

Paula Hayes Reimagines a Victorian Totem in Madison Square Park



The artist Paula Hayes's 18 "Gazing Globes" will be on view in Madison Square Park from Feb. 19 through April 19.

YASUNORI MATSUI, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND SALON 94, NEW YORK

By JULIE BAUMGARDNER
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Paula Hayes can see into the future. "I've always been a bit witchy," she squeals. It's true: Hayes has been infusing her sculptures with a bit of history and magic since she began creating work back in the 1990s. But it wasn't until her first show in 2004 with Salon 94, which represents her to this day, that it became clear the environmentally focused artist's iconic medium, the round terrarium, would trickle down into critical mass. These days, retailers like Target unknowingly sell imitations of her work. Now that every twentysomething in Brooklyn (and their mothers elsewhere) own the little glass spheres that contain living plants, succulents and crystals, Hayes has moved on. "I'm contemplating in the realm of nature, but it has moved into sculptural form and illumination," the 57-year-old says. On top of her terrariums, Hayes is internationally lauded as a landscape artist — even divining the backyards and terraces of the art world's elite, including the gallerists Jeanne Rohatyn Greenberg (of Salon 94), David Zwirner and Marianne Boesky. For her next project, though, "I'm not using living plants," Hayes says. "That's a huge departure for my audience, the aspect of the botanical or horticultural, with more than 15 years in garden design," Hayes continues. So what is she doing?

This week, Hayes unveils two projects. The first, which launches tomorrow, is a series of 18 "Gazing Globes" created in partnership with Mad. Sq. Art, the beloved art program from the Madison Square Park Conservancy initiative, which taps artists (previous participants have included Leo Villareal, Rachel Feinstein and Orly Genger) to fill the Edith Wharton-era, William Grant-landscaped urban oasis with public art projects. Gazing globes themselves hark back to the 19th century, too; originating in 16th-century Venice, they were vogueish garden ornaments

during the Victorian era. “It’s a particular part of history that I’m pretty obsessed with,” she explains. “Now, gazing globes belong to Walmart and garden catalogs online and they’re very kitschy, made out of plastic and shiny in green or blue.” Hayes — like Jeff Koons, who placed a globe front and center on the cover of [Lady Gaga’s “Artpop” album cover](#) in 2013 — is attracted to the totem object’s reflective and metaphysical properties. “The history of them is about reflection and divination,” she says, “looking into something to ascertain the future and figure the past.”

For her Mad. Sq. Art project, Hayes created the globes, which range in size from 16 to 24 inches in diameter, on pedestals ranging in heights and reaching up to 47 inches. Unlike the opaque Victorian globes, Hayes’s are transparent, made of an “optically clear” polycarbonate encasing, and are filled with material — “something like a landscape,” she says. Her wondrous terrains comprise upcycled radio parts, acrylic wands and other non-compostable parts, sprinkled in fairy dust made of pulverized CDs. “Alchemy is a really good word for when you see them. When you look closely, you can see it is materials the earth really can’t digest,” she explains. “It’s a very good idea to use those materials for art, because art is meant to be eternal and something we leave behind. And that would perhaps be a better use for these materials than just discarding them — keeping them in sight in a way that you put the two words together: insight.” Whereas Hayes’s terrariums were designed as living objects bestowed to a “caregiver,” her term for a collector, the Gazing Globes take on contemplative purpose. “I think art is political,” she says, offering her favorite Emily Dickinson quote: “Tell all the truth but tell it slant.”

In contrast to the overt contemplation inspired by the Gazing Globes, Hayes aims to illuminate — literally — with another project opening this week, “Morning Glories,” which has its debut at Salon 94 Bowery on Friday and consists of eight hand-cast acrylic light sculptures. The Northern Lights have long been regarded as a spiritual phenomenon in Nordic folklore — in Finland, they’re seen as the great snow sprays of the magical arctic fox; in Norway, as the souls of dancing women. The series, which bridges art and design, as the chandeliers are entirely functional, is intended to create an atmosphere, Hayes says, “like looking at the sky and something in the ocean; some very natural phenomenon that’s typically fleeting.”

After decades of work, Hayes is still enthusiastic about her medium. “It’s a good time to be a sculptor!” she exclaims. “It’s so tactile, and everything else is so flat. The world is becoming flat again!”

“Gazing Globes” will be on view from Feb. 19 through April 19 in the West Gravel area of Madison Square Park, New York, madisonsquarepark.org. “Morning Glories” will be on view from Feb. 20 through March 22 at Salon 94 Bowery, 243 Bowery, New York, salon94.com.

A close-up of one of the globes, all of which contain little landscapes created from non-compostable items like radio parts and pulverized CDs. YASUNORI MATSUI, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND SALON 94, NEW YORK



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