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ARTISTIC TRANSFORMATIONS

ARTLANTIC, A MULTI-YEAR PUBLIC ART SERIES, IS BREATHING MUCH-NEEDED LIFE INTO ATLANTIC CITY'S LONG-VACANT LOTS

By PAMELA DOLLAKE

Photos By PETER TOBIA/Atlantic City Alliance

This past April, *ARTLANTIC* officially debuted in Atlantic City with the unveiling of *ARTLANTIC: wonder* and *Étude Atlantis*, the first two major installations in a multi-year outdoor public art series. Curated by world-renowned curator Lance Fung, who has a reputation for ambitious, innovative approaches to public art, Fung has been deeply involved in exploring public art's potential to engage with and revitalize urban neighborhoods. This large-scale \$3 million, multi-phase project is being funded by the Atlantic City Alliance (ACA) and the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (CRDA), to help re-imagine and bring new life to Atlantic City.

This series of art installations, the goal of which is to re-energize vacant spaces in the heart of Atlantic City, will utilize the talents of international artists and architects who will work in conjunction with emerging and local artists. Their considerable job will be to re-interpret these unique environments and transform the empty urban lots into vibrant artsy playground displays, lively public meeting places and a nexus for social interaction to be enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.

ARTLANTIC: wonder was created by Ilya and Emilia Kabakov and Kiki Smith and is located where the old Sands was once situated (Boardwalk between MLK and Kentucky Avenue). It is formed by two grass mounds interwoven into a giant earthwork that are walled by a 14'x11'-foot high undulating terrace covered in indigenous grasses and wildflowers that is intended to be reminiscent of the Steel Pier roller coasters.

Artist Robert Barry has placed illuminated text pieces inside this oasis, which includes more than 20 inspiring words, such as "Wonder," "Glorious" and "Possible." Barry's colorful illuminated text truly comes alive when the sun goes down,

and fits in beautifully with the glittering lights of A.C. and the neon signs adorning its famous Boardwalk.

Look, too, for a good-humored pirate ship that emerges from the ground, and calls to mind the sunken pirate ships presently lining the ocean floor off the coast of New Jersey. Across from the ship is a lovely lush garden surrounding "Her," a figure of a woman tenderly embracing a doe. The garden is entirely composed of gorgeous bright red foliage — red flowers, red berries or red leaves. It is intended to change along with the seasons.

The second space is *Étude Atlantis*, which is located directly on the Boardwalk at California Avenue. Designed by artist John Roloff, *Étude Atlantis* is very much an optical illusion. This elaborate space is covered with bold linear stripes that converge into a spiral pattern. A cistern made from sheets of mirror, is at the center of the spiral. Water gently cascades down the cistern and falls through its center, creating the illusion that the cistern is crying.

Roloff used the idea of "finding Atlantis" to connect the Atlantic City location with the opposite side of the world—the sea floor off the southwestern coast of Australia. The stage-like setting of Roloff's site can also provide an elaborate backdrop for a series of performances, concerts and public events that can continue year-round at both locations. (In fact now through Saturday, September 21, "Mind, Body & Soul ARTLANTIC," free programs for the whole family like fitness classes, live music and theatre, is taking place in both art parks.)

The multi-year scope of the Atlantic City project will enable Fung to test the limits of all that public art is and can be, as well as set new standards for the transformational power of a genuinely collaborative, comprehensive curatorial vision.

Style Art

ever expected that by working in Atlantic City, I would find a renewed sense of purpose and inspiration," said Fung. "It seems as if the stars have aligned for ARTLANTIC: wonder. Local artists and groups, business leaders, government officials, the school system and trade unions have all done their part to make this project succeed. I believe that they, too, see the need to transform empty lots into beautiful, vibrant public spaces through art and architecture. I foresee many activities taking place in the ARTLANTIC area, but more importantly, I hope to see the emergence of a greater sense of community. Working in Atlantic City, we have met many wonderful people who see this collective action as a catalyst. There is almost a sense of eureka when someone offers ideas or suggestions. I hope that ARTLANTIC illustrates how great art goes beyond the gallery, museum, or auction house. It begins in the heart and remains there to truly transform people through art and experience."

Despite the scale and ambition of this project, the project has moved forward full speed ahead. Fung made his exploratory visit to the site in March and the participating artists had submitted finished project designs by the end of that year. Initial phase work on the project began in early September. As mentioned, a few exhibitions were already completed by May 2013. The goal is to launch a brand new project to follow each other throughout 2016.

"The speed with which so much has been accomplished is a testament to the commitment, dynamism, and energy of the participants in the project, as well as the enthusiastic support of local government, businesses and community organizations," said Liza Cartmell, President of the Atlantic City Alliance. "The curatorial plan has caught the imagination and drawn support from a myriad of local groups, ranging from community gardens, and local unions, to workers' unions."

John Palmieri, Executive Director of Casino Reinvestment Development Authority, said this about this incredible groundbreaking project: "We have the opportunity to attract and integrate art into the fabric of Atlantic City, which by all accounts will enrich the quality of life for our residents, as well as improve and expand the visitor experience." ■

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