

Simone Subal Gallery

HYPERALLERGIC

Strange Creatures and Constructions Alight on the High Line

The High Line's Mutations exhibition features motion-capture cameras for birds, audio of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, and other uncanny interventions in the elevated park.

Allison Meier – November 8, 2017



Larry Bamburg, "Avian Bird's Eye Burl Perch Camera Trap: hinged, galvanized and rounded" in Mutations on the High Line in New York

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The High Line in Manhattan — a park hovering on a disused railroad — has no illusions of being natural like some New York greenspaces, such as Central Park with its meticulously designed landscape. The current group exhibition that sprawls from Gansevoort Street to West 30th Street on the elevated park embraces this strange space between the natural and the human made, with work by an international mix of artists that treads this uncanny line.

Mutations features interventions like Larry Bamburg's "Avian Bird's-Eye Burl Perch Camera Trap: hinged, galvanized and grounded," which has a tower of contraptions for motion-activated photography of the birds that visit the Javits Convention Center area. The Javits Center was once among New York City's top bird-killing buildings, but now, thanks to a green roof and bird-friendly glass on its façade, it's an avian destination. Nearby, Radamés "June" Figueroa has transformed a scaffolding-shrouded section of the High Line into a tropical hangout called "La Deliciosa Show," with palm trees and a leaf-patterned fence encircling a stage. It's hosting performances during the exhibition's run.

Further south, visitors can witness a grotesque take on a tide pool with Max Hooper Schneider's "Section of Intertidal Landscape (Hair Metastasis)." Its underwater garden of synthetic hair is sloshed back and forth by the aquarium's waves, with layers of debris below punctuated with razors and agate-like stones. Jon Rafman has a particularly creepy loop of animals consuming each other — titled "L'Avalée des avalés" ("The Swallower Swallowed") — suggesting a more biodiverse remake of the Human Centipede films, and Marguerite Humeau's "SPHINX JOACHIM" has a sci-fi sphinx reimagined as a winged lion, its shape somewhere between the synthetic and biological. A few of the pieces respond directly to the environment, such as Dora Budor's "The Forecast (New York Situation)." Its biomorphic modules, inspired by the Archigram 1960s architectural group's visions of futuristic living, change colors in the rain due to their hydrochromic paint.

On a day back in August, the most successful art in Mutations at engaging the crowds had some form of interaction. Joanna Malinowska and C.T. Jasper's "The Emperor's Canary" involves two gramophones installed on railings. One plays a swooshing, churning recording of the Great Pacific garbage patch, the other the raspy breath of a person with black lung disease, both echoing a human impact on the Earth. People also delighted in climbing into Alisa Barenboym's "Locus of Control," a sculpture that looks a bit like a big nose. Its nostrils act as seats for people to look out through distorting glass, altering their sense of the world.

Below are more photographs from Mutations, as well as the other current commissions on the High Line, including Sheila Hicks's joyous "Hop, Skip, Jump, and Fly: Escape From Gravity" with around 650 feet of fabric tubing that winds over and through the tracks at the Western Rail Yards, and Henry Taylor's chill self-portrait in "the floaters" mural, with the artist swimming in a bright blue Palm Springs pool.