



ARTIFACTS

Artifacts | Gilding the 'Lilliput'

CULTURE | BY LINDA YABLONSKY | APRIL 30, 2012 3:45 PM



Alessandro Pessoli's "Old Singer with Blossoms," 2012

Over the last year, four million people walked the High Line, the elevated park in Chelsea. Many have stopped to photograph themselves in front of the birdhouses at the halfway point, not always realizing they were posing with a sculpture by the artist Sarah Sze. All can be forgiven for thinking it a housing project for birds. A number of birds suffering the same delusion have nested within it, either because passers-by keep leaving them food or because the birds know a great piece of art when they see it.

They may have to look harder for the six new works in "Lilliput," the High Line's first group exhibition of outdoor sculpture. Even from a bird's-eye view, they're not easy to spot. As commissioned by Cecilia Alemani, the curator of the High Line's art program, they're miniatures designed to counter the often oppressive monumentality of traditional public artworks. Because they're also set in unexpected places, you never know when — or if — one will turn up.

The other day, when I made tracks down the walkway to meet Alemani for a guided tour, I didn't notice a single one. Once I knew where to look, however, I had to wonder how I could have missed them the first time around.

Alessandro Pessoli's "Old Singer With Blossoms," for instance, is a metal scarecrow that stands nine feet tall amid the copse of birch trees planted on the park's southern end. A bronze head mounted on a kind of tripod and dressed in a colorful knitted cap, it has a garland of crocheted flowers decorating its skeletal support. In its whimsical presence, Alemani pointed out, the viewer becomes the miniature. Personally, I felt like a wide-eyed city kid discovering the urban jungle's hidden pleasures for the first time.