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GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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Unspooling Great Journeys Along Park Paths

By RANDY KENNEDY

As a pastoral sculpture socked into the heart of a metropolis, Central Park has fascinated and provoked artists for decades. Claes Oldenburg hired gravediggers to excavate and refill a hole in it, to form an "invisible monument." Christo and Jeanne-Claude gated and orangeified it. Diane Arbus used her camera to draw deeply from its well of the weird. Robert Smithson, creator of the monumental "Spiral Jetty" in the Great Salt Lake, suggested that the idea belonged to the park's beginnings: He called Frederick Law Olmsted, its chief designer, the "first 'earthwork artist.'"

So when Tatiana Trouvé, a highly regarded sculptor who works in Paris, was asked by the Public Art Fund to create a work relating to the park, her instincts told her to dream big. The piece she made, "Desire Lines," which goes on view Tuesday at the Doris C. Freedman Plaza near 60th Street and Fifth Avenue, is — in a manner of thinking — the size of the park itself. It is composed of miles of colored rope that, if unwound from the various-sized wooden spools that hold them, would stretch along every inch of the 212 paths, by Ms. Trouvé's count, that snake through the park's 843-acre rectangle.

Like the Borges short story about a map so large and detailed it corresponds precisely to the territory it maps ("In the deserts of the West, still today, there are tattered ruins of that map, inhabited by animals and beggars"), Ms. Trouvé's installation plays in the netherworld between the real and the represented. That seems only fitting because, as she said in an interview last week, she came to know the park first through studying maps and pictures and only

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Tatiana Trouvé with "Desire Lines," on view in Central Park through Aug. 30.

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later set foot in the thing itself.

"It was very interesting to me because you could see that it was not just land, but all the pipes and cables and lights and everything that is needed to run it," she said. "It's like a big machine, a lot of which you don't see. So making this, for me, was like making a sculpture on top of another sculpture."

As she said this, she was standing inside an old Park Avenue storefront with a tin ceiling, converted last year into an exhibition space by the Gagosian Gallery, which represents Ms. Trouvé. In the middle of the space stood a small-scale model of "Desire Lines," three black metal racks full of spools of cord, like something you might see being pushed in a cart through the garment district. On tables were long rectangular hand-drawn maps she had made of the park's sinuous paths, accented with copper and tin. And hanging on the walls were versions of these same maps stitched onto fabric, works that looked like a combination of an embroidered folk tablecloth and a snaky Brice Marden painting. (A show of these studies for the Public Art Fund piece opens Tuesday at the Gagosian space, at 821 Park Avenue, at 75th Street.)

The park installation, which remains on view through Aug. 30, is the first public commission Ms. Trouvé, 46, has completed in the United States. But Nicholas Baume, the director and chief curator of the Public Art Fund, said he had been drawn to the ways her work — often sculptural interpretations of common but metaphorically resonant objects like shoes, mattresses, sinks and stoves — "suggested an interest in public space because they're about things that are individual but at the same time universal." Last year, she created a kind of fountain, "Waterfall," now on permanent view in Munich, in the form of a bronze mattress draped over a wall, slowly weeping water onto the ground from its buttons.

"It's not a waterfall by any stretch of the imagination — the water is just coming out of it in tiny little drops," Ms. Trouvé, smiling, said in animated, thickly accented English (she is French and Italian) on a recent frigid morning, wearing a blue sweater dress appropriately accented with long dangling yarn threads. "I'm interested in mattresses because I think of them more as a place than an object, but they're both."

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Tatiana Trouvé with her work, at Doris C. Freedman Plaza, that represents Central Park's paths.

For over two years, Ms. Trouvé worked on the Central Park project. (She likes to work mostly in solitude, with the occasional help of an assistant and fabricators for complex objects.) She wanted the park and its paths to function both as physical spaces and evocations of culture. So she dived into what she called "the wide world of marches," and used metal tags to assign each of her 212 spools — thus, each of the park's paths — a political march or a walk from history or art or song.

"The places in the park already have these names that make it into something like a history of modern society: the Engineers' Gate, the Women's Gate, the Artists' Gate, the Warriors' Gate, the Farmers' Gate," she said. And so, for example, she designated the path from the Scholars' Gate to somewhere near Playmates Arch in the park as an analog of the March 7, 1965, civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Ala. The path from the Scholars' Gate around the Dairy and past Cop Cot, represents the "Hands Up, Walk Out" national marches staged on Dec. 1, 2014, to protest the death of Michael Brown and other police killings of unarmed people. And the one leading from the Boys' Gate around the Great Hill represents the Oct. 21, 1967, March on the Pentagon.

But the walks also traverse more poetic and conceptual ground, like Philippe Petit's tightrope walk between the World Trade Center towers; or the artist David Hammons's "Phat Free," a 1995 performance in which he kicked a bucket down a deserted New York street at night; or Frank Zappa's "Winos Do Not March"; or Borges's short story "The Garden of the Forking Paths"; or the artist Allan Kaprow's 1972 "Easy," in which students carried stones along a dry riverbed.

"There are so many artists who have done work about walking, it's sad to me that I can't use all of them here," Ms. Trouvé said. But then, brightening, she added that she very well might, someday: "This is just a tiny, tiny atlas of all the walks I have found, all the walks I could find. I could keep working on this for years."