MAD. SQ. ART 2014. RACHEL FEINSTEIN FOLLY

May 7 – September 7, 2014
Madison Square Park
Presented by the Madison Square Park Conservancy
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Rachel Feinstein guards her diminutive hand-cut paper sculptures as intensely as the medieval Sir Galahad sought the Holy Grail. They guide her thinking, secure her creativity, and dictate the form of her work. In a sense, the artist copies her own pieces by taking one object and supersizing it to create the next. If two artists were involved, this would become a postmodern critique in which one artist riff’s on the work of another. Instead, Feinstein uses timeworn sculptor’s means: she makes a maquette and magnifies it to realize a final object. Her remarkably laborious process in creating architectural-scale aluminum sculpture from fragile tabletop paper pieces is noteworthy. She first cuts paper into shapes, draws on the pieces, and then layers them through and around one another. They are as complex as they are finespun. Through the technology of fabrication, Feinstein’s work transforms from sculpture that she carries around in a little box to outsize stage sets on the lawns of Madison Square Park. And if the cuddly scale of the artist’s initial paper sculpture isn’t maintained, the hand-wrought line — her surface pencil drawing — successfully transfers from one format to the next. Those casual, hand-drawn marks are Feinstein’s signature and her innovation. Jean Dubuffet painted black lines by hand on his outdoor sculpture and his 20th century explorations of linearity on sculptural surface have clearly influenced Feinstein. Feinstein has pushed this practice of rendering into a new realm where applied surface graphics replicate the informality of drawing on paper.

Her three works created for Madison Square Park — Flying Ship, Cliff House and Rococo Hut — comprise her project, Folly. These whimsical, fairy tale stage sets are meant to engage park visitors to become players on a great, public stage. Follies were a decorative conceit that came into being around the sixteenth century and reached prominence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They dotted the lawns and estates of a privileged class, were seen by an elite circle, and had no specific architectural purpose other than extravagance, wonder and ornament. But follies, much like Feinstein’s list of source material, borrowed from various periods and themes. A folly could implicate Asian temples or Egyptian pyramids to create a new, fanciful whole. Feinstein ventures into a similar realm with Folly in Madison Square Park, but her work is by nature of the site designed for a diverse public rather than an honored few. This is a period of stylistic polyphony in contemporary sculpture and Feinstein embraces myriad historic sources in her work. Ballets Russes, Commedia dell’arte, Grimm’s Fairy Tales, Fellini movies, the Italian master etcher Giovanni Battista Piranesi, and Meissen porcelain are not typical fare for inspiration today. Feinstein does not coax the tenets of Modernism or have a dialogue with the Minimalists. There is, instead, the grandeur, motion and excess of Baroque and Rococo art in her work. Each of these far-flung inspirations conspires and serve as footholds: the Flying Ship was influenced by a seventeenth century Punchinello skit about a fool who strives to journey to the moon; Cliff House was modeled on an early twentieth-century Ballets Russes painted stage backdrop; Rococo Hut samples from Rococo architecture and Marie Antoinette’s Le Petit Trianon, a gift to the queen from Louis XIV on the grounds of Versailles.

Since Folly opened in Madison Square Park, it has delighted and amazed visitors. The white surface of the work contrasts with lush summer foliage. The vibrancy of Folly complements the pulse of visitors who daily course through the Park. This project could not have been realized without the steadfast commitment and munificence of the Madison Square Park Conservancy’s Board of Trustees. Our Art Committee provides meaningful guidance, wisdom and support. We are grateful to Marty Chafkin of Perfection Electrics and to John Barry and Christopher Ward of Thornton Tomasetti who worked with the Conservancy and the artist to realize this project. Marianne Boesky and Adrian Turner have offered encouragement and generosity to Mad. Sq. Art.

This project is Rachel Feinstein’s first outdoor public work in America. It is sure to charm and engage all visitors to Madison Square Park.

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FOREWORD.

Rachel Feinstein guards her diminutive hand-cut paper sculptures as intensely as the medieval Sir Galahad sought the Holy Grail. They guide her thinking, secure her creativity, and dictate the form of her work. In a sense, the artist copies her own pieces by taking one object and supersizing it to create the next. If two artists were involved, this would become a postmodern critique in which one artist riff’s on the work of another. Instead, Feinstein uses timeworn sculptor’s means: she makes a maquette and magnifies it to realize a final object. Her remarkably laborious process in creating architectural-scale aluminum sculpture from fragile tabletop paper pieces is noteworthy. She first cuts paper into shapes, draws on the pieces, and then layers them through and around one another. They are as complex as they are finespun. Through the technology of fabrication, Feinstein’s work transforms from sculpture that she carries around in a little box to outsize stage sets on the lawns of Madison Square Park. And if the cuddly scale of the artist’s initial paper sculpture isn’t maintained, the hand-wrought line — her surface pencil drawing — successfully transfers from one format to the next. Those casual, hand-drawn marks are Feinstein’s signature and her innovation. Jean Dubuffet painted black lines by hand on his outdoor sculpture and his 20th century explorations of linearity on sculptural surface have clearly influenced Feinstein. Feinstein has pushed this practice of rendering into a new realm where applied surface graphics replicate the informality of drawing on paper.

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FOREWORD.
Rachel Feinstein’s three large sculptural installations for Madison Square Park—Rococo Hut, Cliff House, and Flying Ship—are based on studio-made paper maquettes with the same names. The installations range in height from just under eight feet (Rococo Hut) to approximately twenty-six feet (Flying Ship and Cliff House). All three are constructed of aluminum and were assembled on site.

Rococo Hut, located under the boughs of one of the park’s formidable cherry trees, has a central stair—flanked by columns, jardinières, and other architectural devices—that rises under an arched and vaulted roof structure, all of which appear in a state of decay. Cliff House displays a similar state of ruination, in a strategy that has been used since the fifteenth century to evoke a certain wistfulness and contemplation about the passage of time. Perched on a craggy promontory with a waterwheel below, the remains of a structure are overgrown with brush, a tree growing through a window opening. Flying Ship appears sea-tossed but in comparison much less distressed than the other two. The hull soars ten feet above the ground. A single mast supports a sail that has caught a breeze that seems to propel the pilotless boat onward and upward.

From an architectural history perspective, Feinstein’s installations do indeed recall and extend the long tradition of “follies”—architectural forms with no real function other than to provide visual delight and trigger emotions—that have been constructed in garden or park settings since the 16th century. Unsurprisingly—
The Madison Square Park Conservancy has given me the opportunity to be able to marry my early need for theatre and performance with my later obsession with the handmade in one of the most spectacular settings. I picture the exhibition as an empty Fellini-esque set dropped into the middle of a lush green wonderland amidst the historical Flatiron District of New York City.

I have always been driven by the stark contrast between good and evil in old fairy tales, and this setting, a hidden natural jewel situated within the tall skyscrapers of yesterday and today, will be the perfect backdrop for my theatre. The real people who occupy the park every day will stand in for brightly-colored Commedia dell’arte performers among the colors of the summer plantings and my white ruined sets made to human scale hidden around the park. The white structures will transport the park into a cinematic landscape.

— Rachel Feinstein
considering the cost involved—most follies were built for and by the aristocratic elite. (Those who were tasked with building them may have contributed the term “folly,” from folly, which in French means “madness” or “insanity.”) The Temple of Philosophy, for example, was built around 1764 by the Marquis de Girardin in Ermenonville, France (Fig. 1). A visitor would come upon this apparently classical Roman structure in a garden landscape, where the folly, designed to appear either in ruins or unfinished, would provoke curiosity and contemplation. Less challenging philosophically, Marie Antoinette’s Hameau de la Reine (the Queen’s Hamlet; Fig. 2) was a romantic and picturesque faux gardens—a small building, or shrine—to the Queen’s Dolls’ House, a miniature manse designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens for the delight of Queen Mary, the wife of George V, and completed in 1924.

As Summerson pointed out, the aedicula has been associated not only with rituals (for example, shrines that are big enough to contain just a cult statue) but also with pleasure and fantasy. He gives many examples of both uses, and Feinstein evokes another: the diminutive structures created in sugar as part of the elaborate centerpieces made to decorate aristocratic dining tables on great occasions. For the 2009 exhibition Imperial Privilege: Vienna Porcelain of Du Paquier, 1718–44 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the food historian Ivan Day re-created such a centerpiece, based on illustrations of an eighteenth-century banquet (Fig. 3).6

In addition to a historical thread, Summerson traced the appeal of the diminutive structure throughout one’s life, beginning with the child’s play of creating make-believe “houses” under tables and in tree branches. He saw the same appeal at work in leisure activities enjoyed by children and adults alike, such as such as camping and sailing: “In both, there is the fascination of the miniature shelter—a petite maison that excludes the elements by a narrow margin and intensifies the sense of security in a hostile world.”7

In terms of more grown-up pleasures, Summerson pointed out that the words casino, bagnatifs, and brothel are all diminutives. In the same vein, the petite maison was a French garden pavilion set behind a dense wall of foliage that often served as a clandestine destination for romantic affairs. The petite maison provides another illustration of Summerson’s thesis regarding the “small house” and—like Marie Antoinette’s hameau—connects the folly, the diminutive structure, and erotic escapades.8

Rococo Hut and Cliff House can easily be seen in the historical context of the diminutive house, but it is interesting to note as well the examples of boats as vessels of fantasy and pleasure. The young Ludwig II, king of Bavaria, spent a fortune building the Venus Grotto at his Linderhof Palace in the 1860s (Fig. 4).9 The grotto, with faux stalactites and waterfalls, had electrical power that illuminated the space in changing colors and heated the sculpture of A. Dirigl (designer) 2009–March 21, 2010. 

In 1764, the young Ludwig II, king of Bavaria, spent a fortune building the Venus Grotto at his Linderhof Palace in the 1860s (Fig. 4). The grotto, with faux stalactites and waterfalls, had electrical power that illuminated the space in changing colors and heated the sculpture of A. Dirigl (designer) 2009–March 21, 2010. 

"Heavenly Mansions: An Interpretation of Gothic," John Summerson described what he sees as the near-universal appeal of diminutive structures.9 He traced the history of such structures, from the Roman aedicula—a small building, or shrine—to the Queen’s Dolls’ House, a miniature manse designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens for the delight of Queen Mary, the wife of George V, and completed in 1924. As Summerson pointed out, the aedicula has been associated not only with rituals (for example, shrines that are big enough to contain just a cult statue) but also with pleasure and fantasy. He gives many examples of both uses, and Feinstein evokes another: the diminutive structures created in sugar as part of the elaborate centerpieces made to decorate aristocratic dining tables on great occasions. For the 2009 exhibition Imperial Privilege: Vienna Porcelain of Du Paquier, 1718–44 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the food historian Ivan Day re-created such a centerpiece, based on illustrations of an eighteenth-century banquet (Fig. 3). In addition to a historical thread, Summerson traced the appeal of the diminutive structure throughout one’s life, beginning with the child’s play of creating make-believe “houses” under tables and in tree branches. He saw the same appeal at work in leisure activities enjoyed by children and adults alike, such as such as camping and sailing: “In both, there is the fascination of the miniature shelter—a petite maison that excludes the elements by a narrow margin and intensifies the sense of security in a hostile world.”

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water for swimming. Ludwig reportedly liked to be rowed around the grotto in a gilded shell-shaped boat while he listened to Wagner’s operas.

Another striking example is the Marble Boat, a pleasure pavilion in a lake on the grounds of the Summer Palace in Beijing. After the original was destroyed during the Opium Wars, the boat was rebuilt by the Empress Dowager Cixi in 1893. According to a tourist guidebook, with “huge mirrors fixed on each deck [of the boat], Cixi could enjoy the exquisite lake scene while having tea.”

She paid for the immovable lake-bound structure with funds that had been earmarked for expanding the imperial navy.

While these two examples extend the notion of the folly to maritime iconography, Flying Ship draws heavily on another source that Feinstein cites as a point of reference in her work—the fairy tale. In 1889, the American writer and poet Eugene Field published the poem now known as “Wynken, Blynken, and Nod.” It tells the story of three children in a flying boat in the shape of a wooden shoe, fishing among the stars:

Wynken, Blynken, and Nod one night
Sailed off in a wooden shoe—
Sailed on a river of crystal light,
Into a sea of dew.

In the last stanza of the poem, the shoe-shaped vessel is revealed to have been “a wee one’s trundle-bed,” transformed by a dream into a flying boat. In this sense, the only real difference between the child’s bed and Feinstein’s Flying Ship is a poetic and vivid imagination.

Summerson’s thesis goes a long way to enlighten the meaning of Feinstein’s iconography; the question of the scale of Feinstein’s installations has its own complexity. While Cliff House, Rococo Hut, and Flying Ship may portray diminutive structures, they are certainly not diminutive themselves. Yet rather than simply describe them as large, it is more accurate to describe them as enlarged. In fabricating the installations, Feinstein has built them to appear like the paper maquettes she first constructed for the project, all of which were less than twelve inches in height. Painted paper white, all three installations have dark streaks representing the creases in the original studies. In this respect, the installations in the park can be thought of as not only stage sets, but also as drawings, each of which has a reverse side.
Left:
Rachel Feinstein,
Cliff House, 2014 (detail)
Powder-coated aluminum
with applied graphics
25’ 6” x 27’ 8” x 12’ 4”

Right:
Rachel Feinstein,
Flying Ship, 2014
Powder-coated aluminum
with applied graphics
26’ x 8’ 6” x 5’
The artist’s manipulation of scale is further complicated by her challenge to one interviewer to imagine how the installations would look from far above Madison Square. If the park was imagined as a tabletop, she proposed, Cliff House, Rococo Hut, and Flying Ship might again be seen as the paper maquettes they once were—not unlike the diminutive scale of the sugary centerpieces that decorated banquet tables centuries ago.

Without denying the originality of Feinstein’s vision, much of her recent work fits well within that of two generations of artists for whom architecture has emerged as a virtual genre. Exhibiting their first such work nearly simultaneously in the mid-1960s, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Dan Graham, and Ed Ruscha turned from the human figure and abstraction, and trained their lenses on industrial structures, rowhouses, and apartment blocks. It is difficult to imagine the art world today without the photographic representations of architecture by Andreas Gursky, Candida Höfer, Thomas Ruff, and Thomas Struth (all students of the Bechers).

Even so, it is not architectural images alone that have provided grist for the contemporary artistic mill. Vito Acconci, Nicolas Buffa, Guillermo Kuitca, Glen Seator, Jeff Wall, and Andrea Zittel—to name a few—have also raided the discipline over the past three decades for its constituent parts: theory, history, artifacts, materiality, constructive techniques, scale, and so on.

A notable aspect of the current focus on architecture is the corresponding decrease in focus on the human form—the subject that dominated twentieth-century Western artists from Picasso to de Kooning to Warhol and art for millennia before them. Feinstein frequently has portrayed the human form, yet in her Madison Square Park installations, as we have seen, she has limited herself to architectural and maritime imagery. Passersby implicate themselves as part of the art, but only by happenstance.

Feinstein’s depiction of Cliff House and Rococo Hut in a ruined state reflects an architectural history that associated ruins with a Romantic sense of the passage of time. While that is clearly the artist’s intent, it is also interesting to see how those installations connect to a smaller group of contemporary artists exploring architecture in unexpected ways. One of the qualities most often associated with architecture is its durability and stability—what Vitruvius referred to as firmitas in his first-century-B.C. text on architecture. In many recent works by artists such as Kuitca, Rachel Whiteread, and Gary Simmons, the architecture is represented in a state of destructive transformation. In Kuitca’s Home (2003), for
instance, it seems to be in the process of watery dissolution. In Simmons’s Code Red (2008; Fig. 5), the buildings appear engulfed in flames.

Whether they are seen in a historical or a generational context, one of the best ways of understanding Feinstein’s follies is to refer to her initial description of the project in its prospectus: “The cartooned, fairy-tale works for Madison Square Park will suggest magic and decay—fantasy and foolishness.” The visual richness of the realized installations bear out the artist’s vision of works of art layered with multiple meanings drawn from the mental library she has created for herself.


4 Summerson, “Heavenly Mansions,” 2.
Rachel Feinstein

display models for
Rococo Hut, Cliff House, Flying Ship
2013

Rachel Feinstein

Flying Ship, 2014
Powder-coated aluminium
with applied graphics
26’ x 8’ 6” x 5’
Rachel Feinstein
Rococo Hut, 2014
Powder-coated aluminum with applied graphics
7' 6" x 11' 6" x 9'
EDUCATION
1993 Columbia University, New York, B.A.
1993 Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, ME

SOLO EXHIBITIONS
2012 Rachel Feinstein, Gagosian Gallery, Rome
2011 Rachel Feinstein: The Snow Queen, Lever House, New York
2008 Rachel Feinstein, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York
2007 Special Project for FineArt Fair at Marc Jacobs, London
Rachel Feinstein, Curiou-Solaire, London
2006 Triennial, Tate Modern, London
2005 Rachel Feinstein, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York
2002 Art in the Amour, organized by Art Production Fund, Soho, New York
Rachel Feinstein, Curiou-Solaire, London
2001 Rachel Feinstein, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York
1999 Rachel Feinstein, Robert Prime Gallery, London
White Arm, White Columns, New York
2004 Skypalace, Galería Daniel Templon, Paris
Shenutuzi, Art Rock, Rodezville Plaza, New York
2003 Monuments for D. Flavio, Roskilde Festival, Denmark
2002 Self Portraits, Delitch Projects, New York
3-D, Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York
20th Anniversary Show, Monika Spruth - Philipp von Magen, Cologne
Peep Show - A glimpse of the Frank Cohen Collection, Comma (a Art Gallery, Manchester
2001 Bill Out, Haryn Lovegrove Gallery, Los Angeles
The Honeymooners: John Currin and Rachel Feinstein, Hayward, Athens, Greece
Landscape, Dewi Ellen Gallery, New York
The Visitors, Printmets de Septembre, Toulouse
The Americans, New Art, Barbican Art Gallery, London
The Love of the Look, Kentish Engoloh Gallery, Vienna

GROUP EXHIBITIONS
2014 L’Art à l’endroit: Parcours d’art contemporain, Aix-en-Provence
The House of the Seven Gables, University Galleries of Illinois State University, Normal
2013 Little Black Dress, SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, GA
Exposition d’ouverture, Le Consortium, Dijon
Night Scended Stock, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York
The Living and the Dead, Gavin Brown’s enterprise, New York
Tell Dirty to Me …, Lamsa Goldstein Gallery, New York
2012 The Alliance, Hyundai Gallery, Bejing/Korea
Don Quijote, Anyang Public Art Project, Anyang, South Korea
The Recognitions: The Fireplase Project, East Hampton, NY
French Kiss, JUM Galleries, Paris
The Mom Show, Vivngton Arms, New York
Seeing Other People, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York
Art Firstnight, London, London
Candyland Zoo, Herbert Read Gallery, Kent Institute of Art & Design, Canterbury, England
Standard Project 24/7, The Standard Hotels, New York
2009 Self Portraits, Delitch Projects, New York
3-D, Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York
20th Anniversary Show, Monika Spruth - Philipp von Magen, Cologne
Peep Show - A glimpse of the Frank Cohen Collection, Comma (a Art Gallery, Manchester
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Landscape, Dewi Ellen Gallery, New York
The Visitors, Printmets de Septembre, Toulouse
The Americans, New Art, Barbican Art Gallery, London
The Love of the Look, Kentish Engoloh Gallery, Vienna

DRAWINGS 2000, Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York
Pastoral Pop, Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, New York
Moving Pictures, Tommy Lund Gallery, Copenhagen
Garden Party, No Limits Events Gallery, Milan
2003 Girls School, Bruceal University, Gainesville, GA
Art Lovers, Liverpool Biennial, England
Motion Studies, Kunsthall Brande Klaedefabrik, Odense, Denmark
Ethiopia, Spaces Gallery, Etxer, England
Down in Earth, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York
New York: Netheor/Man, Grand Arts, Kansas City, MO
How We Behave? Robert Prince Gallery, London
Jenny Bornstein’s Studio Show, New York
Heaven, P.S.1, New York
2002 Spring and Winter, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York
Let the Artist Live, Exit Art, New York
Artist Invitational, Sonnabend Gallery, New York

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY
CATALOGUES AND BOOKS
2013 No Limits Events Gallery, Milan
Garden Party, Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY
CATALOGUES AND BOOKS
Ingrid Sticht and Sandra Brant (interviews). “Ich Liebe die Phantasie,” Vogue Deutschland, January.
"Gagosian Gallery in Rome for Rachel Feinstein." VanityFair.it, November 16.

Fantasy and Mining Her Past." Cultured, Summer 2013.

"Funky, Surprising, and Self-Worthy Outdoor Art Installations to See in NYC This Summer," ARTnews Online, May 8.
Ingrid Sticht and Sandra Brant (interviews). “Ich Liebe die Phantasie,” Vogue Deutschland, January.
"Gagosian Gallery in Rome for Rachel Feinstein." VanityFair.it, November 16.
PREVIOUS MAD. SQ. ART EXHIBITIONS.

2014
Ivan Navarro This Land Is Your Land

2013
Giuseppe Penone Ideas of Stone (Idee di Pietra)
Orly Genger Red, Yellow and Blue

2012
Lee Villarreal BUCKYBALL

2011
Jacco Olivier Stumble, Hide, Rabbit Hole

2010
Jim Campbell Scattered Light

2009
Shannon Plumb The Park

2008
Olia Lialina & Dragan Espefscheld

2007
Bill Fontana Panoramic Echoes

2006
Ursula von Rydingsvard Bowl with Fins, Czaa & Babelskam, Damski Czepak, Ted’s Desert Reigns

2005
Jena Highten Eleven Works

2004
Mark di Suvero Aseso’s Fables, Double Tetrahedron, Beyond

2003
Wim Delvoye Gothic

2002
Dan Graham Biected Triangle, Interior Curve

2001
Navin Rawanchaikul I Love Sasi

2000
Tony Oursler The Influence Machine

From 2000-2003, exhibitions were presented by the Public Art Fund.

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Mad. Sq. Art is the free contemporary art program presented by the Madison Square Park Conservancy in the 6.2-acre park located at 23rd Street and Fifth Avenue.

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For more information on the Madison Square Park Conservancy and its programs, please visit madisonsquarepark.org.

MAD. SQ. PK. CONSERVANCY

The Madison Square Park Conservancy is the public/private partnership with the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation that was established in 2002 as a nonprofit organization to operate Madison Square Park. The Conservancy is dedicated to keeping Madison Square Park a bright, beautiful, and active public park. The Conservancy raises the funds that support lush and brilliant horticulture, park maintenance, and security. The Conservancy also offers a variety of cultural programs for park visitors of all ages, including Mad. Sq. Art.

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11 Madison Avenue, 15th Floor
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