

A Bronze Zoo on Park Avenue

ArtInfo, September 16, 2009

NEW YORK—Undeterred by a broken foot, artist Claude Lalanne discussed at the **French Institute** today the eight surrealistic animal sculptures by her and her late husband, François-Xavier Lalanne, that now grace Park Avenue's medians between 52nd and 57th streets. Though the couple has exhibited widely over the last half-century, this is their first outdoor show in New York City and was organized by the **New York City Parks Public Art Program** and the Paul Kasmin **Gallery**, which represents both artists.

Speaking French, with daughter Dorothée Lalanne translating, Lalanne explained why the show, which has three of her sculptures and five of François-Xavier's (who passed away last year), included no collaborations. "It never worked really well," she admitted, remembering when they had once split responsibilities on a planned centaur sculpture. It ended disastrously: His horse body could not be forced to accommodate her human torso.

Lalanne also explained some of her recent activities, revealing that she had spent time this week with New York artist Jenny Holzer, an old friend. Jean-Gabriel Mitterrand, president of JGM Galerie, which represents both Lalannes in Paris, mentioned that she had begun preparing for a retrospective on the couple at the **Musée des Arts Décoratifs** in Paris. Their creatures will invade the grounds of the **Louvre** in March 2010.

After the press conference, Paul Kasmin director Clara Ha took reporters on a stroll around the show, beginning with François-Xavier's final completed work, *Singe Avisé (Tres Grand)* (2008), a baboon that gazes curiously at the **Four Seasons Hotel**. Further down the avenue, an elegant bronze owl — its body formed by a few curves and its wings outlined with spare, elegant ovals — watches over 55th Street. Its talons, by contrast, are crafted with dangerous realism. They look prepared to defend the block.

Lalanne politely explained the way her artistic process differed from François-Xavier's, saying, "We just have a very different way of working." He used drawings to prepare sculptures, while she has always preferred to manipulate objects, constructing models with her hands. Her results are often more brazenly bizarre, as in *Choupatte (Tres Grand)* (2008), a cabbage with chicken legs that stands at attention at 53rd Street. If the ripples of the vegetable's leaves looked impossibly real, Ha explained, it was because the model was molded from the real thing.

"Their work is extremely poetic," Mitterrand had explained earlier. "The human scale is working so well to bring charm to Park Avenue." The southernmost work, the final piece in the exhibition for those walking south, is an 8-foot-tall bronze apple by Claude Lalanne, and it seemed to confirm that appraisal. Titled *Pomme de New York* (2007), it sits one block from the former headquarters of Lehman Brothers and has been polished to a rich, comforting gold.











(source: <http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/32622/a-bronze-zoo-on-park-avenue/>)