

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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Mapping Central Park

Desire Lines turns a walk in the park into an emotional map.

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Desire Lines, 2015. A project of the Public Art Fund. © Tatiana Trouvé. Photo: Emma Cole, courtesy Gagolian Gallery

In 1654, Madeleine de Scudéry produced a ten-volume philosophical novel called *Clélie*, about the coaction between temperament and free will. *Clélie* was a popular salon novel at the time, but it's now best remembered for the *Carte de tendre*, often translated as “the map of love” or “the map of the country of tenderness”: a long description of a country that represents the landscape of human emotion, illustrated by a map in the first volume of the book. The country is divided by the “river of inclination,” and there are little hamlets, deserts, and mountains like “sincerity,” “assiduity,” and “respect.” “Passion” is a dangerous-looking rocky outcrop, beyond which is unknown territory. To get from one end to another, one must avoid the “Lake of Indifference,” and “Affection” has to be surmounted to arrive at deep spiritual love. The map is one of the premier examples of sentimental cartography, which has a niche spot in French literary history.

In March, the Public Art Fund of New York City installed *Desire Lines*, a new commissioned work by the French Italian artist Tatiana Trouvé, which mixes sentiment and cartography. *Desire Lines* is at the southeast end of Central Park, in the Doris C. Freedman Plaza, where it will sit for the summer. The structure comprises three steel racks, nearly twelve feet tall, that hold spools of rope in different colors; there are 212 spools in all, each with a length that corresponds to a specific path in the park. Trouvé mapped, named, and indexed every one of them, from the thoroughfares to the secluded, unnamed paths. From a distance, the installation resembles a

giant's sewing kit, or an electrician's stock. Engravings on each spool suggest various acts of walking in the culture: "Woman Suffrage Parade, March 3, 1913" or "'Walk on By,' " Dionne Warwick, 1964." Visitors "can choose a path by name and then undertake the walk as it describes, tracing the march of history in collective memory while discovering Central Park anew."

Giuliana Bruno, a professor of visual and environmental studies at Harvard's Graduate School of Design, described the work as an archive of park history and "a cultural atlas of walking." The work evokes the idea of an itinerary; it threads passages of experience through the park, allowing us to create our own emotional map, layering the place names with gestures or memories—the place where I sat at lunchtime on Tuesday, the place I told my sister to meet me for a walk—making the public space private for every walker. It's the same way in which each city dweller has her own map of habit—a preferred subway exit, a route from work to home, from home to the bodega, from the bodega to a friend's apartment. *Desire Lines* turns a walk in the park into an exercise in memory, a way to traverse sentiment. It encourages us, just as de Scudéry did in 1654, to make emotion into a physical journey, to see the way a space becomes ours—our own *Cartes de tendre*.

On a recent Tuesday, I made a thread through the park with Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, a scholar of landscape design and the invisible force behind the transformation of the park over the last thirty years. In 1980, Rogers, who goes by Betsy, founded the Central Park Conservancy, an organization responsible for 75 percent of the park's fifty-seven million dollar annual operation budget; in 1979, Ed Koch appointed her the first Central Park administrator since Frederick Law Olmstead, the park's architect.

We entered at Grand Army Plaza and took a path that *Desire Lines* maps out as "from Scholar's Gate to a crossroad near Olmstead Flowerbed." Trouvé's engraving for this route said "Selma to Montgomery March"; the noise level dipped immediately, as the street was blocked off by one of the rocky outcrops of 460-million-year-old bedrock schist that punctuate the grass and bodies of water. We were briefly accompanied at a few feet by a woman playing a ukulele.

"Olmstead and Vaux would have hated having art in here," Rogers told me. "They had a really romantic nineteenth century notion of the garden." Putting art into the park can be a delicate thing. Trouvé told the *Times*, "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. It's like a big machine, a lot of which you don't see. So making this, for me, was like putting a sculpture on top of another sculpture." Robert Smithson's 1973 essay, "Frederick Law Olmstead and the Dialectical Landscape," describes Olmstead as "America's first Earthwork artist." As we passed Gapstow Bridge and skirted the Wollman Rink, Rogers said, "It's already something—you don't need too many more things." The Trouvé sculpture is unique in the way it works, Rogers said. It is about the park, not merely in the park.

In the 1960s, Rogers recalled as we walked up toward the Dairy, the park was a mess: impromptu concerts, drug deals, areas filled in with asphalt, open spaces unregulated by vegetation. Rogers began working to resurrect it in 1975: "I was a little missionary. I learned how to do fundraising. We just couldn't let the park rot." She likes to speak about the park as a

center of civic consciousness: it is, she says, the greatest expression of American democracy, because it's a purpose-built people's park, "not like those in London that were royal parks, eventually opened to the public."

We walked on beneath the mall's double rows of elm trees, which Rogers points out as "probably the greatest living plantation of American Elms," to the grand staircase taking us beneath the Seventy-second Street Cross Drive and through to the Bethesda Terrace. We went west around the Cherry Hill horse-drinking fountain and crossed the West Drive to enter the path that took us through Strawberry Fields: "The most important thing about the park is movement. It's experiential. You experience it by moving through it."

To finish our walk we headed north, walking along the bridle trail until we got to Eighty-first Street and Central Park West. "You didn't see one piece of trash or graffiti on that that walk," Rogers said. And then: "Of course, the park will never be finished, perfect. It's always ongoing."

Trouvé's sculpture evokes the ongoingness of the park, not just in its use but in its evolution as a site. The work recalls the very construction of the park, what Betsy Rogers calls "a great nineteenth-century achievement in drainage and irrigation. A great achievement in integrating traffic flow into the landscape, by dividing the park into five smaller parks." The bulky, industrial-looking spools, beautifully manufactured, don't look like the kind of art one affiliates with public works; it almost looks as though it could have something to do with the scaffolding just behind it, part of the thousands of miles of cable that route power through the city.

Back at the plaza, people entering and exiting the park approach the spools, reaching their hands out to touch the coiled ropes, and then stoop to read the inscriptions. One of them, Baudelaire's poem "À une passante"—inscribed onto path P038, "From the Merchant's Gate to Tavern on the Green via West Drive"—describes the kind of fleeting, longing encounter that everyone in the city has at some point, each following along on her own thread, occasionally intertwining. Being alone among others; being private in public. "For I know not where you fled, you know not where I go," William Aggeler's translation has it: "O you whom I would have loved, O you who knew it!"