

THE
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GOINGS ON

JACKSON ARN’S SUMMER PUBLIC ART PICKS

Alfresco works by Huma Bhabha, Suchitra Mattai, and Cj Hendry.

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Jackson Arn

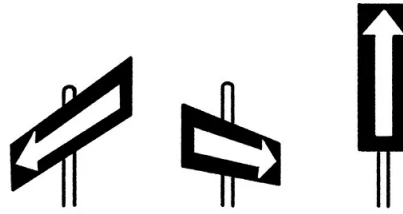
The New Yorker’s art critic

You’re reading the Goings On newsletter, a guide to what we’re watching, listening to, and doing this week. Sign up to receive it in your in-box.

Outside of “immersive experience,” I think the two saddest words in my industry are “public art.” You’ve heard the old joke that love is giving something you don’t have to someone who doesn’t want it? That’s how I feel about ninety per cent of the sculptures, murals, performance pieces, giant hot dogs, and other whatsits committed into existence for my supposed enjoyment. But summer is here, and even bureaucrats get beauty right from time to time—see, for proof, these three temporary public art works. I didn’t know I wanted them, but I think I’ll miss them when they’re gone.



Art work by Huma Bhabha / Courtesy the artist / David Zwirner; Photograph by Nicholas Knight / Courtesy Public Art Fund



Pick Three

1. The sculptures of **Huma Bhabha** are dirty snowballs that pick up bits of art and cinema and history as her career rolls along. “Before the End,” a foursome of dark bronze slabs currently in Brooklyn Bridge Park (through March 9, 2025, courtesy of the Public Art Fund), owes its title to the thirteenth-century friar Vincent of Beauvais; the installation also reminds me (and I’m not the only one) of the H. R. Giger sets from “Alien.” Each sculpture looks like a time-chewed sarcophagus, covered with carvings that hint at a corpse trapped inside. An odd choice, you might think, for a beautiful summer lawn. But spend a little time with Bhabha’s work and it starts to seem like an inevitable piece of the landscape—the lawn is the real intruder.

2. Should you want something lighter, make your way to Socrates Sculpture Park, in Queens, where **Suchitra Mattai** has brought a collection of newly commissioned work. The most purely pleasurable parts of “We are nomads, we are dreamers,” her solo exhibition (through Aug. 25), are six large textile sculptures that look like giant tree stumps covered in rainbow bark (actually hand-woven together from vintage saris), at the park’s center. If a breezy, slightly sweaty Sunday morning stroll in late June were a work of art, it might look like a Mattai.



Art work by Suchitra Mattai; Photographs by Scott Lynch

3. Lightest of all, and also very heavy, are the pink chairs designed by **Cj Hendry**, two of which you can find in Prospect Park until late October; like Jeff Koons’s “Lifeboat,” they look inflatable but are made of solid metal. (Others, which Hendry has been leaving in various spots around the city for the past several weeks, including at the Met and at the Guggenheim, are made of still-heavy recycled plastic). I’m not sure how Hendry convinced the Prospect Park Alliance to grant her permission to place pink metal chairs by the lake—if her social media is a reliable source, she just went ahead and did it. In any case, they’re so silly, kitschy, innocent, and palpably bored by anything but art for art’s sake and sitting for sitting’s sake as to be more or less irresistible.

Our About Town listings will resume next week.
