclosing cast-off furniture (a metal kitchen stool, an ironing board) behind glass is, by contrast, self-contained, and the most evocative piece here.

## Metrotech Center

The season of mists and rains has done wonders for Vito Acconci's

elaborate, mazelike garden, a Public Art Fund commission a few blocks from Long Island University at the Metrotech Center in downtown Brooklyn.

Mr. Acconci has created a large, interconnected network of metal fencing incorporating 50 pairs of built-in seats. The fencing, which is four feet high, serves as a vast trellis for plantings of woodbine, honeysuckle and wisteria. As they grow, the plants will transform the seats into secluded romantic bowers. It's a lovely idea, but one that will need another year or so to achieve its full effect.

Also at Metrotech is work by Tom Otterness, an artist who, with strong works installed at two separate New York locations (both Public Art Fund-supported installations), easily takes the laurels for the best figurative sculptures in a public space this summer.

The Metrotech group includes the artist's signature cartoonlike cast bronze figures, scattered across a lawn in the Commons and installed in a building lobby. Lilliputian in size, they look like smooth-limbed dolls but seem to be engaged in adult pursuits. Two tipsy figures perched on the lobby reception desk, for example, hoist glasses like New Year's revelers; another figure crawls inquisitively over a decapitated head lying on the lobby floor and whispers in its ear.

## Doris Freedman Plaza

It is in Manhattan, though, that Mr. Otterness is seen at his expansive best, in a sprawling, multi-part work titled "Life Underground" at Doris C. Freedman Plaza, on the southeast corner of Central Park at Fifth Avenue.

The piece, commissioned by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority for the 14th Street station of the IND subway line (where it will be installed in 1998), vaguely suggests a construction site as well as a subway station. Tiny workmen prop up a precarious arch of steel I-beams, while commuters come and go: a woman lugs a wheel-size subway token; a fare beater is apprehended by a pint-size cop.

Like most of Mr. Otterness's work, "Life Underground" is both surrealistically funny (a man emerges, mildly startled, from the mouth of an alligator) and politically alert (the figure of a homeless woman lies curled up on a bench). It's a runaway hit with children and adults alike: almost no one passes by without giving it a long look. And it remains on view — rain or shine — through Sept. 10.