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For the Birds: Next High Line Show, 'Busted,' Examines Official Public Sculpture

By Andrew Russeth 3/19

"Maybe because I'm Italian, I kept thinking of the High Line as a big boulevard or like a street of the Roman forum, and the public sculptures that dot that landscape," High Line curator Cecilia Alemani said by phone last week.

Ms. Alemani was discussing her latest exhibition, "Busted," which opens along the mile-long elevated park next month. It includes artworks that play with the conventions of such official public artworks. **They're by nine artists, many of whom rarely produce public art, like George Condo, who has made a beastly head titled Liquor Store Attendant,** and Goshka Macuga, who is contributing a bust of Colin Powell delivering his infamous 2003 speech at the United Nations, gingerly holding that famous vial of anthrax.

"We wanted to question what the public monument is," Ms. Alemani said. "What about the traditional figurative monuments that have characterized our public space since the ancient Greeks?" (The most classical-looking piece is probably Frank Benson's enigmatic and eerily lifelike Human Statue (Jessie) (2011), a human posing in a long tunic and chic glasses.)

A 10th work will join the exhibition halfway through the show's yearlong run, as part of a program called Vox Populi, which asks the park's 4.4 million annual visitors to vote online for someone—real or imaginary—they would like commemorated in a statue. An as-yet-unnamed artist will handle the public's winning choice.

Another exciting name in the show is the young sculptor Andra Ursuta, who was just tapped for the 2013 Venice Biennale. Her piece is "a giant white marble nose that looks as though it fell off a giant Greek Colossus," Ms. Alemani said. "She grew up in Romania and witnessed the fall of Communism and what happened to the many official monuments in that part of the world. It's going to sit in an old wheelbarrow, as though it was abandoned by a worker on the side of the High Line."

Mark Grotjahn's contribution, one of the hollow bronze mask sculptures he showed at Gagosian last year, seems particularly well-suited to the park. "We can put seeds or water in it and it can function as a bird feeder," Ms. Alemani said. "On the High Line, you're going to have the birds everywhere." Sarah Sze's intricate sculpture, which ended its run last summer, "was really, really popular with our birds," she added.