

LALANNES ON PARK

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A life-size flock of sheep and, appropriately, a big apple more than eight feet tall are coming to Park Avenue this fall, along with a bronze bunny, a seated monkey and a giant owl, the work of the French artists Claude and François-Xavier Lalanne. Although they were married for 41 years, the two largely worked independently of each other. Now, from Sept. 13 through Nov. 20, their animal menagerie will adorn the meridians between 52nd and 57th Streets.

Paul Kasmin, the Chelsea dealer who represents the artists in the United States, proposed the project before Mr. Lalanne's death in December at 81. But he didn't get the green light until several civic officials saw examples of their work at a recent show of the Lalanannes' sculptures in his Chelsea gallery.

"He was working up until the day he died," Mr. Kasmin said. "And Mrs. Lalanne continues to work every day."

Although the public may recognize Mr. Lalanne's sheep, these artists are hardly household names. "But in the last two or three years they have become better known," Mr. Kasmin added. Then in February in Paris, examples of their work — like Mrs. Lalanne's room full of 15 mirrors framed by twisted bronze branches and Mr. Lalanne's marble, bird-shaped chairs — were included in the landmark sale of art and objects belonging to Yves Saint Laurent and his partner, Pierre Bergé. The sculptures sold for record prices, and suddenly became desirable.

"They weren't popular four or five years ago," Mr. Kasmin said. "But now it seems quite all right to say you like the Lalanannes' work. These things come and go in cycles."

The Park Avenue displays represent the first large-scale outdoor exhibition of Lalanne pieces in the United States. Adrian Benepe, the city's parks commissioner, who oversees art along Park Avenue along with the Fund for Park Avenue Sculpture Committee, said he thought this project would be particularly popular. "I think it will have kids and families looking once and looking twice," he said.

Over the years art by James Surls, Tom Otterness, Fernando Botero, Beverly Pepper and Robert Indiana, among others, have occupied different parts of Park Avenue. "It brings art to the public at virtually no cost to the city," Mr. Benepe said of the program. (The Paul Kasmin Gallery is paying for the project, and Mr. Kasmin declined to disclose the price.)

In addition to knowing and admiring the Lalanannes' work, Mr. Benepe said he thought these sculptures were "particularly approachable."

He added, "They will resonate with people who aren't art experts."

(source: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/10/arts/design/10vogel.html?_r=2&emc=tnt&ntemail1=y)