

# HYPERALLERGIC

## Venture Out to See Seven Queer Public Artworks Across NYC

Looking for safe ways to see art? We compiled a list of beloved public artworks that celebrate LGBTQ makers and lives.

Hrag Vartanian August 10, 2020



Keith Haring's Crack in Wack mural is a favorite among art lovers in Upper Manhattan. (images courtesy Louise Hunnicutt)

Corporations act as though June is the only month LGBTQ people should celebrate their pride, but that's not right, because we're proud all year round.

I thought now we be a good time — as people have started to become more adventurous and have started wandering the streets after months of being pent up in our apartments — to spotlight some of the works by queer artists that you can view without stepping

inside a gallery or museum. (But don't forget to wear your mask and follow social distancing guidelines.)

Here is a list of some favorite (permanent and temporary) public art works in New York City you might not know about, and some history that might interest you.



The Keith Haring bathroom at NYC's LGBT Center (photo via flickr.com/pom-angers)

## Keith Haring “Once Upon a Time” at the LGBT Center



No list of queer art in NYC would be complete without a mention of Keith Haring, who was effortlessly able to combine the zeitgeist of the 1980s with his queer sensibility and universally loved line drawings.

His bathroom work, titled “Once Upon a Time” (1989) is the best known of his “public” works, though you can’t always sneak a peek at this all-over work on the second floor of Manhattan’s LGBT Center as it’s often being used for meetings (it’s no longer a bathroom). But if that’s inaccessible, you can always check out his Crack Is Wack mural in Harlem; his Pop Shop ceiling currently on display at the New-York Historical Society; his two murals at Woodhull Hospital in Bushwick/Bed-Stuy (one is tucked away in the maternity ward); his Carmine Street pool mural; or his final work, the Life of Christ altarpiece at St. John the Divine in Manhattan’s Morningside Heights neighborhood. It’s not an understatement to say the spirit of Haring continues to live on throughout NYC.



Emma Stubbins’s Bethesda Fountain is a popular tourist site. (photo via flickr.com/kingfox)

## **Emma Stebbins's Bethesda Fountain in Central Park**

Many people are unaware that one of the most iconic fountains in the city is by a 19th-century lesbian American sculptor. Often known simply as the Bethesda Fountain, its official name is "Angel of the Waters" (1873).

Emma Stebbins was the daughter of a wealthy banker, and when she moved to Rome she met Charlotte Cushman, an American actress, and the two would eventually exchange vows in a ceremony they considered a marriage. While rumors of nepotism have surrounded the fountain since it was commissioned (Stebbins' brother was the chairman of Central Park's Committee on Statuary, Fountains and Architectural Structure), the attractive sculpture regularly attracts tourists and New Yorkers alike, and it regularly features in Hollywood films as a quintessential city landmark.

The work itself was inspired by the Old Testament story of an angel giving the waters of Bethesda healing powers and the mid-19th-century Croton Aqueduct, which modernized life in the city.



Images of the artist Patricia Cronin inspecting the installation of a bronze version of “Memorial to a Marriage,” which portrays her and her spouse cuddling. (photo via )

## Patricia Cronin’s “Memorial to a Marriage” in Woodlawn Cemetery

This work is located in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx, which is one of the city’s most beautiful cemeteries. Artist Patricia Cronin depicts herself and her partner, artist Deborah Kass, in a loving moment. It was created during a time when gay marriage was still illegal in the United States.

The original marble version was installed in 2002, but, partly because of NYC pollution, it was replaced with a bronze version in 2011, the same year gay marriage was legalized in New York state.

At the time, Cronin told writer Allison Meier that she picked bronze not only for its fortitude, but also to add a level of interaction with visitors, as she liked how people



often touched beloved sculptures in Parisian cemeteries. “I like extending the performatory participatory nature of my project,” she said. She also likes to call it an “anti-monument.”

Whatever you call it, it’s a welcome addition to NYC public art.



George Segal's Gay Liberation Monument (1980) in Greenwich Village (via flickr.com/annulla)

## **George Segal's Gay Liberation Monument in Christopher Park**

While the sculptor isn't LGBTQ himself, George Segal's "Gay Liberation Monument" is located across the street from the Stonewall bar, and a must-see for any fan of queer public art in New York.

The work was commissioned in 1979, but it wasn't until 1992 when it was unveiled in Manhattan's Christopher Park due to controversies about its subject matter.

When famed activist Marsha P. Johnson was asked about the sculpture, she said, "How many people have died for these two little statues to be put in the park to recognize gay people? How many years does it take for people to realize we're all brothers and sisters in the human race? ... We're all in this rat race together."

Fast forward to now, and some LGBTQ activists think the sculpture whitewashes LGBTQ history.



Jeffrey Gibson, "Because Once You Enter My House It Becomes Our House" (2020) at Socrates Sculpture Park (photo courtesy Socrates Sculpture Park)

## Jeffrey Gibson at Socrates Sculpture Park

The artist's "Because Once You Enter My House It Becomes Our House" (2020) may be a temporary work, but it's worth the trip.



Jeffrey Gibson explains that his ziggurat sculpture “serves as an homage to ingenuity of Indigenous North American peoples and cultures, to pre-Columbian Mississippian architecture, and to queer camp aesthetics.” The work is made of plywood and covered with vibrant wheat-pasted posters, and it is part of the *Monuments Now* exhibition, which continues until March 2021 in Queens.



Robert Indiana's "LOVE" on Sixth Avenue (image via flickr.com/jakeprzespo)

## **Robert Indiana's LOVE in Midtown**

Most people don't know Robert Indiana was gay, but I feel like that fact adds another layer to his iconic "LOVE" symbol. This big sculpture, formally known as "Love Red Blue," is a tourist favorite and sits at the corner of 55th Street and Sixth Avenue in



Manhattan. If that's not there (like it was last year when it was being cleaned) then you can always check out his HOPE sculpture close by at 53rd Street and Seventh Avenue.

Fun fact: the LOVE work was an evolution of a two-dimensional work Indiana created for the Museum of Modern Art's Christmas card in 1964, while the first version of the work is fittingly (because of his name) in the Indianapolis Museum of Art and dates to 1970.

According to Untapped Cities, Indiana, who was raised in a Christian Science household, explained the origins of the image to art collector Larry Aldrich this way:

The *LOVE* paintings sprang like a crop from that seed planted at your museum, Larry. The painting you commissioned, *Love is God*, which burst into mind when I learned that you were converting an old Christian Science Church in Ridgefield . . . for I, as a child, was raised as a Christian Scientist, and the word *LOVE* was indelibly imprinted in the mind, for there is that slightly different phrase, 'God is Love,' on every front wall of every one of Mary Baker Eddy's houses throughout the world.



Work by Alan Pelaez Lopez. (photo by Luna Park, and used with permission)

## Five Queer Artists as part of Art in Ad Places

Five queer artists — Demian DinéYazhi', Alan Pelaez Lopez, Kah Yangni, Ashley Lukashevsky, and Jessica Sabogal — were included in the latest Art in Ad Places series that are dotting the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood of Manhattan. Each artist makes intersectional and feminist work that responds to their community and the power structures that continue to oppress BIPOC communities.

Alan Pelaez Lopez explains the meaning behind their piece:

This work should be in public space because the society that we currently live in is failing Black people daily. Every entity named in this art piece is an entity that advances the global circuit of anti-Black violence that forecloses our futures: pol(ice), prisons, borders, and corporations. Each time this piece is read in a public space, this piece demands that we betray the systems that we were taught to trust under settler-colonial law. I also want to remind all Black people to hold



on to their joy because Black joy and Black pleasure are and will continue to be the antithesis to anti-Blackness.

You can learn more about Art in Ad Places on its website.

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If you have another LGBTQ public art favorites in New York City, please post them in the comments below.

*This article, part of a series focused on LGBTQ+ artists and art movements, is supported by Swann Auction Galleries.*

*Swann's upcoming sale "LGBTQ+ Art, Material Culture & History," featuring works and material by Richmond Barthé, JEB, David Hockney, Peter Hujar, Harvey Milk, Toyen, Oscar Wilde, & David Wojnarowicz, will take place on August 13, 2020. A portion of the proceeds from this sale will benefit NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project.*

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