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In Dallas, 10 Sculptures for 10 Years



Ben Torres for The New York Times

A work by Charles Long being installed in NorthPark, a Dallas shopping mall.

By [JUDITH H. DOBRZYNSKI](#)

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A LOT of museums celebrate important anniversaries with special exhibitions in their galleries, but not the [Nasher Sculpture Center](#) in Dallas. For its 10th year, it is going much bigger — to all of Dallas. It has commissioned 10 public sculptures by 10 artists at 10 diverse locations around the 385-square-mile city, all on view as of Oct. 19.



Allison V. Smith/Nasher Sculpture Center
Preparations for a “social sculpture” by Rick Lowe in Vickery Meadow.



Allison V. Smith for the Nasher Sculpture Center
Mr. Lowe's “Trans.lation” consists of a series of pop-up markets where residents can display their artistic projects, reflecting many cultures.

The exhibition — titled “Nasher Xchange” as both a pun on the Roman numeral and a sign that the participating artists worked with local communities — aims to draw viewers to uncommon places for art. It will be a bit of a challenge for people who want to see them all.

In other ways, though, “Nasher Xchange” is a natural, because it touches on several themes coursing through the art world, including the desire of artists to make monumental works specifically for public spaces and of museums to meet people outside their walls.

“Some of the most interesting work being produced today is for the public sphere and therefore by definition doesn’t fit into the context of a museum or even in our garden,” said Jeremy Strick, the Nasher’s director.

He and his curatorial team selected artists whose approaches were varied enough to make “Nasher Xchange” tantamount to a survey of contemporary public sculpture. “With 10 works you can’t cover it all,” he admitted, “but you can begin to suggest the range.”

That it does, said Rochelle Steiner, former director of the Public Art Fund in New York and now dean of the Roski School of Fine Arts at the University of Southern California. “It seems like a range of approaches to sculpture — some are figurative, some abstract — and there’s a range of materials. Some will have social practices embedded in them. So it’s a pretty good range of ideas,” she said. And, she added, “I think the idea of extending into the city was a wonderful idea.”

The exhibition, which will cost about \$3 million, is also intended as a link to the Nasher’s founder, [Raymond D. Nasher](#), who died in 2007. Mr. Nasher, who collected sculpture with his wife, Patsy, for 50 years, was a developer whose signature project was the NorthPark shopping mall in north Dallas. From the day it opened in 1965, Mr. Strick said, “they put sculpture there — important works and with great care.” NorthPark still features [major works](#) by artists including Andy Warhol, Joel Shapiro, James Rosenquist, Antony Gormley and Beverly Pepper, among others.

“So public art in uncommon spaces was part of our history,” Mr. Strick said. “This was our attempt to re-engage and reflect that history.”

In those days, though, sculpture was a simpler matter, usually involving bronze or wood or some other basic material. Now sculpture can be performative, participatory or projected, to cite a few variations. And many contemporary artists work in so many media that there is hardly any such thing as “a sculptor” anymore. The universe of artists the Nasher could consider was enormous. “And we wanted to include artists who are well known for their public works and also some who are closer to the beginning of their careers,” Mr. Strick said.

The final mix encompasses Rick Lowe, whose “[Trans.lation](#)” is a “social sculpture” consisting of a series of pop-up markets in the highly diverse Vickery Meadow neighborhood where residents can display their artistic projects, reflecting many cultures. Mr. Lowe staged workshops to help area residents with their offerings. There is also the Good/Bad Art Collective of artists. They developed “Curtains,” which involves a one-night event in which visitors can become part of the creation and editing of an infomercial video in a downtown high-rise, which will then be displayed for later viewers in the same space.

Liz Lerner's effort is somewhat more traditional — a mirrored [stainless steel sculpture](#) called “X” — except that she says it could not have been designed without new digital modeling technology. Fittingly, it stands in a courtyard outside a new arts and technology building at the University of Texas, Dallas.

Back at NorthPark, Charles Long has put a new, virtual spin on the age-old public fountain. His “Fountainhead” consists of three kiosks, topped with iPads, that surround a central headlike sculpture with projected hundred-dollar bills cascading down the surface, as water would. Visitors pay to flick a virtual coin at the fountain from the iPads, creating “an exuberant splash,” the Nasher says. The donations go to charity.

Finding sites was complicated: Dallas offered nearly endless possibilities, and the curatorial team had to survey which would work. “We made an effort to find spaces that speak to the city's various aspects culturally,” Mr. Strick said. “Part of it is that this is an opportunity to reach out to parts of Dallas that perhaps don't come to the museum, but that's not the exclusive bent.”

Then they had to secure local cooperation (only one community declined, in fear of too much disruption) and match the selected artists with potential sites. “Some artists wanted to find their own site; others wanted help; and others said, ‘This is what I want to do, find a space for it,’ ” Mr. Strick said.

The final locations included residential areas, nature areas, downtown business districts, college campuses and the NorthPark shopping mall. Only one work, created by Alfredo Jaar, sits in the Dallas Arts District downtown: a pavilion resonating with the sound of newborns and titled “Music (Everything I know I learned the day my son was born).”

Several cities have played host to citywide sculpture exhibitions — notably the German cities of Munster, which stages a huge show every 10 years, and Munich, which this year invited numerous artists to make temporary artworks to pop up “like magic mushrooms” in the cityscape. The Nasher says “Xchange” is different: it's the only museum-curated show in the United States involving so many artists, locations and genres.

But it is unlikely to be the last. Other institutions have expressed interest in similar projects, if they can surmount the logistical hurdle of getting people to go to many locations. Mr. Strick said that the Nasher planned to offer organized bus tours that visit all 10 installations, and it has developed a mobile app for those who want to go it alone. If a sprawling city like Dallas can do it, why not others? Ms. Steiner is looking on the positive side, saying, “I love the idea of encouraging people to be tourists in their own city.”

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