

ART WORLD

Deborah Kass's 'OY/YO' Sculpture Lands in Brooklyn but Speaks to All the Boroughs

Sarah Cascone, Wednesday, November 11, 2015



Deborah Kass, *OY/YO* (2015), Brooklyn Bridge Park.

Photo: Etienne Frossard, © Deborah Kass Studio LLC, courtesy Two Trees Management Co.

Brooklyn-based artist Deborah Kass is bringing a bit of artistic word play to her native borough with *OY/YO*, her first monumental sculpture, on view at the foot of the Manhattan Bridge. “YO” refers both to the Spanish for “I am” and to urban and Brooklyn slang, while “OY” is a common Yiddish word expressing woe, dismay, or annoyance.

What is now a common motif for Kass was inspired by Ed Ruscha’s OOF word painting. She created her own version reading “OY” in 2011—just one of her many pieces that aimed to reclaim the work of major 20th-century male artists as her own. When a friend pointed out the *OY/YO* connection, a new series of work was born.

When Kass was approached by Two Trees Management company about creating a work for the space, she told artnet News in a phone conversation, expanding upon that earlier work “just seemed like a no-brainer, especially here in New York.” After paintings, prints, and tabletop *OY/YO* sculptures, this was “the first opportunity to make it really big.”

Kass’s other works based on the linguistic pun include two large-scale side-by-side billboards (one “OY,” the other “YO”) installed this past year in Massachusetts and Florida. Kass wasn’t sure how the work’s multicultural message might have been received differently in other parts of the country versus New York, and stressed that the Brooklyn work “is a different piece,” experienced in three dimensions and multiple views.



Deborah Kass, *OY/YO* (2015), Brooklyn Bridge Park.

Photo: Etienne Frossard, © Deborah Kass, courtesy Two Trees Management Co.

It's a busy fall for Kass, who also has an upcoming show of new work at Paul Kasmin Gallery, and is being honored along with her wife, artist Patricia Cronin, and actors Alec Baldwin and Richard Gere at Artwalk on November 17. The annual art auction benefits the New York Coalition for the Homeless, and Cronin and Kass have both contributed regularly to the auction over the years.

"They do great work," said Kass of the Coalition for the Homeless. "It's a very hands-on thing; they actually go out and feed people. That's fantastic."

The new work, a yellow painted aluminum statue, sits on the newly-renovated Main Street lawn in Brooklyn Bridge Park, measuring eight feet tall. People viewing it from the waterfront will be greeted with "YO," while visitors entering the park will see an "OY." Kass sees both sides as equally important, reflecting the cultural melting pot that is New York. "That's the beauty of 'YO,'" she said.

Though it's Kass's first experience with monumental sculpture, the whole affair has gone off without a hitch. St. Louis's Lococo Fine Arts, which was in charge of production of the original small-scale editions of the piece, also handled the fabrication of the large version. There weren't any challenges in shipping such a massive work—at least not that Kass knew of, seeing as it had arrived in New York in one piece. "It's been very exciting," said Kass of seeing her work come to life on such a massive scale.



Deborah Kass, *OY/YO* (2015), Brooklyn Bridge Park.
Photo: Etienne Frossard, © Deborah Kass, courtesy Two Trees Management Co.

Although the work might seem particularly at home in Brooklyn, Kass is quick to note that “it’s a sculpture for all the boroughs.”

“The thing about this piece is it’s about so many communities coming together, and that’s what I hope people take from it,” said Kass. “I just hope they like and can relate to it and identify with it.”

Deborah Kass’s OY/YO will be on view on the Main Street lawn in Brooklyn Bridge Park through August, 2016.

“Deborah Kass: No Kidding” will be on view at Paul Kasmin Gallery, 515 West 27th Street, New York, December 9, 2015–January 23, 2016.