

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY



### Penone's trees grow in Midtown

*The artist's installation of branching bronze sculptures in Madison Square Park has even fooled the birds*

Pac Pobric



*Penone's Idee di pietra—1303 Kg di luce (ideas of stone—1303kg of light). Photo: James Ewing*

Giuseppe Penone's latest public installation in New York has already fooled the wildlife. The three monumental bronze trees the artist has installed in Madison Square Park, which range in weight from 7,000 to 12,000 pounds, look enough like the real thing that birds have happily perched on the branches, though they don't appear to be nesting, per se.

"It's rare that my work is a response to a place," says the 66-year-old Penone of the exhibition, titled "Ideas of Stone". It was five years ago that he began talks with the president of Madison Square Park Conservancy, Debbie Landau, about a public project in the space, which sits on a 6.2-acre plot across from the Flatiron Building. The final installation, due to open to the public today, 26 September and run until 9 February 2014, developed from Penone's long-standing interest in nature and trees in particular.

But why use bronze to mimic wood? Penone explains that the material's enduring importance to the history of sculpture was essential to his choice. "The technique is so old—thousands of years old—and it was invented at a moment when all the world was sacred," he says. "So, I don't believe that you can use bronze as just another material. That's the deeper reason I used it."

Yet history and divinity are only two of Penone's concerns, and he says that his work is essentially about sculpture. "Sculpture is a specific language," he says, "and that is my basic consideration. It is a question of horizontality and verticality." Even the works' beauty is just the result of structural rigor rather than his primary goal. "If you think about a knife", says Penone, "usually a knife that is beautiful has a strong function. A knife that is not so nice doesn't have that."

Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that Penone sees sculpture as more closely related to life than other forms of art, partly because sculpture relies on tactility. "There is something very basic in learning through touch," he says. "Is a surface soft, hard, hot? Sometimes seeing is not enough, so you have to touch." Painting, on the other hand, is based on a restricting convention, Penone says. "You have a surface that is of a certain dimension and the space is defined by the canvas or the size of a wall." Sculpture is more open: "An object is different because all the surrounding space is involved."

At Madison Square Park, that involves the nearby buildings, benches and animals, among which the sculptures fit right in. The squirrels, however, seemed more skeptical: not one tried to climb a Penone tree during the works' installation.