

Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza Transcending Boundaries with Art

By Anne Hersh

As the historic Gateway to the United Nations, this 1.5-acre public park preserves the legacy of Dag Hjalmar Agne Carl Hammarskjöld, enshrining the right to public assembly and free speech since 1961. The epic marches continue to this day while the park's Katharine Hepburn Garden offers a tranquil sanctuary among the towering edifices of Midtown Manhattan. In 2020, as the Coronavirus pandemic closed the doors of New York's most storied institutions, NYC parks remained open, affirming the importance of urban green space and our connection to the natural environment.

Among the park's public programs, the arts serve as a common denominator, a universal language. Through the city's Art in the Parks program, more than 35 world-class sculpture exhibitions have graced the Plaza, many curated in collaboration with Friends of Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza and World Council of Peoples for the United Nations.

The largest exhibit to date, *Borders* by Steinunn Thórarinsdóttir, featured 26 androgynous, life-size sculptures, thirteen aluminum and thirteen cast iron, placed throughout the Plaza. Many of the works have reflected environmental themes: Steven Vince's *Sculpture Safari* of endangered species, Marcos Lutyens' *Universal Solvent*, *When Tears Water the Sky*, Rachel Owens' Hummer construction echoing the songs of whales, *Inveterate Composition for Clare*, and the most recent installation, Noa Bornsteins' bronze *Peace Gorilla*, with the word "Friend" inscribed in 90 languages on a concrete base.

Anne Hersh is the Director of Development for Friends of Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza. She served as a founder and first president of the nonprofit conservancy, which acts in cooperation with NYC Dept. of Parks & Recreation.

Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza is a NYC park located on East 47th Street between First and Second Avenues, New York City.

hammarskjoldplaza.org
nycgovparks.org/art



"Peace Gorilla," by Noa Bornstein. Photo: Margit Zsedely.



"Rhino Charging," from *Sculpture Safari*, by Steven Vince.



"Caracalla & Speechless," by Francisco Leiro, courtesy of Marlborough Gallery.



"Colony Expanse," by Matthew Willey. Photo: Paige Olsen.



"Borders," by Steinunn Thórarinsdóttir.