

Island of Art

RIVAA President Tad Sudol is on a mission to transform Roosevelt Island into a Must-See Art Destination

by Briana Warsing

Two wave statues temporarily placed on the Island as part of the City-wide La Mer Wave Walk project may be the most recent art installations to grace our shores, but if Tad Sudol has his way, they will be far from the last. The president of the Roosevelt Island Visual Art Association (RIVAA) has long pursued a vision of transforming Roosevelt Island into an “Island of Art.”

In addition to running Gallery RIVAA at 527 Main Street, Sudol has advocated for multiple public art installations over the years, including acquisition of *Blue Dragon* at Southpoint Park, creation of the Motorgate Gallery, and the placement of the two La Mer sculptures.

And Sudol says he’s just getting started.

A Destination for Art

According to Sudol, the cows led the way.

CowParade was the world’s largest public art event, with installations staged in 79 cities worldwide starting in 1999. More than 10,000 artists participated in CowParade – professional and amateur, famous and emerging, young and old – and more than 5,000 cows were ultimately created. New York’s cows were placed in both public and private locations during the event. One still graces Roosevelt Island’s PS/IS 217 and is visible from the west promenade.

A more recent Island addition, *Blue Dragon*, was officially unveiled in April 2016. Working with the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation, RIVAA arranged for Gustav Kraitz’s 9-by-3 foot sculpture to be placed at the entrance to Southpoint Park.

Hungarian-born Kraitz survived a Soviet forced-labor camp in 1945, and eventually settled in Sweden. He is best known in New York for *Hope*, his sculpture completed in honor of Swedish World War II hero, Raul Wallenberg, which sits at 47th Street and First Avenue facing the United Nations. Kraitz donated *Blue Dragon* to the Island after taking a tour with Sudol and RIVAA associate, Elizabeth Stapen. *Blue Dragon* faces Kraitz’ other piece, *Hope*, across the river.

“He fell in love with the Island,” says Sudol.

And, according to Sudol, the Island’s children have fallen in love with Kraitz’s work. At the dedication, recalls Sudol, the artist told the crowd, “This sculpture, *Blue Dragon*, came from Sweden through the water. It is done in Swedish black marble, with blue eyes. I donated it to Roosevelt Island to make the Island more artistic. This sculpture is meant to be touched, especially by children.’ Now, whenever I pass it, there are always children sitting on it, and it’s great.”

Sudol is also credited with the conception of the Motorgate Gallery, which showcases paintings created at the Island’s annual Fall for the Arts festival. “For many years, those panels were in different storages. I came up with the idea of putting them in Motorgate,” recalls Sudol. He credits RIO Board member Margie Smith with advocating for the idea.

“The first year, two [RIO Board members] stated that they thought it would be a waste of time and money [to display art in Motorgate]. They said there would be graffiti the next day. I said, ‘What money? It’s already painted. If there will be graffiti, there will be graffiti. We will learn.’”

Sudol says that, deep down, he feared that they were right, but the closest they ever came to being graffitied happened recently. He recalls, “I was



Two proposed sculptures by Donald Gerola envisioned for the Island by RIVAA President Tad Sudol.

walking into Motorgate and saw a guy standing under the escalator by a painting. I was ready to jump. Turned out it was the artist adding something.”

More to Come

From Sudol’s perspective, the Island’s temporary acquisition of the two La Mer wave sculptures signal something larger for the Island’s art scene. “I think this is a unique opportunity to work with RIO and to work, maybe, even with Cornell and Hudson Related to put together some kind of process in making this Island an Island of art.”

As for next steps, Sudol has a few ideas. “I am already working with another artist. I took a long walk with him.”

That artist is New Jersey-bred Donald Gerola. “Everything [in Gerola’s art] is moveable, thanks to the wind,” says Sudol. “He wants to install two pieces on the Island for three years. The beginning of the proposal was quite interesting.”

Gerola and Sudol envision placing a 25-foot-tall kinetic sculpture along the promenade just south of Westview’s cherry trees. “Every boat will turn to the right to be closer and see it,” says Sudol.

They’d like to place a second sculpture at the triangle on the Rivercross lawn, at the beginning of the entrance to Main Street.

Donald Gerola

Gerola, who studied physics at the University of Dayton, often works with steel. His pieces can weigh as much as 10,000 pounds and typically require cranes to move. The steel is left to rust naturally or painted in high-tech enamel finishes.

Gerola sees public art as a partnership between imagination and reality and views it as a gift to adorn cities and landscapes that include nature and historical legacy. In his three decades as an artist, he has built an imposing collection of steel sculptures from the monumental to smaller works amid urban and private spaces.

Of his style, Gerola explains, “Presently, I combine the artistic styles I set for myself in urban public installations, new sculpture sea series, and my signature fresco paintings incorporating fibers and 3-D perspectives. I follow no guides except my

personal ones and embrace risk – risks in creating public projects that use colorful weaving as an historical linkage between and within spaces, rivers, and unused landscapes.”

Sudol says a presentation to RIO is upcoming.

First Plinth

Another of Sudol’s upcoming installations, *First Plinth*, is an homage to London’s *Fourth Plinth*.

See **Sudol**, page 11

Beacon Cont., from page 4

money already allocated to RIYP if the organization declined to fulfill their existing contract by failing to provide summer services. DYCD did say however, that, “If RIYP changes its mind, DYCD would immediately begin the process of finding another provider in time for the start of summer sessions.”

Island Kids

Although it’s also out of the running for the Beacon contract, Island Kids will continue providing its paid afterschool program at PS/IS 217 for children in pre-K through second grade. According to Director Nikki Leopold, the schedule will include snacks, homework help, enrichment programming, free play and outdoor time.

The longtime Island not-for-profit organization has provided support to the families of Roosevelt Island for 23 years. It also offers toddler classes and support groups, including the Island’s free baby group.

For the upcoming school year, the organization plans to expand its program to include enrichment classes for families who do not need full afterschool care. Classes will run for 45 - 90 minutes in 12 week sessions. They say they will release the schedule of classes within the next few weeks. The classes will take place at 536 Main Street.

Leopold also says that, in line with the Island Kids’ mission to serve the entire Roosevelt Island Community, they expect to offer scholarships to those who might otherwise not be able to participate in the program.