

FriendsWithYou Builds a Psychedelic Cave in the Meatpacking District Cait Munro | September 8, 2014



FriendsWithYou installation at The Standard High Line.
Photo: Alyssa Ringler.

If you've been anywhere near The Standard Hotel's swanky High Line location this weekend, you may have noticed that something large, colorful, and pulsating with light has wrapped itself around the hotel's entrance. Fear not, it isn't a sign of an alien invasion, just a new sculpture by lovable art duo FriendsWithYou. Resembling a prehistoric cavern with a decidedly psychedelic spin, Light Cave is described by the artists as a "cathedral of the spirit"—a cathedral which just happens to lead into one of the trendiest nightlife spots in New York. The installation is also a perfect marquee for the swarms of designer-clad New York Fashion Week attendees that post up at the hotel, and will thus be fêted accordingly, with a VIP opening party this evening, September 8.

Presented by The Standard Hotel as well as the Art Production Fund, Light Cave is FriendsWithYou's largest and most ambitious sculpture to date. If you're not one of the almost 25,000 fans following them on Instagram, you may be curious about these visionaries who have graced the Meatpacking District with yet another piece of eye-candy. They are Samuel Borkson and Arturo Sandoval III, who have been working under the name FriendsWithYou since 2002. Formed in Miami and based in Los Angeles, the duo creates sculptures, installations, paintings, prints, and design objects that manage to fuse the language of Minimalism with playful Pop sensibilities.



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Counting Jeff Koons, Takashi Murakami, and Damien Hirst as immediate influences, FriendsWithYou might be dismissed by some critics as commercial fluff, but there's more to them than meets the eye. The pair is serious about incorporating elements of spirituality into their works, and by translating often solemn religious traditions, symbols, and practices into works and experiences that are playful, they hope to make a "connection to the divine" accessible to people who would probably never set foot inside a church. "We don't want to alienate people who experience our work," the artists told artnet News via email. "We want to love them and help them love and accept themselves."

In an era when countless artists are cultivating an aesthetic blending high and low culture, Borkson and Sandoval are right on the money. But they aren't necessarily striving for cool—they're striving for transcendental. Whether or not their work achieves its lofty goal is a matter of individual taste. Regardless, their genuinely positive sentiments are a relative rarity in the New York art world, where even the things that appear sweet on the surface often have a dark underbelly.

So what's next for the pair after this large, high-profile public artwork? "We love working on a scale this big, and also tiny," the artists said. "We are interested in affecting people in public and private settings, so while this sculpture is quite huge, before this we launched a tiny cloud lamp that is quite small and can go everywhere you do. Friends can be great no matter how big or small!"

The FriendsWithYou Light Cave is on view at The Standard, High Line through October 1.