

DAILY NEWS

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FORWARD WITH NEW YORK

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Public art starts to return to the public

BY MARGARET MITTELBACH

WHEN WORLD-RE-nowned artist Richard Serra's ungainly and unpopular sculpture, "Title Arc," was booted from downtown's Federal Plaza two years ago, public art in the city took a hard knock. Why put up public art, artists wondered, if the public was going to run you out of town?

Such fears seem to have abated, and local artists now are unveiling several new sculptures that challenge previous notions of what public art is about.

With bronze statues of Nathan Hale and Horace Greeley as a backdrop, City Hall Park this month becomes temporary home to "Liberty Pavilion," a 54-foot-long, 20-foot-tall tongue-in-cheek paean to the U.S. Constitution and American flag.

With a wooden sidewalk leading up to a bridge inside the red-white-and-blue pavilion, passersby on Broadway will actually be able to enter the artwork, where they will be confronted by printed questions culled from a



'MANTIS': Robert Ressler's wood-carved insect in Riverside Park

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grade-school government textbook.

"The scale of the piece might be offensive to some,"

admits architect Jeffrey Cole, who designed the project with artist David Schaffer.

"But ... if people find it totally abhorrent, it won't be up

there in a year."

Though some critics have dubbed the work subversive, Cole says he hopes the Public Art Fund-sponsored sculpture will encourage people to think more about government and its symbols.

"A growing number of art-

cerned about — the streets and the world."

In this vein, Brooklyn artist Terry Lee Dill last week installed "Creative Blindness — Memorial for the End of Racism" across from the State Supreme Court building, site of the recent Bensonhurst racial attack trial. A fiberglass globe and marble bench enclosed in a white steel cage, the 15-foot-high "Memorial" has drawn mixed reviews from passersby.

IT'S DEFINITELY ONE of those things that makes you go "hmmmm," said Julien Davidson, upon seeing "Memorial" for the first time. "It's nice to see something modern."

"The greatest place for individual artistic freedom is temporary outdoor works," says sculptor Robert Ressler, who has five large wood-carved works on display.

His biggest hit to date is a 2,500-pound praying mantis in Riverside Park, carved from the wood of a lightning-struck ash tree.

(Margaret Mittelbach is a freelance writer.)