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PALM SPRINGS LIFE

A 'Monumental' Question

By Carl Schoemig – April 12, 2021



Artist Christopher Myers poses in front of the first of six horse statues that sits on the median of Tahquitz Canyon Parkway near Palm Springs City Hall. PHOTOGRAPHS BY CARL SCHOEMIG

Christopher Myers' "The Art Of Taming Horses" does more than simply add another exhibit to **Desert X 2021**, a site-specific installation featuring 12 artists from eight countries that were first revealed in February. Myers, a New York artist who also communicates through visual arts, theater, and literature, wanted to question the role of a monument in a community.

"I was particularly interested in the idea of how to displace the logic of a monument," said Myers at the April 9 unveiling in Palm Springs. "It is not simply about replacing one monument with another. I want to find out what does it mean to have a monument that does not act like a monument. What happens with a monument when it is on eye level with the audience? That is what I am interested in. What does it mean to have a monument that does not focus on a singular body, but has an impact on the community?"

His exhibit involves six large-scale sculptures of horses positioned in the median on Tahquitz Canyon Parkway in Palm Springs, starting near Palm Springs City Hall to just before Sunrise Way. Each horse is also identified with a banner that tell the fictional story of two ranchers, one Hispanic and one African-American, whose personal journeys and love for raising horses led them to create a welcoming community that would eventually become Palm Springs.

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Palm Springs Life spoke further with Myers about his inspiration and work for Desert X.

What else went into your thinking to create these six horses?

Besides rethinking the purpose of monuments, I'm also interested in the history of ranches. When you think about ranches, and the history of animal husbandry, especially horses, there is communes. You can't have a ranch with just one person. A ranch is its own small community. I am very much interested in this idea that there needs to be something that can take place and think in terms of a community.

What do you think of how your statues are displayed? What are you hoping people will take away from viewing your exhibit?

Real talk. I want people to speak about my art. I love the curiosity and strangeness. I love a moment that unsettles and asks the viewer to think again about the other things that they see around. One of the things that's interesting about Palm Springs is that there's so much public art around. Looking around makes one need to pause and reflect, "Hey, that one's a little off," or "That one's a little strange one." I love that encounter with strangeness. It is the same encounter with foreignness and liminality or otherness that we all live in. It makes you think about things.

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How did your connection to Desert X happen and what does it mean to you to have your work included?

The connection happened through the kind offices of César Cacia-Alvarez (co-curator of Desert X) and the kind input through Neville Wakefield (Desert X co-curator and artistic director). They are some of the smartest and most interesting curators. It's a gift to have my work included in this year's Desert X exhibition. I like to talk to a community. I like work that is able to speak in kind of a communal context. Always.

Have you been to Palm Springs and the desert before? Did the landscape influence your work?

Absolutely. I've been in Palm Springs around four or five times now, mostly doing site visits for Desert X. And the landscape is absolutely part of the work. I think a lot about how the landscape is used here and its usefulness. That's really what has an influence on my decisions.

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Artist Christopher Myers chats with César Cacia-Alvarez, co-curator of Desert X. PHOTOGRAPHS BY CARL SCHOEMIG

You work in several types of art? Would you be better off specializing in one or what are the advantages of creating in several forms?

I am interested in speaking as many languages as possible to reach as many people as possible. That is the reason why I am working in several types of art. Specialization also tends to cut down on your audience. And I am interested in talking to both young people, old people, people who are familiar with art matters, and people who are less familiar with art.