



NEW YORK

Jonathan Prince

The Sculpture Garden at 590 Madison Avenue

Felicitously staged among stately bamboo in the soaring atrium of New York City's IBM building, Jonathan Prince's four monumental steel sculptures brought to mind one of Plato's favorite sayings: God is always doing geometry. Classic forms bearing historical and symbolic associations, Prince's obelisk, flattened sphere, cube, and torus all display rich sienna patinas that accentuate their contours. Militating against geometric perfection, however, silvery patches gash the forms, disrupting their simplicity and giving rise to the series' title, "Torn Steel."

A slender upright ripped at the apex by a jagged triangle of silver, *Totem* (2011) suggests—because of its title—protective ancestral spirits, as well as the masculine generative powers inherent in the obelisk and the Indian lingam. *Disc Fragment* (2011), a flattened sphere, its surface also interrupted by irregular pools of silver, recalls the ancient winged discus that symbolizes the journey of the sun and, by extension, sublimation and transformation. A six-foot cube, "torn" deeply at a diagonal to reveal rippling patterns of stainless steel, *Vestigial Block* (2011) intimates a rudimentary reality. The form, a three-dimensional square, refers to the material uni-

verse and the four elements. *Torus 340* (2011), its annular circuit broken at the top by a scraggly "cut" of shiny metal, projects the energy of its shape—the implied trajectory of a smaller circle rotating around the perimeter of a larger one.

It would seem at first that Prince has spoiled Plato's divinely perfect geometric forms. But the "tears" are beautiful and, on deeper reflection, meaningful. *Totem's* theatrical gash, for instance, hints at lightning, that flash of fire from the heavens fertilizing the earth, analogous to the obelisk's inherent potency. The patterns on the giant disc are leaf-like, suggesting cycles of life and underscoring the notion of transmutation. The profound "rip" in the cube resembles a cut in the earth, accentuating, as in the other works, the form's symbolic associations. And the hiatus in the torus creates jagged ends that seem to beckon one to the other, as though magnetized, paralleling the ring's immanent energy. The "tears" thus complement rather than blight perfection.

Prince also weds geometry to natural processes through what he terms "gravitational patinas." Though begun with chemicals, his surfaces are finished outdoors, where rain and wind create distinctive patterns on each form. The cube, for example, shows unequal vertical striations, whereas the torus reveals swirls appropriate to its curves.

Left: Jonathan Prince, *Vestigial Block*, 2011. Oxidized and stainless steel, 6.25 x 6 x 6 ft. **Below:** Alison Saar, *Spring*, 2011. Bronze, detail of installation.

While Plato considered the objects of sensuous reality to be mere "shadows" and saw perfection only in geometric forms apprehended by the intellect, Prince prefers a marriage of form and accident, the one complementing the other. And in this union—to borrow from Yeats—"a terrible beauty is born."

—Dorothy Joiner

NEW YORK

Alison Saar

Madison Square Park

Alison Saar used her six-part installation *Feallan and Fallow* at Madison Square Park to re-write classical myths so that they apply to us today.

Treesouls (1994)—14-foot-high male and female figures made from carved wood standing on roots covered in patinated copper sheeting—guarded the north entrance to the park, near the children's playground. Four larger-than-life, bronze female figures (specially created for the installation and sited at the four quadrants of the park) represented not only the four seasons, but also the four stages of life. In theory, each season appeared as the same "everywoman." *Spring*—located in a sycamore tree—bends over as though dreaming or sleeping, her hair hanging down like branches and covered with caterpillars, cocoons, and moths—the insect stages of growth. In interviews, Saar has said that the moth represents night creatures associated with the moon. She uses its fragility to comment on young adults. *Summer's* smoothly curved belly is



TOP: TIMUR CIVAN, COURTESY THE ARTIST / BOTTOM: JAMES EWING, COURTESY MADISON SQUARE PARK CONSERVANCY

protected by a cupped, helmet-like shield; she is in her prime and pregnant with fireflies. *Fall* is an infertile woman who collects the pomegranates that fall from her upward-branching hair in her upturned skirt. *Winter*, curled into a fetal position as though hibernating, is the same size as the other figures yet seems smaller. In all of the portraits, the woman's body is unadorned, the skin dark brown.

With the Middle English title, *Feallan and Fallow*, Saar tips her hat to Anglo-Saxon interpretations of Graeco-Roman mythology. In classical lore, Persephone, the daughter of Demeter and Zeus, was abducted by Hades, king of the underworld. Demeter refused to fulfill her role of seeding the earth until her daughter was returned. After Zeus intervened, Persephone returned to earth, yet because she ate a few pomegranate seeds in Hades, she was forced to spend half of each year there.

Saar first treated the pomegranate theme in her 2008 solo exhibition "Hither" at L.A. Louver. She identifies with the Persephone myth in part as a universal message about life's seasons, and in part, perhaps, as an oblique reference to her mixed heritage. Saar's father Richard, now deceased, was of Scottish-German descent and classically trained in ceramics and art restoration. Her mother Betye, a California native of Irish, Native American, Creole, and African American heritage, is a major artist known for narratives that expose racism and correct false stereotypes of African American traditions.

Madison Square Park attracts diverse visitors. One day, it was moving to see *Winter* behind a man sleeping peacefully on a bench beside a cart holding his belongings. Other visitors could be seen looking up at *Spring* and photographing *Fall*. Squirrels and birds nested against the roots and towering torsos of *Treesouls*. At night, each sculpture

was modestly lit, and *Spring's* moths seemed iridescent. Located around the periphery of the park rather than in its central oval, Saar's works served as egalitarian guardians, subtly interacting with its flora, fauna, and human visitors.

—Jan Garden Castro

OLD WESTBURY, NEW YORK

Arthur Simms and Hyong Nam Ahn

Amelie A. Wallace Gallery, SUNY Curator Hyewon Yi recently produced a striking show of works by two sculptors, Jamaican-born Arthur Simms and Korean-born Hyong Nam Ahn, both of whom live and work in the New York City area. The three-tiered exhibition started with works by Simms, a compulsive archivist of discards and street refuse; the next level down presented a triptych by Ahn, a skilled technician working with neon and industrial materials, and a large dreamcatcher by Simms; while the third, bottom level was devoted to one large piece by Ahn. According to press materials, "Dreamcatchers," the show's title, refers not to the Native American totems meant to clutch bad dreams, but to the spiritual motives of the two artists, who pursue dreams of flight and transcendence.

Ahn's complex, three-part *For Whom* (2011) explores the notion of sacrifice and artistic martyrdom. The movement of the three sculptures is from left to right: *Power Play* (*For Whom 1*) is composed of organically shaped canvases, intended to mark the martyrdom of the artist, whose blood is represented by the presence of red in all three components; *Fallen Wing* (*For Whom 2*) includes a series of blue neon lights shedding illumi-

Above: Hyong Nam Ahn, *Ascending Soul*, 2007. Wood, muslin, metal, oil, and neon, 12 x 8 ft. **Right:** Arthur Simms, *Bicycle*, 1995–96/2006. Bicycles, wire, wood, plastic, metal, and found objects, 67 x 93 x 30 in.



nation onto the red neon, representing the lost wing of the heroic protagonist; and *Shattered Blood, Flash and Born Unknown Dimension* (*For Whom 3*) consists of red neon sticks issuing from a black center, a depiction of souls streaming into a black hole of oblivion. The impact of the installation was very strong, but a bit too reminiscent of Frank Stella. *Ascending Soul* (2007), a work that details, mostly abstractly, Ahn's placement of his father-in-law's remains in an urn, is much more effective. There is a large circular band on the floor, with a large lid, above which the relative's spirit appears in the form of a neon line suspended in an open circular cage. Red neon lights beneath the lid simulate fire reducing the bones to ash.

Simms almost always uses found materials, either discovered on the street or given to him by friends and colleagues. His *Dreamcatcher* (2000) is a visually intricate collection of

junked elements, including a bicycle, a chair, and an ascending ladder-like structure embellished with bottle caps. Simms finds real poetry in his refuse aesthetic, which relates to the New York-based Caribbean diaspora to which he belongs. Some of his wrapping sculptures also appeared in the show, including *Hemp or If I Were a Bird* (1991), whose monolithic simplicity echoes works by Brancusi and Martin Puryear. Yet, as Simms pointed out in a gallery talk at the opening, the work is also about color—about the golden hue of the rope that constructs the form. *Bicycle* (1995–96/2006), consists of two bikes tied together with string and random objects, including a good number of license plates and an unused outdoor toilet belonging to Nelson Rockefeller. The humor is sharp and blunt. Although the two sculptors are stylistically very different, Simms, like Ahn, seeks transcendence in materials.

—Jonathan Goodman

