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Painting Bryant Park, While Adding to Its Charm



Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

Four artists, including Patti Mollica, of Nyack, N.Y., were selected from among 39 applicants to spend two weeks painting scenes of Bryant Park this summer.

By LISA W. FODERARO
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Bryant Park's pristine lawn, lush hydrangeas and movable bistro tables have been well documented in photographs and videos, but not so much in paint. This summer, to correct that situation, the Bryant Park Management Corporation, which operates the park, chose four artists to be painters in residence: each is being paid \$2,000, in addition to the cost of materials, to spend two weeks depicting life in the park.

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"The public loves to watch painters, and we thought that if we spent \$10,000 on a full summer of painting that it would be well worth the money," said Daniel A. Biederman, president of the management corporation. It also infuses the park with an ineffable charm.

[Patti Mollica](#) was one of those chosen from among 39 applicants. She said she considered herself an urban painter, her subject matter largely subway platforms, taxis, fire escapes and corner groceries. But, she said, she usually

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Walter Lynn Mosley

One of 19 paintings of Bryant Park made by Walter Lynn Mosley while he was an artist in residence there this summer.

photographs her subjects first and then puts oil to canvas in her studio in Nyack, N.Y., miles up the Hudson.

For the last two weeks, she has been painting en plein-air, like the Impressionists who, more than a century ago, often left the confines of their studios for the French countryside.

“It’s actually been somewhat life-changing,” said Ms. Mollica, who on Wednesday was standing at her easel and painting the park’s carousel near 40th Street, wearing a broad-brimmed felt hat and listening to Thelonious Monk and Bill Evans on her [iPhone](#).

“Artists like their creature comforts, which includes climate-controlled studios,” she said. “But there’s an excitement to painting something on the spot. I think the energy comes through.”

But painting inside the park has its challenges. About 20,000 people visit the park on a typical summer day, drawn by the chance to step outside of Midtown Manhattan’s skyscrapers and traffic-choked streets into a verdant oasis of six acres, bounded by Avenue of the Americas to the west and the New York Public Library to the east.

In addition to the crowds, the artists have had to contend with this summer’s intense heat and the park’s unusual light effects. [Walter Lynn Mosley](#), a 51-year-old painter who lives in Brooklyn, was the first of the four artists to set up an easel. He said it sometimes felt as if the sun’s rays were moving faster than his paintbrush.

“You’re surrounded by buildings, and it’s kind of like you’re in a valley, so it was a little tricky,” said Mr. Mosley, who produced 19 oil paintings during his two-week stint.

“With the way the light was hitting, certain parts were in shadow and certain parts were in light,” he said. “But it was a nice arrangement.”

The park, which is privately managed, reopened 20 years ago after an extensive renovation. It is the best-financed public space, per acre, in New York City, with an annual budget of \$8.2 million. None of that revenue comes from the city’s parks department; instead, the park is supported by corporate sponsorships, fees paid by the adjacent office buildings and concessions.

Ms. Mollica was on track to create 12 paintings by Friday, her last day in residence. Every morning, she lugged 50 pounds of materials into the park, including a few dozen paintbrushes, panels, paints, palette knives, some water and her easel. Her paintings included scenes of the park’s lawn and park visitors eating lunch and holding umbrellas in the rain.

She said that the biggest hurdle was dealing with the constant movement in the park. “Ninety percent of plein-air painters are landscape artists, because everything moves in the city,” she said. “I was a little scared at first, but I feel like I can paint anywhere now.”

The carousel was a case in point, with its horses spinning endlessly and children continually hopping on and off. “There’s just so much detail,” Ms. Mollica said, considering her loose green and lavender brush strokes on the one-square-foot panel propped on her easel. “I don’t need every horse, but I want to get the ambience, because it’s such a beautiful carousel.”

It is unclear what will become of the paintings by the four artists in residence, who also



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include [Andrea Arroyo](#) and [Yuka Imata](#). “We’re debating among three or four possibilities,” Mr. Biederman said.

One idea is to collect business cards from park visitors and then hold a drawing with the paintings as prizes.

But the park corporation could also decide to sell the canvases, or keep them.

“We could have our own display up in our offices,” Mr. Biederman said, referring to the corporation’s headquarters on Avenue of the Americas, across from the park. “Or maybe even in the park’s restroom, which has classical music and beautiful flower displays. But it’s never had artwork.”

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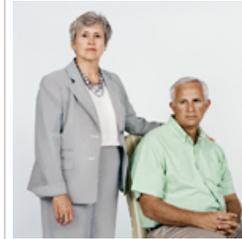
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