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MIKA TAJIMA'S PINK HOT TUB IS THE SUMMER'S HOTTEST PUBLIC ARTWORK  
SculptureCenter hopes the piece will foster relaxation and conversation

By Eileen Kinsella



Mika Tajima, *Meridian (Gold)* (2016). Photo by Eileen Kinsella

Having wowed and amused the art world this past fall with a viral-ready giant butt sculpture by Anthea Hamilton, the SculptureCenter in Long Island City has unveiled the next big thing for the summer season: A temporary public art project by artist Mika Tajima entitled *Meridian (Gold)*.

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Artist Mika Tajima and SculptureCenter executive director Mary Ceruti introduce the work. Photo by Eileen Kinsella

The work was unveiled on June 9 at the beautiful—and at the time windswept—Hunters Point Park South in Long Island City. The hot tub is perched on the edge of the East River, set against sweeping views of the Manhattan skyline which serve as a majestic backdrop.

*Meridian Gold* is a “geysering” hot pink sculpture that is lined with benches. Viewers are invited to climb inside for what is intended to be a moment of relaxation and spontaneous conversation. The main catch? Instead of being an actual geyser, it is a plume of water vapor that shoots upwards, the color of which shifts between magenta and pale cyan.

As the vapor drifts away in the breeze, it creates “techni-color clouds,” according to a statement from the SculptureCenter. The color of the vapor “corresponds in real time to the global sentiment for gold, reflected in the price fluctuation of the commodity.”

Longtime SculptureCenter executive director Mary Ceruti and the artist were on hand during the private waterside reception to offer more detail about the work. Ceruti welcomed the crowd and explained that sculpture was selected by participants in Public Process, the institution's program for high school students that uses New York as a backdrop for which to explore the history and impact of public art and its effect on the community.



SculptureCenter executive director Mary Ceruti. Photo by Sam Deitch/BFA.com

“Last summer ten high school students got a crash course in public art when they spent two weeks studying public art and public spaces,” said Ceruti. The program involved lots of field trips and guest speakers including urban planners, designers, and architectural historians, followed by visits to three different artists' studios, including Tajima's, and before participants chose one artist's proposed design.

The students “really responded to the way that Mika thinks about the digital economy and the information economy that we work in, and how to manifest the emotive aspects of that,” said Ceruti. “I think that really resonated for this generation of 14, 15, 16, and 17 year olds.”

Describing the planning and the need for wi-fi, water, and electricity, Ceruti added: “It's not a plop art piece. It's really connected.”

“It's been a really wonderful experience thinking about what the impact of the piece could be, and thinking about how to expand my own practice in the public sphere,” said Tajima, who was, appropriately, sporting gold shoes.

Of the decision to have the lights reflect the fluctuating price of gold, Tajima notes it's a commodity where the value “doesn't have to do with supply and demand but actually has to do with the sentiment of people and how uncertain or confident they feel.”

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“Right now the piece tends to be on the pink side which means that the price of gold is skyrocketing. It's been like the highest ever in two years,” she added.

“I thought of this as a sort of social place that we could contemplate this materiality while facing the financial center of the world,” said Tajima of the spa/hot tub setting.

Hunters Point South Park, is one of New York City's newest parks. The completely overhauled and now beautifully manicured waterfront space was, up until recently, an abandoned area. The transformed space now features a massive lawn, a dog run, and waterside promenade. *Meridian(Gold)* will be on view there until September 25.

The public is invited to celebrate the project at a community day scheduled for Saturday June 11, from 11:00 a.m.–12:30 p.m. There will be family activities and refreshments.