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Culture notes: growth project

The Starns claim no powerful artistic inspirations, except, says Doug, the “complicated” compositions of Jimi Hendrix and Nick Cave

By TIM TEEMAN

Central Park in New York is a brimming carpet of green, the setting sun dramatic as it dips between the skyscrapers and glittering Art Deco façades. But here on the roof of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, your eyes are not drawn to the stunning urban vista but to the all-enveloping, monumental structure of interlocking bamboo branches jutting dizzyingly at various angles, lashed together by coloured climbing cords, that the museum estimates will attract 400,000 clambering visitors before it closes in late October.

Big Bambú, the creation of the artists Mike and Doug Starn, is, the 48-year-old twin brothers say, a piece of art that will be “in process” until it is dismantled. “Our inspiration was how things, organisms, change, yet stay the same,” Mike says. As visitors take the pathways up into the structure, the brothers and a team of professional rock climbers will continue building upwards and outwards. By midsummer the pièce de résistance of the 100ft long, 50ft wide structure, built from 5,000 bamboo branches — a peaking, cresting wave shape sweeping over into Central Park — will be complete.

The brothers, quietly spoken with weather-beaten faces, lead me into the structure. It is mesmerisingly intricate and fiendish-looking but, they say, it has

taken only eight weeks to construct. “It would have taken three if we hadn’t put these arteries [walkways] in,” Mike says. “We’re using 50 miles of climbing cord to tie the branches.”

Big Bambú was first conceived at the brothers’ studio in upstate New York and, the curator Anne Strauss says, is one of the most logistically complex projects the museum has taken on. Engineers had to be enlisted. New York’s Fire Department has evaluated *Big Bambú*’s flammability; the Department of Buildings had to be consulted because it is a temporary structure. Because of concerns over falling objects, visitors will be stripped of cameras, cellphones and bags.

The Starns claim no powerful artistic inspirations, except, says Doug, the “complicated” compositions of Jimi Hendrix and Nick Cave. Music might find a home here over the summer, he teases. The idea is to take the project, or similar ideas, elsewhere in the world, including the UK — but the twins won’t be drawn on specific plans.

“My favourite time is now,” Mike says, as the sun melts around us. “I mean, where else would you want to be?”

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