

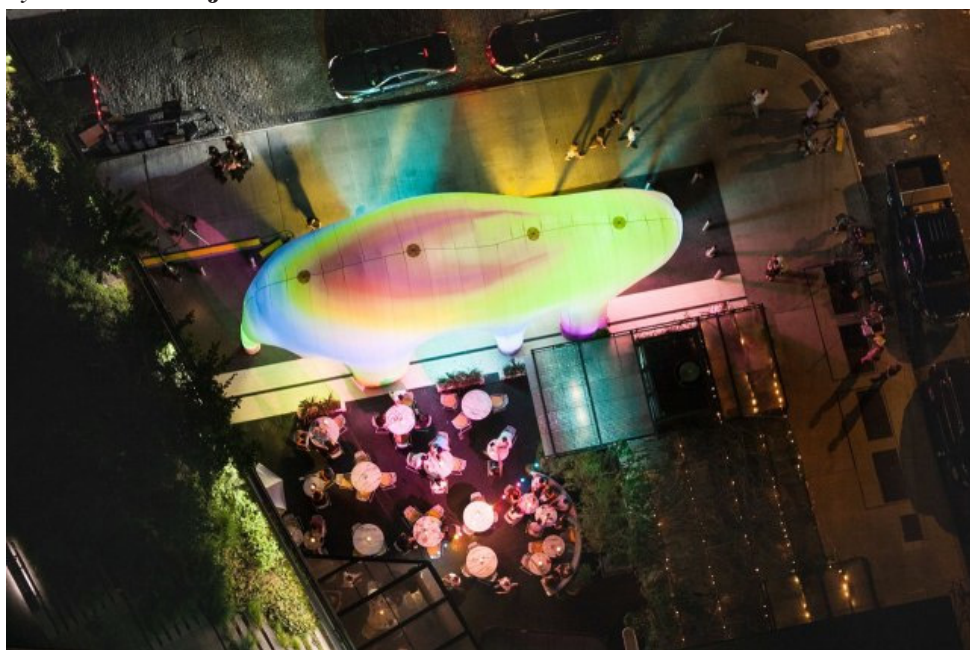
VANITY FAIR



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What Is That Glowing Orb in Manhattan's Meatpacking District?

by **Rachel Tashjian**



BY ALYSSA RINGLER.

Passersby of the Standard hotel on Manhattan's Washington Street will encounter an inflatable rainbow structure of indeterminate shape, beginning this week. At night it lights up like an alien pod that's just set down from a planet located in the artist **James Turrell's** high-school locker.

Or maybe it's a long hallway with many escape routes, an orb in rainbow-sherbet hues?

Or an infrared blob?

A psychedelic Stonehenge?

"We meant it to be almost a primordial structure, almost like a paint stroke or a cave, almost like stalactites, or a wooly mammoth or a prehistoric figure—all of those things are valid, every one of those things is right," **Samuel Borkson**, who created the piece with **Arturo Sandoval III** as part of their art collective, *FriendsWithYou*, recently told VF Daily.

The *Light Cave*, as it's officially titled, is co-presented by the *Standard*, High Line, and Art Production Fund. It is the pair's most recent work in an oeuvre of public art that seeks to connect people through a sense of joy. Many viewers will no doubt leave the work feeling bouncy in both body in spirit—as opposed to headier major works of public art in New York as of late, such as **Jeff Koons's** *Split-Rocker*, at Rockefeller Plaza, or **Kara Walker's** *A Subtlety*.

The creators of *Light Cave* refer to it as a "cathedral of the spirit."

"On a very physical level, once you're inside of it, and when you're being affected by the hues of it, I think it creates almost, like, a reunion, in a very loose, metaphysical sense," Sandoval said. "You are connected now because you're in this thing."

As befitting their name, FriendsWithYou deal in plush toys and happy little clouds, though theirs are more Takashi Murakami than Bob Ross. Much like their work, Borkson and Sandoval are delightful and kind—in a word Borkson is fond of, disarming. Both are burly and tower over almost everyone, but their size is somehow gentle, and in baggy T-shirts and pants, they look more like roommates on a late-night run to a Whole Foods than collaborators and friends of **Pharrell**.

Their last major installation in New York, 2010's *Rainbow City*, transformed a West Side lot into a Seussian theme park in a fistful of Crayola shades.

“What we really identified when we started to work together was that people still really wanted to be connected. People still really want to, you know, transcend their own personal experience,” Sandoval said.

Standing under *Light Cave*, gazing up, and overhearing other viewers' interpretations does the same—it's clear that this wacky, colored glob resonates because it is so much *fun*. And that's the point, though the pair have a higher sense of purpose.

Their work aims to provide spaces for people to connect beyond the typical excuses for gathering, such as sports, music, or school.

Sandoval explained, “The difference is that through sports [or concerts or classes], it's like a proxy that everyone's sharing—it's kind of an escape, and you have those connections, but you don't have, like, a residual deepening of yourself. You don't have contemplation. You don't have a re-centering, into your own self.”

“Our job is making that,” Borkson added.

“Amongst other things, we are also professional dancers,” said a joking Sandoval.

Dance, though not the professional variety, brought the collaborators together. Both men were ravers in Miami who came across each other through friends on the dance floor.

“Once we get on the dance floor, it's on like Donkey Kong, you know,” Sandoval said. “It's like crazy style.”

When the cave is lit up at night, it does appear to gleam like a giant glow stick, with viewers united underneath its umbrella in a euphoric state of Instagramia. Under the hashtag #lightcave, visitors gush: “a living [sic] breathing monument pulsating with energy and light,” “home sweet Standard a go-glow,” and “giant glowing elephant.”

“When you go into a church and people believe, they're there and they have this pure connection, there's this solidarity, you know?” Sandoval said. “And you really feel connected. So what is the modern version of that?”

For the next month, at least, it might just be a glowing cave in the Meatpacking District.