

REGEN PROJECTS

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Hedge Two-Way Mirror Walkabout, by Dan Graham with Günther Vogt, at the Metropolitan Museum.

Artists Hold Up a Glass To a City's Changing Face

The idea of a Dan Graham pavilion in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's roof garden is so obvious, so perfect, that it really should have happened years ago.

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**ART
REVIEW**

But late is better than never, and Mr. Graham's execution of the project more than makes up for lost time. Mr. Graham, 72, has been exhibiting his signature steel and mirrored-glass structures (he calls them pavilions, although they are open-topped) since the early 1980s, in an array of museums and parks. His pavilions often seem to disappear into the sites, while fostering playful interactions between viewers and the landscape. New Yorkers

may recall his "Rooftop Urban Park Project," atop the Dia Art Foundation in Chelsea from 1991 to 2004, which, in a way, augured the neighborhood's evolution from warehouses and garages to condo towers and the High Line.

His project for the Met, titled "Hedge Two-Way Mirror Walkabout," a collaboration with the Swiss landscape architect Günther Vogt, arrives at a pivotal moment for both the museum and the Manhattan skyline. The Met is about to annex the Whitney's longtime Madison Avenue headquarters for its expanding contemporary program. Meanwhile, the view from the roof garden — a rare public aerie along the Gold

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Artists Hold Up A Glass To a City

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Coast — is changing; super-tall skyscrapers with mile-long shadows are shooting up along the southern edge of Central Park.

Mr. Graham's pavilion acknowledges these transitions, and presses you to confront them. It does so with his characteristic understatement, eschewing the playground-like aspects of some Met rooftop commissions — the climbable pods of Tomas Saraceno's "Cloud City," for instance, or the undulating ramps of Doug and Mike Starn's "Big Bambu."

That's not to say that it doesn't have its fun-house moments. The pavilion consists of an S-shaped curve of specially treated glass, bookended by two parallel ivy hedgerows. The glass, which divides the structure into two equal compartments, is slightly reflective; viewers moving around it will see faint but visibly distorted mirror images (and will inevitably try to capture them on their cellphone screens). They will also experience a kind of false mirroring, observing people on the opposite side of the glass. As in Mr. Graham's earlier pavilions and installations, looking goes hand in hand with being looked at.

But these activities are made to seem more routine than spectacular, thanks to the minimal design and the commonplace components: glass, steel, shrubs, synthetic grass. Mr. Graham's pavilions have been compared, not unfavorably, to bus shelters and telephone booths.

And, anyway, this particular pavilion is not just a capsule of interactive experiences. If you approach from the north, the pavilion's hedges frame the southern view. The greenery blocks out the eastern and western skylines, so that you focus on the glass towers rising in Midtown (with the needlelike One57 accentuated by the sweep of the glass, which, from certain vantage points, seems to curve around the building).

The same skyline is seen in reflection

"The Roof Garden Commission: Dan Graham With Günther Vogt" runs through Nov. 2 (weather permitting) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; 212-535-7710, metmuseum.org.

if you enter from the south, but this time as a spiky, futuristic apparition.

A clever kind of camouflage is also at work. Seen from a greater distance — if, say, you wander over to the bar — the pavilion looks almost indistinguishable from the low hedges that line the terrace, as well as from the glass-enclosed offices and wings of the Met.

"Two-way mirrored glass now defines the center of the city, where so many of the buildings are clad in this kind of reflective surface," Mr. Graham says in an interview with the curator, Sheena Wagstaff, in the small but excellent catalog. "And then the hedge defines the edge of the city." (Ms. Wagstaff, the head of the Met's department of Modern and contemporary art, commissioned the work. The associate curator Ian Alteveer or-

ganized it with Mr. Graham.)

Mr. Graham has always gravitated to places where the urban and suburban, the center and the edge, overlap. Although he has lived in Manhattan for decades, he spent his childhood in New Jersey and made his most famous work there: the multimedia essay "Homes for America" (1966-67), which surveyed row housing with a wink at the minimalist aesthetic that was prevalent then.

In a 1992 video he made for Dia (on view downstairs in the Met's Modern and contemporary wing, along with some earlier photographs and a smaller pavilion), he narrates a concise history of urban parks, from the Crystal Palace to the World Financial Center's Winter Garden. The atrium gardens of New York in the 1970s and '80s seem to fasci-

nate him, as responses to that era's scarcity of public park funds and as spaces with a split personality: "corporate buildings with a kind of arcadian suburban landscape inside," as he describes them to Ms. Wagstaff.

You can't help wondering what he thinks of the vast atriums that are now obligatory for any museum looking to build or expand — or of other spaces that prioritize interactive spectacles, like the glass-box "art bay" envisioned by MoMA. They may not be parks, but they are, in a sense, pavilions.

It's difficult to find answers in Mr. Graham's Met commission, which is broadly historical, as befits the museum's approach to contemporary art. The hedges nod to the 18th-century garden maze, the S-curve to the 17th-centu-

ry Baroque period. And the whole pavilion, on a small hillock and surrounded by synthetic grass, might be seen as an architectural folly akin to the Gothic Temple at Stowe, England, or the Great Pagoda at Kew Gardens in London (albeit by way of a miniature-golf course.)

Yet "Hedge Two-Way Mirror Walkabout" is much more than an odd little compendium of different eras in garden design. It gets you thinking about the changing skyscape of New York City, about the parallels between parks and museums, and about the quirks of the roof garden, which Mr. Graham calls a "leftover space." And it reminds you that the city needs more spaces like this one, where leftovers come with multi-million-dollar views but are nonetheless set aside for the public.

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"Hedge Two-Way Mirror Walkabout," on the roof deck of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, invites viewers to consider the Manhattan skyline.