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Outdoor Art, Summer 2021

All in very different but concrete ways, these artists’ “live” public works speak of healing, history, and a fragile material world.



“Homage to Coco,” from “Melvin Edwards: Brighter Days” at City Hall Park. Madeline Cass for The New York Times

By Holland Cotter

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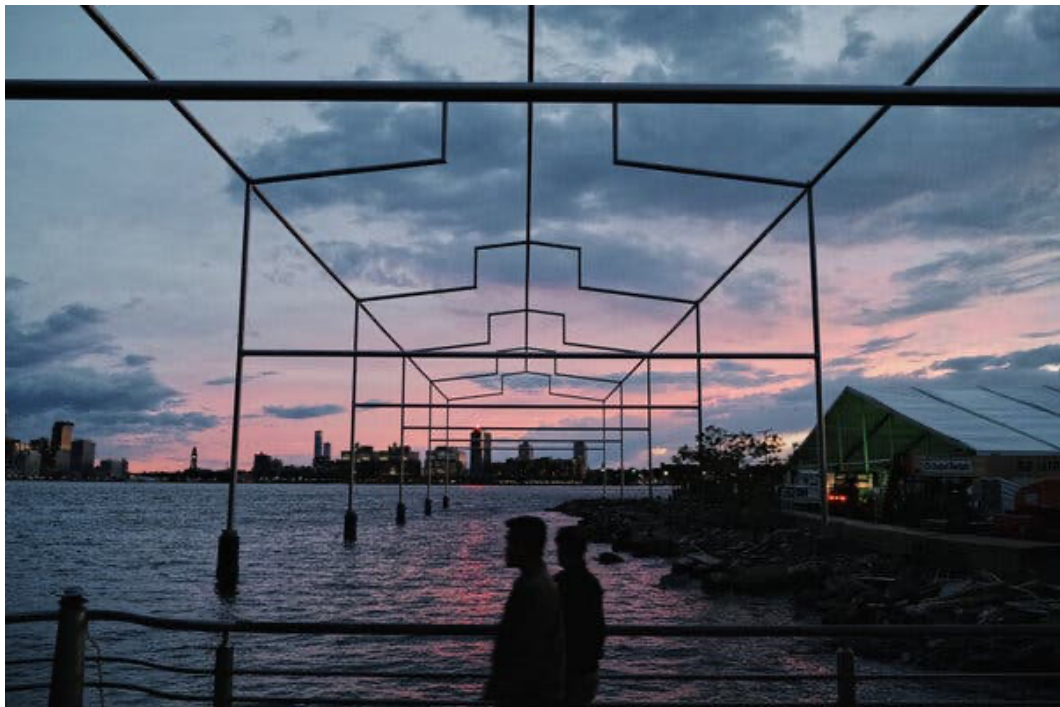
In post-lockdown New York, art has busted free from months of digital quarantine. Museums are open; objects are present, and people are pouring in — or at least queuing up for admission. The entrance line at the Met last weekend stretched across the plaza, and forward motion was slow. So, if you’re in need of a “live” art-fix fast — like, *right now* — you might consider another option: a self-guided tour of new outdoor art across town.

Much of this work was planned well before the pandemic. The originating idea for Maya Lin’s new installation, “Ghost Forest,” a cathedral-like grove of dead and dying trees at the center of a midtown Manhattan park, dates back some eight years. Similarly, David

Hammons's "Day's End," a wiry riverside monument to the just-pre-AIDS New York of the 1970s, began as a pencil sketch sent to the Whitney Museum in 2014.



"Maya Lin: Ghost Forest" at Madison Square Park. White cedars from the Pine Barrens, a habitat infiltrated by salt water as a result of climate change, talk back. Credit...Madeline Cass for The New York Times



David Hammons's "Day's End" in Hudson River Park. Credit...Simbarashe Cha for The New York Times

Neither piece is “political,” in an out-loud way. But after the layered traumas that have slammed this country over the past year and a half — killer plague, racist violence, California on fire — they can’t help but read that way. This is true of several other new outdoor works — by Sanford Biggers, Christian Boltanski, Melvin Edwards, Rashid Johnson, Guadalupe Maravilla and Mary Mattingly — described inside by Martha Schwendener. All in very different but concrete ways speak of healing, history, and a fragile material world.

And for those deeply addicted to digital, there’s something vital too, as Arthur Lubow reports: The High Line and the Shed have collaborated on a line of virtual projects experienced entirely on a smartphone app picked up on site — outdoors.