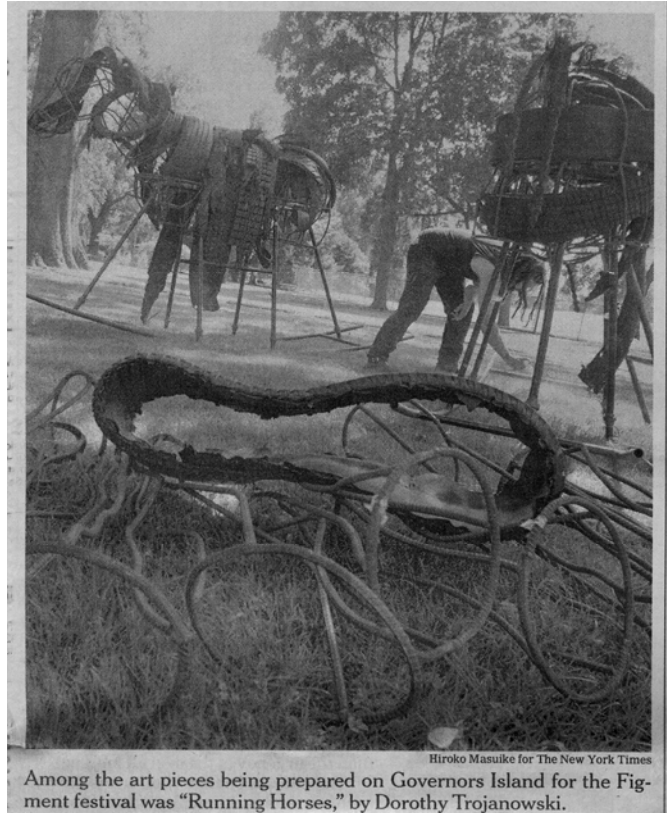


Weekend Arts

Ferrying Creative Impulses Across New York Harbor

By MELENA RYZIK
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Among the oddities on Governors Island — the empty military barracks and officers' houses; the admiral's mansion where Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev held a summit meeting in 1988; the abandoned, ghostly golf course, bowling alley and Burger King — the strangest sight on Sunday may be the giant inflatable starfish tethered to a tree. Or perhaps the trio of life-size, mid-gallop rubber horses. Or the carousel made from Razor scooters.



Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times
Among the art pieces being prepared on Governors Island for the Figment festival was "Running Horses," by Dorothy Trojanowski.

All will be installed for Figment, a new one-day arts festival inhabiting the island. Equal parts installation and performance piece, Figment is meant to be interactive and participatory, with games (a squirt gun battle and "limbonade," a contest in which good limbo dancers win lemonade), music (D.J.'s and bands), dance (workshops in African styles and samba) and costumed revelry (expect lots of body paint and drag) from more than 75 local artists and groups, and, ideally, every visitor.

The hope was “to create an environment where everyone’s an artist,” said David Koren, 36, a Figment organizer. “The more people that come to it with something to contribute, the more successful it will be.”

Jim Glaser, 43, another organizer, said, “I like to think of it as a 1,000-ring circus where everyone is their own ringmaster.” (Thus, Mr. Glaser will be wearing a ringleader costume and cracking his whip over a shopping cart painted to resemble a lirmaid: half-lion, half-mermaid.)

If it sounds a bit like Burning Man East, it is; the organizers and about half the participants are veterans of that alternative arts juggernaut in the Nevada desert. “The idea was to bring the energy and the volunteerism and the ability to just jump in and do things from Burning Man and marry that with the arts energy in New York,” Mr. Koren said.

He visited the island in 2005 for the Muster, the first large-scale public art project held there after the federal government sold the land to the city for \$1 in 2003. (A visitor at the time described Muster as “Burning Man for lazy people.”) When Mr. Koren returned last year for an architectural tour, he was inspired.

“It struck me that it’s an incredibly serene place, and so close to New York,” he said. “It needs to be known for something more concrete than just a park where you can grill.”

He joined with the Action Arts League, Mr. Glaser’s nonprofit group; Ryan Fix, the kilt-wearing founder of the Pure Project, a NoLIta arts space and “creativity incubator”; and about 30 volunteers to conceive of and create Figment over the last year. (The name comes from an Andy Warhol quotation describing his preferred tombstone: “No epitaph, and no name. Well, actually, I’d like it to say ‘figment.’ ”)

The event won the approval of the Governors Island Preservation and Education Corporation, which oversees the 150 acres that are not

national parkland. The organizers hope that it becomes an annual event, with minimal environmental impact (the gathering is officially “leave no trace”) and maximum exposure for underserved artists.

With stratospheric rents and an increased focus on sales, “there is the sense that New York is potentially losing its edge in the art world,” Mr. Glaser said. “One of the ways to bring that back is to bring art to the public space. We think participatory art is really the next big movement.”

Some of the artists involved agree.

“I am not a big fan of the Art World,” said Anakin Koenig, 42, who created the inflatable starfish installation (and who specified the capitals). “As an artist I need to be part of it, but I wish it was more encompassing and more accepting. That’s the reason I’m excited” about being part of Figment.

“It’s a new frontier for New York,” added Mr. Koenig, whose work has been shown at the Whitney Biennial and at many underground parties and clubs. “And I was excited to do something during the day.”

Figment is to run from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday on Governors Island (rain date: July 22). The festival is free and ferry service, also free, will be available from the Battery Maritime Building. Snack carts available, picnics recommended. Information: figmentnyc.org.