

New York Art In Place: June 2022

By Darryn King, June 20, 2022

What is it like to perform in a concert venue with one of the most arresting backdrops in New York City? Or to develop a close personal connection with one of the most recognizable buildings in the world?

For this month's installment of New York Art in Place, four exceptional artists share their thoughts on New York venues extremely close to their hearts.

“Lydia Ourahmane: Tassili,” SculptureCenter

Through August 1

“Kyle Dancewicz came to visit me in the summer of 2021, and Alana (Mejia Gonzalez) happened to be in town for a couple of hours so I invited her over for lunch. He asked how we knew each other which opened the floodgates on Tassili, the Saharan plateau between Algeria and Libya, home to thousands of prehistoric cave paintings, and our fated attempt to make this film before the borders closed to Algeria in March 2020.

“We arrived at base camp February 16th 2022, after months of negotiations with government officials to obtain permissions to take a non-Algerian crew of seven collaborators, the first time in many years due to the contentious nature of that site. We set off with a caravan of 16 donkeys, nine guides, and all the food/water and filming equipment we would need to sustain a two-week expedition by foot.

‘Tassili’ is a 47-minute film shot in first person as a hallucinatory deluge of otherworldly landscapes and extraterrestrial cave paintings on the border of Algeria and Libya which have survived 6-12,000 years.

“Upon entering SculptureCenter you first encounter the soundtrack to ‘Tassili,’ a four-part exquisite corpse scored by four musicians, along with a sculptural hanging in the center of the space made in collaboration with Yuma Burgess. It’s at once a semi-factual, semi-fictional landscape generated by photogrammetry scans that we took

on the plateau and acts as an eclipse to the film. We spent a month at SculptureCenter making the sculpture on site, and turned the back room into a 3D print farm, with 13 printers running 24 hours a day, and kept a blow up mattress on the floor, taking it in turns to sleep over. It was unconventional; the team at SculptureCenter truly went above and beyond their responsibility as an institution to make the work possible. It's so rare for that kind of support to exist.

This is the first time the cave paintings have been filmed in high definition, which raises questions around how this kind of imagery should exist since the first formal expedition to Tassili n'Ajjer, which brought many of the paintings to light in the 50s, served as a colonial narrativization at the helm of France's waning occupation. Dealing with the reality of pilgrimage as tightly woven into the fabric of tourism, 'Tassili' takes into consideration the way these spaces of deep history are narrativized, and whom they serve." — Lydia Ourahmane