

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



Tatiana Trouvé's Central Park Spools Unravel the History of Walking

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Tatiana Trouvé, Desire Lines, 2015. © Tatiana Trouvé. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery. Photography by Emma Cole.

Walking with a purpose is a concept with unwavering significance in modern times, from the March on Washington and the first step on the moon to, more recently, the People's Climate March and the Journey for Justice: Ferguson to Jefferson City. Protest marches have impacted history and popular culture by raising awareness and inspiring change, not to mention that the simple act of walking propels everyday life. And at this opportune moment, there's an artwork in the middle of New York that celebrates this idea: Tatiana Trouvé's *Desire Lines*, the latest Public Art Fund installation.

If you've walked anywhere in sight of New York's Freedman Plaza recently (the patch of concrete at the crosshairs of 60th street, 5th avenue, and Central Park) you've undoubtedly seen three towering steel racks filled with giant spools of thread—this is *Desire Lines*, Trouvé's first public sculpture. It's located at the heavily trafficked junction frequented by tourists and natives alike, who pass through to access the subway, enter the park, shop the iconic avenue, or go for 24-hour tech support at the Apple store. It's a crossroads of vastly different walks of life, and a

place where tread with purpose—and it's with these ideas that Trouvé's work begins to unspool.

While Public Art Fund director Nicholas Baume invited her to take over the plaza for the commission, it was Trouvé who decided on Central Park as her muse. Drawn to the park's design, she was particularly inspired by Robert Smithson's 1973 essay, "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape." Amid a discussion of the park's origins and a play-by-play of a walk through its bounds, Smithson nominates Olmsted as "America's first 'earthwork artist,'" and suggests that "Central Park is a ground work of necessity and chance, a range of contrasting viewpoints that are forever fluctuating, yet solidly based in the earth." Inspired by the artful nature of the park itself, and the steady stream of people—runners, walkers, and wanderers—who occupy and enliven its arteries, Trouvé took to the paths, investigating each one in order to understand the park as a whole.

Over the course of some four years that followed, several intensive research trips landed her in the park, studying the network of defined pathways and physically measuring each one, ultimately detecting 212 distinct paths. It was back in Paris, where she lives and works, that the work came to fruition alongside an extensive series of preparatory works. While the sculpture was initially conceived as a cast object, logistics drove a change of plans, forcing her to employ found and readymade objects; to make the final installation, Trouvé sourced industrial spools and ropes. The latter include natural waterproof cord—the type used on ships—but are mostly synthetic, composed of braided cord realized in a rich palette of colors, most of which Trouvé had dyed in custom hues, from royal blue to mint to fuschia. She cut cords according to the lengths of the paths, choosing colors intuitively and winding them around spools that range drastically in size, from handheld to just larger than a small child. Together, the 212 spools form an archive of the park, an atlas recording its spaces and distances.

Each of these cylinders is affixed with a metal label on which two short phrases have been inscribed: the first describes a path through the park ("From West 63rd Street to Columbus Circle" or "From Mariners' Gate to Summit Rock") and the second is the title of a historic walk. Drawing from history, literature, art, music, and politics, Trouvé investigated walks around the world that have taken place since the late 1850s, when Central Park was built. Depending on the onlooker's knowledge, the phrases may or may not be familiar, but there seems to be something for everyone. In addition to storied marches like *Selma to Montgomery*, for example, there's *I Walk the Line* (the Johnny Cash song) and *The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk* (the performance work by Marina Abramovic and Ulay). While the installation itself is immense and thought-provoking in itself, the experience of it is enriched through an exhibition that, fittingly, is a short walk away.

At Gagosian Gallery's Park & 75 street-level space, wall text on the window beckons pedestrians to come inside—and they do. It's here at "Studies for Desire Lines" that the enigmatic nature of the work begins to dispel, through cast-bronze spools that hang from the ceiling, a small-scale model of *Desire Lines*, and particularly through intricate tapestry-like works that map out the project. It's there that I met Gagosian director Louise Neri, who explained that Trouvé excels at "making the explicit hidden...taking something very obvious and then burying it, almost embalming it," and in this case, "she took a physical terrain and turned it into a complex sculptural object."

Not only is the show evidence of the artist's intense research and impeccable skill—there are delicate pencil drawings of spools, shoes, and scenes from the park, and fastidiously sewn and

drawn maps tracing its terrain—but it also holds the key to the walks referenced. *Index* (2015) is a large plain canvas on which Trouvé has mapped out the park and sewed its paths in different colored threads; each one has a tag and a corresponding label with the name of the walk and in some cases, the individual behind it (artists such as Francis Alÿs and Gabriel Orozco feature). Other delicate sheets of paper and canvas line the walls, including a tapestry depicting all of the spools in miniature, and another map stitching out one long trajectory across the park. Surprisingly, the artist has never worked so closely with textiles before.

Each of Trouvé's spools incites thought and movement, beckoning pedestrians to enter the park and consider the vast history of their surroundings and the impact of simply moving through space. At the same time, *Desire Lines* points to the fact that walking is a fundamental, and equalizing, means of transportation in New York. Sometimes you just *have* to walk.

Desire Lines is on view at Doris C. Freedman Plaza, New York, Mar. 3–Aug. 30, 2015.

“Tatiana Trouvé: Studies for Desire Lines” is on view at Gagosian Gallery, Park & 75, Mar. 3–Apr. 25, 2015.