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"Unsui (Mirrors)" is a sculpture on display in Paepcke Park through September. It is one of the largest-scale public art installations the city of Aspen has ever hosted downtown. There will be a "launch" of the public arts project Sunday at 3 p.m. with music by AMFS students and a talk by artist Sanford Biggers.
Photo: Aspen Daily News

CLOUDS AND MIRRORS IN PAEPCKE PARK

BY GEOFF HANSON

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If you walk by Paepcke Park, you will see a sculpture that looks like two giant popsicles emerging out of the earth, seemingly sparkling and slowly spinning. They appear as if they might be something out of the world of Dr. Seuss.

It is in fact a sculpture of two mirrored cloud forms called "Unsui (Mirror)" by the artist Sanford Biggers.

"'Unsui' means 'clouds and water' in Japanese and these elements are recurring motifs in my work, representing freedom, fluidity and interconnectedness," Biggers said in an interview. "The piece is inspired by my study of Zen Buddhism where clouds symbolize both unencumbered movement and transcendence and Unsui also references a wandering monk that drifts like clouds and flows like water."

"The sculpture's mirrored sequin-covered surfaces and forms allow the sculpture to shift and change with light, weather and the viewer's perspective and reflects not only the visual but the wind environment as well through the jingling of the sequins. 'Unsui' mirrors the way memory and identity shift and evolve over time — constantly fluid, just as clouds move through the sky."

The work has its official “launch” Sunday with a public artist talk in Paepcke Park. A live performance by the Aspen Music Festival and School’s students will begin in the park at 3 p.m., leading into remarks by Buckhorn Public Arts Executive Director Tim Sack. Biggers will speak at approximately 3:30 p.m.

The event in the park will be preceded by a talk at Aspen Ideas Festival at 11 a.m. called “Comprehending Chroma” at the Buckminster Fuller Dome in which Biggers will engage in conversation with Sack and artist Imana Perry about how color communicates history, identity and emotion.

There will be a DanceAspen collaboration with the sculpture on July 27.



Sanford Biggers is the artist that created the sculpture “Unsui (Mirrors)” that has been erected in Paepcke Park. Biggers will deliver a talk at 3:30 p.m. Sunday. Photo: Aspen Daily News

“Unsui (Mirror)” will be on view through September. The sculptures measure 28 and 23 feet tall. It is one of the largest-scale public art installations the city of Aspen has ever hosted downtown.

It was co-commissioned by Buckhorn Public Arts in partnership with Desert X, and the Aspen presentation is being installed in partnership with Aspen Public Art.

Desert X is a nonprofit organization that produces international contemporary art exhibitions that activate desert locations through site-specific installations by acclaimed artists. Founded in 2017, Desert X explores environmental, social and political themes that shape the world. According to their website, their goal is to “promote cultural exchange and education programs that foster dialogue and understanding among cultures and communities about shared artistic, historical, and societal issues.”

According to Sack, Buckhorn and Desert X were looking for a project on which to collaborate and Biggers came to mind.

Biggers is a multimedia artist whose practice encompasses painting, sculpture, video, photography, music and performance. His work reflects personal experiences, from his early engagement with graffiti art in Los Angeles to his time living in Japan, shaping his ability to bridge disparate cultural and historical contexts.

"Buckhorn, along with Desert X, were instrumental in the production of the artwork which led to an exciting opportunity to bring the sculptures to Aspen for the summer," Biggers said. "I'm grateful for the city's warm welcome of the work and the chance to share this piece with a new audience in such a vibrant community."

Biggers has had a long, ongoing relationship with Aspen. His first few visits involved teaching workshops and lecturing at Anderson Ranch. He has shown work at the Baldwin Gallery and at the Marianne Boesky Gallery, he said.

"I've had many opportunities to connect with both the local community in Aspen and visitors who have a deep appreciation for art. It's a fantastic hub for the arts."

According to Biggers, public art has a way of pulling people together, creating a focal gathering space by transforming public space into shared space.

"Public art invites us to pause, become present, and engage with something unexpected," Biggers said. "Whether it sparks a conversation between strangers, inspires a child's imagination, or becomes a backdrop for community events, this piece will turn a familiar place into a site of discovery and dialogue for the community."

Sack echoed Biggers' sentiment, saying, "Public art is crucial because it brings art directly into everyday life as an accessible and free experience. Public art can spark dialogue, inspire reflection, and even challenge preconceived notions. In this case, 'Unsui (Mirror)' invites viewers to experience art in the midst of nature, creating a dialogue between the two and offering a space where both the art and the environment can influence and reflect each other. It's about creating shared experiences that resonate with a wide range of people, regardless of their background or knowledge of art."

Biggers said his hope is that "Unsui (Mirror)" will offer viewers a reflection on change and continuity.

"The shimmering clouds evoke a sense of constant motion and reformation, while also offering a stillness that invites reflection and interpretation," Biggers said. "By engaging with this work, I hope people are reminded of the cyclical nature of life — the way memories and experiences shape our identities, just as clouds shape and reshape the sky. I hope 'Unsui (Mirror)' offers a moment of reflection and meditation. The reflective surface allows viewers to see themselves within the sculpture. I'd like to offer a peaceful moment of connection, both with the environment around the clouds, and within the viewers themselves."