

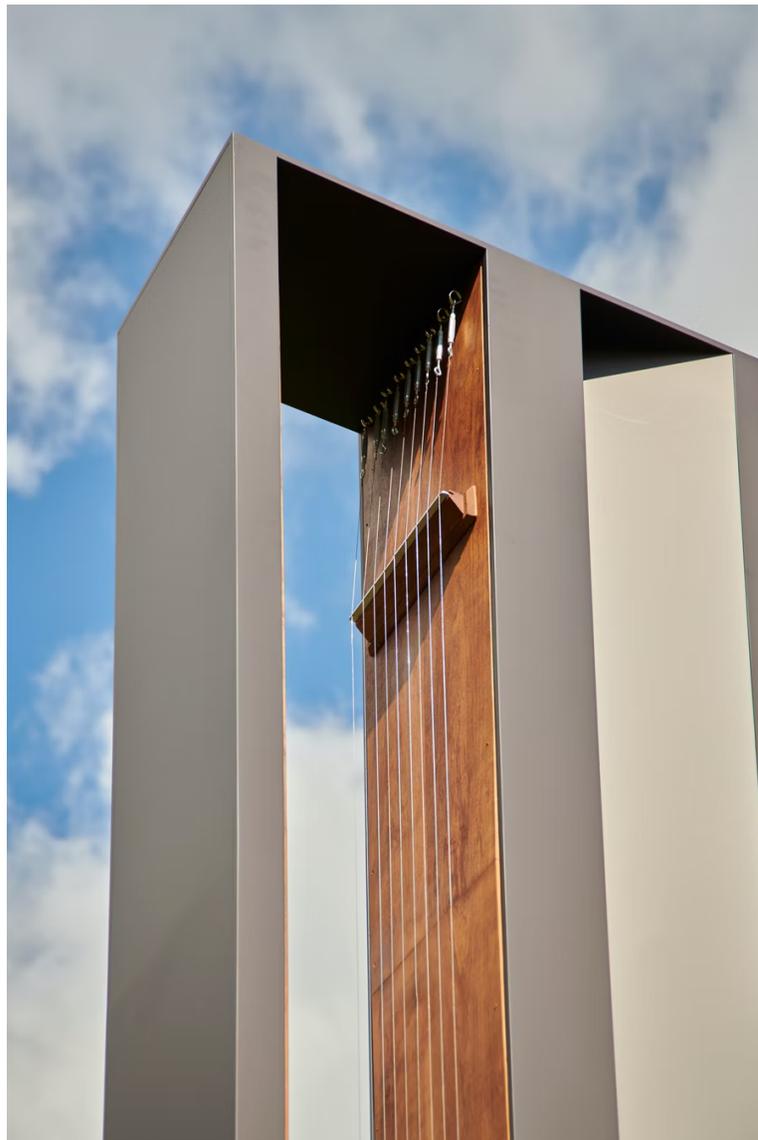
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CULTURE

After Months of Online Viewing Rooms, Outdoor Art Exhibitions Fill the Void

If you're anxious about spending an extended period of time indoors, there are plenty of other options for enjoying the arts.

by **Maxine Wally**
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Piece by Jennie C. Jones, featured in the group show "Ground/work." Courtesy of the Clark.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art may have reopened this past weekend—to the delight of New Yorkers who have made it through a summer devoid of the arts—but at this moment, most institutions in the United States remain shuttered due to COVID-19. If art galleries and museums are opening at all, they're operating at a limited capacity; the dangers of gathering indoors for extended periods of time has been well documented—and renders these cultural spaces proverbial danger zones in a game of Floor Is Lava.

But this limitation has, in turn, created a demand for ways to experience the arts in different environments. As a result, a handful of exhibitions are now taking place outdoors, at some establishments which have never hosted a fully open-air exhibition before. Artists like Marina Abramovic, KAWS, and Hank Willis Thomas participated in a show that took place in the unlikely location of Rockefeller Center's plaza in New York City—while others, like Jennie C.

Jones and Eva LeWitt, are part of the Clark Art Institute's first-ever entirely outdoor show in the Berkshires. Christie's is hosting the sale "Dream Big," which features [SHOP MENU](#) only large-format sculptures and artworks made specifically to live outdoors. Even at South Etna gallery on Long Island, whose opening heralded the return of the IRL show, viewers hesitant to stand in an indoor public space were given the option of scanning some works from outside.

For some museums, hosting artists outdoors is nothing new. At Storm King in upstate New York, the undulating green hills, lines of conical trees, and endless sky interacts with the art—and such a lovely landscape brings in flocks of spectators, from families looking to give their city kids some space to run around to Instagram influencers seeking the perfect snapshot posing in front of Alyson Shotz's Mirror Fence.

The artist Martha Tuttle, who for years has worked exclusively with textiles and wall art, had the opportunity to test out a new medium during the pandemic. Her show "A stone that thinks of Enceladus" comprises a series of stones and boulders she made from glass and marble placed in small stacks across eight acres at Storm King.

Storm King came calling in 2019, looking for artists to feature in its show. Tuttle went to Urban Glass in Brooklyn to learn how to cast glass on a whim, in an effort to immerse herself in unknown territory and acquire a new skill. But in March, at the height of COVID in New York City, Tuttle struggled to finish any kind of meaningful work—an issue most artists came up against in the face of a global pandemic. “I was not making very much, or what I was making was pretty bad,” she said. But having outdoor space provided a fresh opportunity and place for Tuttle to put her pieces.

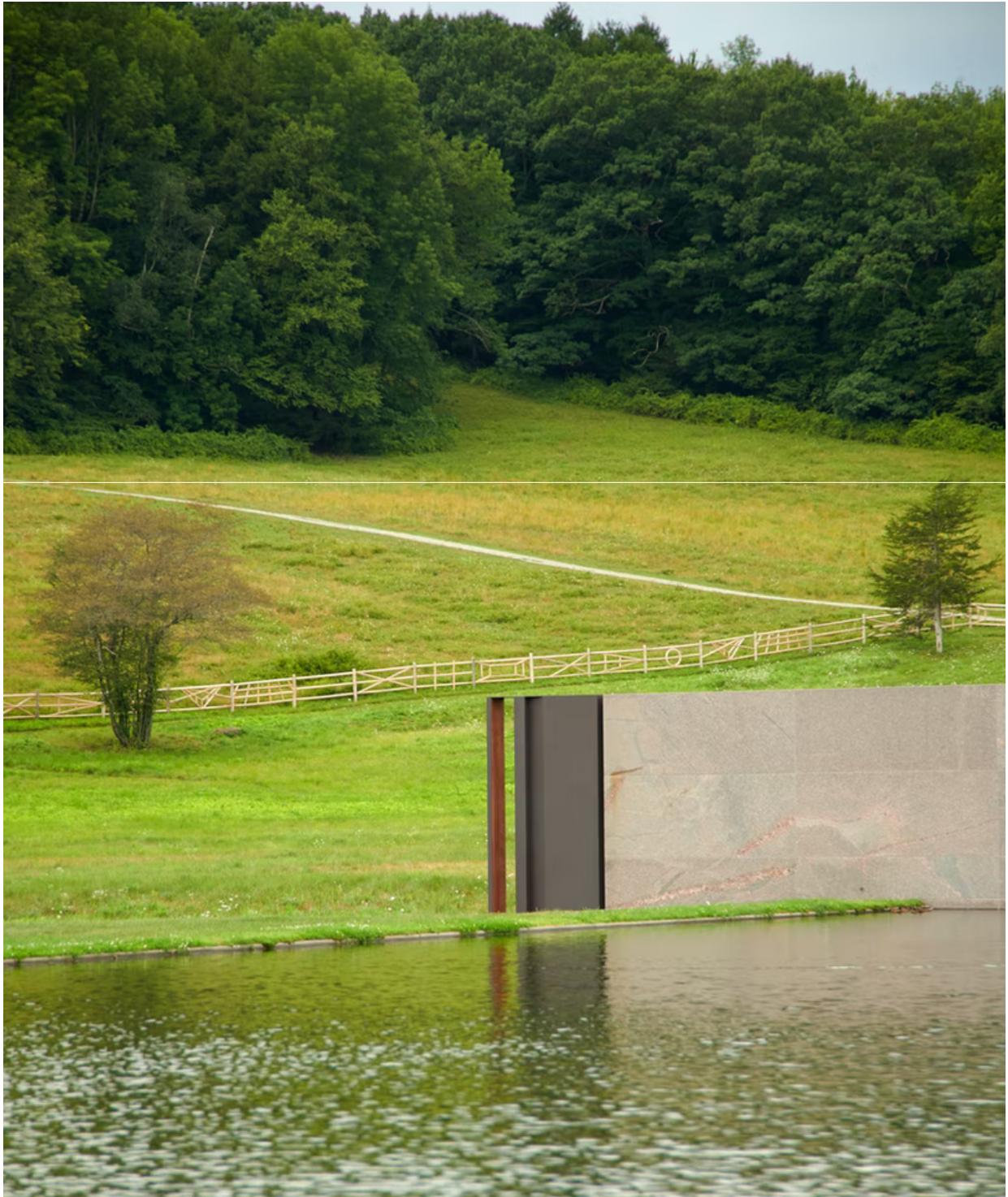
“It certainly has shifted my work,” she said. “I feel like I’m never going back. Anybody who has an outdoor sculpture space: give it to me. I love this way of working.”

Tuttle herself said she’s heard, through her conversations with fellow artists and gallerist friends, of an uptick in outdoor shows—specifically billboard shows, and ways of commissioning different types of artists for group exhibitions utilizing formats that are already outside. But the artist noted that interest in digital art specifically has experienced more of a rise during the pandemic.

“They seem so different, but I think they’re actually two sides of the same coin,” she noted. “Digital art is the unphysical, and outdoor art does, I think, involve the body. It’s a question of access—and in this period, these are the two spaces that people are able to access.”

For Christie’s, restrictions on how the auction house could mount a sale and ship works to buyers led to “Dream Big,” which is the first of its kind, Christie’s global head of private sales Adrien Meyer explained. Prior to “Dream Big,” (which exists online and features works by Ai Weiwei, Keith Haring, Niki de Saint Phalle, and Jeff Koons) clients would come into Christie’s galleries in New York, London, and Hong Kong in a one-to-one way—they’d view a picture behind closed doors. This approach obviously wasn’t as cost-effective as hosting a virtual show. So for its premiere online offering, Christie’s chose to feature the most monumental (and most challenging to ship) large, outdoor sculptures.

The sale comes at an interesting time, when Christie’s core clientele is largely fleeing the various cities in which they live for their summer homes in the country. “The exhibition has triggered the curiosity of clients at a moment when they were probably reconsidering their personal environment more than ever before,” Meyer said, adding that the price point for these works range between “a hundred thousand to 10 million.” “These challenges encouraged us to find easier ways to do business, funnily enough.”



Piece by Jennie C. Jones, featured in the group show "Ground/work." Courtesy of the Clark Art Institute.

In Western Massachusetts, the Hudson, New York-based minimalist artist Jennie C. Jones is part of the group show at the Clark, called “Ground/work.” Although the museum has featured artists on its outdoor grounds in the past, it’s never held a full show outside. Like Tuttle, Jones’ experience making art that would live outdoors was a complete contrast from her usual work.

“I am a bit old-fashioned in the sense that I don’t have assistance, that my work is made with my hands,” she said. “I’m very insular, very private and so outdoor work or work that’s upscaled starts to demand having a team to work with. That was a new experience I definitely would like to do again.

The “Ground/work” exhibition, which opens in fall, features all women artists, including Analia Saban, Haegue Yang, and Nairy Baghramian—and work that is “site-responsive,” in other words, reactive to the space around it. Jones’ pieces for “Ground/work”—long, curving walls that interact with the Tadao Ando Wing and resemble something of a miniature amphitheater—echo the look of her paintings. In a way, it allows the artist an expanded manner in which she can deliver her message.

“It also allowed the Clark to take the first step into working with contemporary art,” Jones added. “Outdoor sculpture has always been a public art game, for lack of a better word. It’s attached to a city budget or an institution wanting to commission a giant metal thing, usually made by a guy. And I’m glad to see that go away. I’m glad to see people being really mindful about choosing artists that were going to be more conceptual and more tender about the landscape.”

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