



MEMORIAL ART GALLERY COMMISSIONS MAJOR SCULPTURAL INSTALLATION Work by Tom Otterness Will Anchor New Centennial Sculpture Park



ROCHESTER, NY, April 5, 2010 — A major sculptural installation by American artist Tom Otterness will anchor a new community park on the grounds of the Memorial Art Gallery, director Grant Holcomb announced today. The selection of Otterness, one of the leading figures in public art, caps a two-year search by the Gallery for an artist of national stature whose work is meaningful, engaging and accessible.

Otterness is known for narrative works that are at once light-hearted and socially pertinent. His proposal for MAG—populated by monumental limestone sculptures that echo the surrounding buildings, as well as by smaller bronze figures—will tell the story of a sculpture from quarry to finished product. From its vantage point in front of the Gallery, it will also serve as a gateway into the museum. As the only site-specific work between New York City and Toronto by this internationally renowned artist, it is also expected to become an artistic destination.

The goal is for the installation and the surrounding park—known as Centennial Sculpture Park—to be open to the public as the Gallery counts down to its 100th anniversary in October 2013.

“The Otterness installation is the first site-specific sculpture in the Gallery’s long history and, with its sense of whimsy and wonder, seems a fitting way to celebrate the Gallery’s centennial,” says Holcomb. “The work will animate the site and serve as an enticing invitation to explore the grounds and, eventually, the treasures of the Memorial Art Gallery. The installation even seems reminiscent of the old town square concept where people meet to carry on public conversations.”



Preparatory grounds work will begin this year on several acres at the southeast corner of the MAG campus, near the intersection of University Avenue and Goodman Street. Installation of the Otterness sculptures is scheduled to begin in summer 2011 and be completed in spring 2012. The project, which is MAG’s largest art acquisition ever, will be underwritten by the Gallery’s Maurice R. and Maxine B. Forman Fund for art acquisition.

Work on the park coincides with the latest phase of ARTWalk, a public initiative to transform the Neighborhood of the Arts into an interactive outdoor museum. The strategic location of Centennial Sculpture Park, along with the removal of portions of decades-old wrought-iron fencing, will help make the Gallery a more vital part of the neighborhood, open up the grounds for the public to enjoy, and attract tourism.

In addition to Otterness’s installation, Centennial Sculpture Park will showcase works from the MAG collection by such national and local artists as Deborah Butterfield, George Rickey, Tony Smith and Albert Paley.

Bringing a sculpture to life



“I was inspired by creation myths like Pygmalion and Pinocchio and the ancient idea of bringing a sculpture to life,” says the artist, whose proposal shows the “flux and change” of a busy sculpture studio. “The sculptures also function as a gateway from the outside world into the museum.

“During the process of developing my proposal, I carefully researched the Memorial Art Gallery collection and architecture. I decided to build a stone monument using the very

material that the buildings are made of, and a new material for me—Indiana limestone. I will also use smaller bronze figures to create a double narrative.”

About the artist

Born in Wichita, KS in 1952, Tom Otterness trained at New York City’s Art Students League and through the Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

He has completed major outdoor commissions in the US, Canada, Germany and the Netherlands, including multi-sculpture installations in New York City, Indianapolis, Grand Rapids, MI, and Beverly Hills, CA.

His sculptures are in the collections of such institutions as the Brooklyn Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Joslyn Art Museum (Omaha, NE) and SFMoMA in San Francisco.

He has also created site-specific works for schools, parks and playgrounds, as well as such unconventional venues as a hayfield in Texas and Manhattan’s 14th Street subway station. In 2005, he became the first artist ever to contribute a balloon for Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade.

“Otterness’s sculptures are playful, but they are also rich with content,” says MAG chief curator Marjorie B. Searl. “With them, he poses questions about how we relate to one another and the world around us and often creates narratives about such social issues as economics, politics and gender. Simultaneously interested in formal concerns and accessibility, Otterness successfully engages a variety of audiences.”

These audiences include students at all levels. “I can easily imagine assigning a paper on the new installation and just as easily imagine grade-schoolers recognizing its value.” says Allen C. Topolski, associate professor of art and art history at the University of Rochester and a member of the selection committee. “Through it, I look forward to my students being able to better understand the function and challenges of successful public art.”

During the past year, Otterness has made numerous trips to Rochester to study the site and the Gallery’s collection and to meet with MAG staff, Board, community members and outside professionals.

Tom Otterness maintains a studio in Brooklyn, NY.

Artist website

<http://www.tomostudio.com>

Memorial Art Gallery website

<http://mag.rochester.edu>

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