

The Record, May 3, 2010

Review of "Big Bambu" sculpture installation on the roof of Metropolitan Museum



Doug + Mike Starn on the Roof: Big Bambú
April 27—October 31, 2010 (weather permitting)

2. Big Bambú installation view, March 2010

Photo by Doug and Mike Starn
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Mike and Doug Starn's bamboo structure on the Met's roof is deceptively sturdy; visitors can tour its upper reaches.

By JOHN ZEAMAN

DOUG + MIKE STARN ON THE ROOF: BIG BAMBÚ

Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Roof Garden, 1000 Fifth Ave. at 82nd Street. 212-535-7710 or metmuseum.org.

Through Oct. 31. Schedule: 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday and Tuesday through Thursday, to 9 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

Recommended admission: \$20, students and senior citizens \$10.

Tickets for the guided tours of the elevated pathways are free with museum admission and available on a first-come, first-served basis.

By the look of it, you'd think some giants had been playing pickup sticks on the top of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The roof is covered with a seemingly random heap of lashed-together bamboo poles.

It's called "Big Bambú," the creation of Mike and Doug Starn, identical twin artists set loose to play in the rooftop sculpture garden. The open-air space has seen some big installations in recent years, but this one, already about 30 feet tall and covering most of the rooftop surface, is by far the biggest.

With the help of a crew of agile rock climbers, it will continue to grow, right through spring, summer and early fall. Its charming feature is how easily it comes together. Tie a few poles together tepee-style and you've got a structure. Then, just keep going. Add a story. Add a wing. Attach a ladder.

It's free-standing, but quite sturdy. In Southeast Asia they use bamboo like this for construction scaffolding, extending the seemingly flimsy structures up and around entire skyscrapers. ("Big Bambú" has already passed inspection by the New York City Department of Buildings.)

Underneath, it's like a forest. Looking into its upper reaches, where live shoots still sprout from the freshly cut poles, you can see elevated walkways that look a bit like the rope bridges from Indiana Jones movies — but rigid. It was raining the day I saw the installation, so no one was on them, but

on nice days the museum will let small groups of sneaker-shod visitors take guided tours. Those with a fear of heights need not apply.

If you get a little distance from it, the swooping and curving walkways and the crisscrossing supports bring to mind an old wooden roller coaster. You can also see the form of a breaking wave taking shape on the top. That is the one intentional design feature of the sculpture.

The rolling wave is only one of several metaphors that the Starns use when discussing this work. Their first bamboo structure was built inside a cavernous factory in Beacon, N.Y., and moved. By continually taking poles from the back and assembling them at the front, they made it roll forward like a wave.

There was no room for forward motion on the Met's roof. The structure already occupies its entire 100-foot-by-50-foot area, but upward and interior expansion will continue over the six-month life of the project. It will eventually reach 50 feet — the height of a five-story building — and continue to grow in complexity, weather permitting, until the roof closes on Oct. 31.

Like showbiz twins, the Starns play up their twinness, dressing similarly, but not quite identically, in loose jeans and gray-green jackets. They finish each other's sentences. They are New Jersey natives, born in Absecon, near Atlantic City.

Today, at 48, they have long hair, creased faces and mellow demeanors. They look like aging hippies, an impression reinforced by the title of their installation. "Big Bambú" refers to a brand of cigarette rolling papers and is taken from a 1972 comedy album by Cheech and Chong, known for their pothead humor.

The Starns speak of their project in cosmic terms. The bigness of "Big Bambú" is meant to make people feel their smallness. Its rope-tied bonds speak of connectivity, its ongoing growth is like that of an organism, its chaotic shape is that of life.

In the end, there's something reminiscent here of Christo's Central Park project, "The Gates." Like that one, it's part stunt and part art, with a communal spirit and with a limited life, destroyed at the end like a Buddhist sand painting.

In the meantime, it's there to enjoy. No need to think deep thoughts. The wisteria is in bloom. And the Met is opening a special martini bar that will serve a cocktail called "Big Bambú," which, given the name's origin, is something of a mixed metaphor.



Website:

http://www.northjersey.com/arts_entertainment/92647584_Bamboozled_and_bedazzled_by_a_twig_pile.html