

Tools

# LIFE

Welcome



Cai Guo-Qiang poses with one the pedicabs illuminated with lanterns that will travel on Benjamin Franklin Parkway for "Fireflies."

DAVID MAIALETTI / Staff Photographer

## Wheels on fire

Cai Guo-Qiang, the Beijing Olympics' fireworks guy, is set to send glowing pedicabs up and down the Parkway to celebrate the avenue's 100th anniversary, beginning in September.

By Stephan Salisbury  
CULTURE WRITER

**C**ai Guo-Qiang remembers vividly his joy as a child during lantern festivals in his native Quanzhou, a port city in Fujian province, China.

The red spheres, the yellow stars, the orange fish — all sparking with light.

"The lights for the lanterns were candles, so as a kid when you run around with them, it's very easy to catch fire," Cai, now 59, said recently as he stood in a temporary studio in a former Kensington factory building.

Known around the world for his explosive, fiery artworks, Cai is creating something less combustible, something less raucous — but just as memorable — to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway.

On this particular warm August day, Cai stood amid a dangling forest of pale green aliens, yellow smiley faces, red and green watermelon chunks, cicadas, bright-green grass hoppers, bobbing red spheres, yellow stars, airplanes, and dozens of other shapes and colors all wired with LED lights, eventually to be attached to flexible rods affixed to 27 specially fabricated

pedicabs.

This is the world of *Fireflies*, Cai's evocative homage to the Parkway. Commissioned by the Association for Public Art with curator Lance Fung of San Francisco's Fung Collective, *Fireflies* will be introduced to the public in a ceremony and performance on Sept. 14.

On Sept. 15, public rides begin. Anyone will be able to take a free one-way ride on the pedicabs (in the glow of their 900 lanterns made from polyurethaned fabric in Cai's hometown of Quanzhou) as they move between Sister Cities Park at 18th Street and Iroquois Park across from the Philadelphia Muse-

um of Art. The pedicabs will operate Thursday through Sunday, Sept. 15 to Oct. 8., from 6 to 10 each evening. (Reservations for one-way rides from Sister Cities Park to Iroquois Park, and vice versa, will be available — details for making them online are coming soon — but walk-ups are also welcome.)

"The lanterns will glow at night, and they are installed in such a way that they will move and be flickering — that was the idea behind *Fireflies*," said Penny Balkin Bach, executive director of the Association for Public Art. "Our desire was to commission something that was new, See **PARKWAY** on C4



### THEATER BEAT

## Arden gets the most Barrymore nominations

By John Timpane  
STAFF WRITER

**T**he Barrymore Award nominations are out: They're a big deal, a reminder of what a rich, diverse theater season we've had.

Often called "the Tonys of Philadelphia," the Barrymores are the



# Tools To celebrate Parkway, wheels on fire

Welcome

**PARKWAY** from C1 that would relate to the Parkway, and that would actually describe the physical attributes of the Parkway.

"If you think about it, it might even be considered a beautiful line drawing in light that goes up the Parkway and around so that, pardon the pun, you see the Parkway in a new light." For Cai, *Fireflies* represents a departure from his well-known work with gunpowder and fireworks, such as the spectacular displays he created for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. His work was last seen in Philadelphia in 2008, with the *Fallen Blossoms: Explosion Project* that burned a fleeting flower into the night sky above the Art Museum (in memory of its late director Anne d'Harnoncourt); concurrently, Cai created the smoldering *Time Scroll* at the Fabric Workshop and Museum.

This time, the Parkway will experience a quieter Cai, reflective, a bit nostalgic. But an artist still concerned with time, light, and memory.

"I conceived of these lanterns as my childhood fireworks," Cai said through an interpreter from his New York studio, Béatrice Grenier. "In a way, the fact that these lanterns were created in my hometown of Quanzhou links them to my childhood, to my childhood dreams, and to my emotion for it. It also symbolizes, in a way, my trajectory as an immigrant artist, departing from Quanzhou and moving to Japan, and then, again, establishing myself in the United States."

A century ago, most of the 1,300 or so buildings standing in the way of Philadelphia's grand boulevard-to-be had been demolished, their workers and residents scattered, and construction of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway had begun in earnest.

Since that great Parkway Diaspora, a lot of earnest thought has been devoted to seeking ways to bring workers and residents back to the area in an effort to repopulate and reanimate the district with anything other than fast-moving cars.

Such are the ironies of history.

That said, there are going to be many exceptional reasons to visit the Parkway over the next year, as Parkway 100, the centennial celebration of Philadelphia's boulevard, gets underway. (For information, go to [www.parkway100.org](http://www.parkway100.org).)

## Party on the Parkway

It will all kick off at 4 p.m. Sept. 8 with the "Parkway 100 We are Connected Festival" and the unveiling of a mural at Park Towne Place.

The parkway's cultural institutions will offer extended hours, free or pay-what-you-wish admissions, and more than 100 family-friendly activities. Indoor and outdoor entertainment, a **Dino Dance Party** at the Academy of Natural Sciences, a **Ceremonial Centennial Science Demonstration** at the Franklin Institute, and "100 Years in Philly Music" at the Philadelphia Museum of Art will mark the occasion.

Numerous musical performances will take place at spots up and down the Parkway.

Fung, who curated *Fireflies*, bringing Cai and the Association for Public Art

together, believes Cai has taken a huge leap with the project.

"It's a big divergence from the gunpowder drawings or the explosions," Fung said. "But it still has that spectacle. It references fireworks ... but it really is a very inward piece." Fung also believes the fanciful bobbing lanterns illuminate Cai's humor.

"Usually his work ... doesn't seem like it's fun and playful, even though it's fireworks and gunpowder," Fung said. "The work is sort of 'art-ified' by art

critics as very serious. Most people haven't seen that, the humor and playfulness in it." Cai says the shapes for the lanterns were partially drawn from his own childhood memories.

"A part of them is from my kids' childhoods, and then a part of them is also my studio staff. We thought, 'What kind of shapes can we make?' Some are contemporary, like the emojis and the extraterrestrials, the cell-phones," he said. "I'm the boy who never grows up."

Playfulness, dancing light, and pedicabs (fabricated in Montana) do not make for a "conventional celebration with an orchestra playing — it's a celebration that everyone can partake in," Cai said.

Which fits with the attention the Association for Public Art has sought to bring to the Parkway, a part of the city for a century now, but a part that many residents turn their back on most of the time.

"We are all interested in animating the Parkway at night, bringing peo-

ple out at night, when they might not normally be out on the Parkway, because there is a shared experience that they can find," Bach said. "This project slows people down. All of a sudden you're slowed down. You feel the Parkway. You're riding in it, part of a larger event. It's going to be fun for people. It also has underpinnings that are more serious, that have to do with the international connection this artist brings."

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## Parkway centennial festivities



Rendering of Cai Guo-Qiang's participatory performance-celebration "Fireflies" on Benjamin Franklin Parkway. Association for Public Art

Friends Select School will unveil a photograph and archival exhibition, "Parkway as Civic Space."

## Free Library history exhibit

At 5 p.m. that day, the Free Library of Philadelphia will open a special centennial exhibit, "Corridor of Culture: 100 Years of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway." The exhibition will run until Nov. 16, 2018.

## Summer 'Fireflies' and 'Winter Fountains'

The Association for Public Art is shepherding two projects for the centennial.

First, from Sept. 15 through Oct. 8, a fleet of 27 pedicabs outfitted with fanciful lanterns

will transport riders up and down the parkway in Cai Guo-Qiang's participatory performance-celebration "Fireflies." Rides will be free, by reservation, Thursdays through Sunday from 6 to 10 p.m.

Then, from December through March, the Parkway will feature Jennifer Steinkamp's "Winter Fountains for the Parkway," five large fountains installed by the artist along the Parkway. When night falls, the fountains will illuminate with animated video projections that relate to the collections at the Parkway museums and educational institutions.

## Exhibits galore

In addition to the Free Library and Friends Select, other Parkway institutions will

present centennial-related exhibitions throughout the year.

"A Peek at the Past" debuts at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University in October for a run through November 2018.

"Old Masters Now: Rediscovering the John G. Johnson Collection" runs at the Philadelphia Museum of Art from Nov. 3 through Feb. 19. The museum became steward of the great collection in 1917, the same year Parkway construction began.

"Paul Crét and Dr. Barnes," an exhibition drawn from the Barnes archives, opens at the Barnes Foundation Oct. 18 and runs through March 12. Crét (who designed the Albert C. Barnes' gallery and residence in Merion), along with architects Horace Trumbauer and Clarence Zantinger, drew up the first comprehensive plan for the Parkway in 1907. They were commissioned by the Fairmount Park Art Association — the forerunner of the Association for Public Art — to do so.

## Basilica concerts and more

There will also be concerts at the Cathedral Basilica of SS Peter and Paul throughout this year and next, and many, many other events, exhibits, talks, and performances. For the conclusion, more than a year from now, the museums, institutions, and attractions on the Parkway will open their doors on Friday night, Nov. 16, 2018, for the "Parkway 100 Finale," offering installations, performances and concerts, premieres, tours, talks, and educational programs.

— Stephan Salisbury

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