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Jeff Koons Returns to Rockefeller Center With Inflated ‘Seated Ballerina’ Sculpture

Get ready for Jeff Koons’s third show at the iconic plaza.

Sarah Cascone | May 11, 2017



Rendering of Jeff Koons’s inflated Seated Ballerina at Rockefeller Center in New York City. Image courtesy of Koons Studio and Art Production Fund.

Jeff Koons is headed back to Rockefeller Center with Seated Ballerina, a new public art project co-presented by the Art Production Fund and Kiehl’s Since 1851. Perhaps best known for his Balloon Dog, a shiny, stainless steel sculpture that looks like a Mylar balloon—an orange version holds his personal auction record for a \$58.4 million 2013 sale at Christie’s New York—Koons is making only his second ever inflatable public artwork for the occasion.

“It’s going back to what he was really well known for,” APF executive director Casey Fremont told artnet News—only where Balloon Dog was a metal sculpture that looked like a balloon, “he’s taking an inflatable and making it look like metal.”

It’s a trick he’s employed just once before, with his 2007 contribution to the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, the silver Mylar Rabbit, a version of a 1986 work originally rendered in metal. “Jeff has an interest in looking at objects from everyday life and looking at them from a different perspective,” noted Fremont. But while the Macy’s balloons can occasionally become a danger to parade spectators, Fremont is confident that there won’t be any issues with Seated Ballerina. “It’s challenging in that it has unpredictable qualities,” she said, “but we’ve talked through pretty much every scenario and we’re well prepared.” (APF also has experience in the arena, after staging Friends With You’s inflatable Light Cave in 2014.)

The new piece will be Koons's third project at the Tischman Speyer-owned Rockefeller Center, following 2014's Split-Rocker and 2000's Puppy. Both of those works, large-scale sculptures planted with tens of thousands of multicolored flowers, were presented by Public Art Fund. The New York-based non-profit has regularly held exhibitions at 30 Rock since 1998, including 2016's Van Gogh's Ear, from Scandinavian artists Elmgreen and Dragset, but APF has a history at the Art Deco landmark as well, having presented Nobel & Webster's Electric Fountain behind the complex's famed golden sculpture, Paul Manship's Prometheus, in 2008.

Seated Ballerina also marks the third time Koons is working with APF, graduating to a full-scale exhibition after creating a plate and a beach towel sold in editions as part of the organization's charitable fundraising initiatives. Seated Ballerina is obviously on a much larger scale—45 feet tall, to be precise, on a seven-and-a-half-foot base. "Obviously Rockefeller Center is one of the most iconic New York City landmarks, and to put a work of public art around it it always such a thrill," said Fremont. "You see it differently when there's art there."

For his Rockefeller Center return, Koons is revisiting a recurring subject, a ballerina perched on a stool, adjusting her shoe. The form, from his "Antiquity" series, is inspired by a turn-of-the-century porcelain ballerina figurine found in a Russian factory. Koons has already created two versions of the piece, one just a foot-and-a-half tall made from hand-painted wood in an edition of 50, the other seven feet tall and made from the artist's signature mirror-polished stainless steel with colored coating.

"Seated Ballerina is like a Venus. You could be looking at a Venus of Willendorf or some of the oldest Venuses," said Koons in a statement. "It is really about beauty and even a sense of contemplation, a sense of ease." The large version of Seated Ballerina appeared in 2016 at the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA) in Buenos Aires. The museum's founder, Eduardo Costantini, purchased the piece and later installed it Oceana Bal Harbour condominiums in Miami. (The property is also home to Koons's Pluto and Proserpina, one of "10 museum-quality masterpieces of modern art from around the world" installed in the lobby, according to the website.)

It's true that Seated Ballerina isn't yet one of Koons's most recognized artworks, but this upcoming project is sure to raise its profile in the artist's oeuvre. To date, only four copies of the wooden version have come to auction, topping out at \$115,484 at Phillips London in 2015. Could the inflatable version boost the prospects of one coming up for sale at Phillips New York, estimated \$60,000–\$80,000, on May 17.

APF also hopes the work will bring some much-needed attention to National Missing Children's Month. Timed to the exhibition, Koons will be releasing a limited-edition collectible tin, free with any purchase from the Kiehl's Midnight Recovery Collection. Prices range from \$32 to \$122, with 100 percent of the profits going to International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children. "This partnership will increase awareness and help the International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children make the world a safer place for children," said Koons in a statement,

"I hope the installation of Seated Ballerina at Rockefeller Center offers a sense of affirmation and excitement to the viewer to reach their potential," he added. "The aspect of reflectivity emulates life's energy; it's about contemplation and what it means to be a human being. It's a very hopeful piece."

"Jeff Koons: Seated Ballerina" will be on view May 12–June 2, 2017.



L to R: The Rabbit balloon by artist Jeff Koons floats in Times Square during the 81st Annual Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade on November 22, 2007 in New York City. Courtesy of Hiroko Masuike/Getty Images; Jeff Koons, Seated Ballerina (2015). Courtesy of Phillips.



Jeff Koons, Split-Rocker (2000) at Rockefeller Center. Courtesy of Benjamin Sutton.