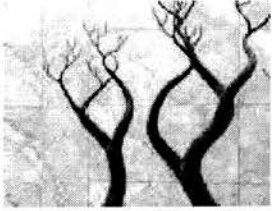


Neighborhoods

TOP STORY



Public Art Enlivens MetroTech Center

DIAL UP ROAD RUNNER

NOVEMBER 30TH, 1999

Not everything at the MetroTech Center in Downtown Brooklyn is as it appears.

There appears to be a lost seeing-eye dog and a squashed basketball there, but not quite. It's all part of the Public Art Fund's on-going exhibitions at MetroTech Commons.

"The Commons itself is about 3 1/2 acres of essential parkland that everybody from the buildings and from the community can access and come out with their children or whatever, sit on the benches and just spend some time under the trees," says Terry Whalen of the MetroTech Center. "It's real pleasant."

And that makes it a good environment to present works of art.

"In the last four years alone we've exhibited the work of over 20 young artists here. So that's pretty exciting," says the Public Art Fund's Susan K. Freedman.

The folks at MetroTech agree.

Whalen says, "It's had a very positive reaction from the community and from the tenant base here at Metrotech. Every year people look forward to it."

This year there are new works by five artists and several other works held over by popular demand. One of the new pieces is called "Grand Entrance at the Commons, by Jason Middlebrook.

I told Jason that his piece just screams suburbia. He says, "Exactly. And so the idea was to take a suburban icon, a suburban element, and place it in an urban setting."

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"This kind of entrance way would imply that you're entering into a piece of property, or a subdivision, a gateway," he continues. "And by putting it in Downtown Brooklyn I'm altering the context of what this represents. The other catch is that it's all styrofoam, so it does have this Walt Disneyesque kind of prop quality to it."

Another visual oddity is "Basketball Dropped From 35,000 Feet at Moment of Impact." Artist James Angus used a 3-D computer system to capture what that moment might actually look like.

"It's an opportunity for young artists to really interact with a site and address a site in a specific way," says Freedman. "So the work you see here was all designed to be here."

Including Sharon Louden's "Tangled Tips."

"The pieces have tiny mirrors that are like markers that are connected to these wires," explains Louden. "And that's why they're called "Tangled Tips." They're tangled through the trees."

But while you can only see small mirrored reflectors in the daylight, this piece comes alive at night, when the semiconductors glow. That means we get two distinct looks. It is almost like two separate installations.

Most of the pieces are easier to enjoy during the daytime. We asked Louden if she is giving a little bonus to those who are here at night.

"Yep. That's what it is," she responds. "Having things come alive in the evening as well. Having sort of a surprise."

Even inside the lobby of an office building here you'll find artwork. One artist, James Carl, created accurate replicas of an ATM, a Fed Ex station and an airport x-ray machine, all made out of corrugated cardboard.

"I think every neighborhood has its own character," says artist Walter Martin, "and this is an interesting part of Brooklyn in that you have a very corporate business daytime crowd and then you have - I live in Fort Greene, which is very close - and you also have a residential group, and they are a different group altogether."

And MetroTech becomes more than a complex - it becomes a destination.

"As you said, it's the sixth year, and as time goes by people come more and more to expect it," says Whalen. "And there are those who come out simply to see the art."

Most of these works will be on display until at least June, then new ones follow every year.

- Paul Messina