

Art World

## Artist Pamela Council Is Building a Joyous, Camp 'Fountain for Survivors' in Times Square

The sculpture will feature close to 400,000 acrylic nails.

Sarah Cascone, August 18, 2021



Times Square is getting its first fountain—and it will be surrounded by acrylic nails.

The unusual monument is the work of artist Pamela Council, who building their largest ever “Fountains for Black Joy” sculpture in New York City. The monumental structure will measure 18 feet tall and be enclosed within a grotto-like carapace covered in close to 400,000 colorful acrylic finger nails, a key material in the artist’s practice for the last 13 years.

“Fountains have this way of working in culture as meeting places, as gathering places, and places where people make wishes, giving people this ebullient sense of hope,” Council told Artnet News. “I hope people feel that, and are also inspired by the imaginative ways that I use materials.”

The piece, titled A Fountain for Survivors, is the artist’s first public commission. It is set to go on view October 7, presented by Times Square Arts.

“The fountain is a very familiar civic architectural structure that you would encounter in a public plaza,” Times Square Arts director Jean Cooney told Artnet News. “But Pamela turns that concept on its head and creates something completely unconventional and incredibly distinct. I’ve never quite been a part of anything like it in all my time in public art.”



Pamela Council, Red Drink: A BLAXIDERM MY Juneteenth Offering (2018). Photo courtesy of the artist.

The work is an extension of Council’s signature aesthetic, which they’ve coined “blaxidermy.”

“This Afro-Americana camp aesthetic is my way of dealing with issues of adornment, Black fungibility, and visibility with a total tongue-in-cheek sense of humor,” Council said. “For me, the absurd and the campy is always central in how I approach dealing with heavy subjects.”

That makes their work a particularly good fit for Times Square, Cooney added: “Times Square is full of camp and spectacle, and Pamela matches, if not exceeds, the maximalism that people expect from Times Square.”

A Fountain for Survivors will be a multi-sensory, participatory experience for viewers, employing light, sound, and smell.

The exact details are still being ironed out, but Council is hoping to incorporate Florida water, a ritual healing tonic with a floral, citrusy scent. Visitors will be able to make some kind of offering to the fountain, in much the same way that visitors to



the Trevi Fountain toss a coin over their shoulder to wish they'll return to Rome.

Council has been making fountains since 2015. "I realized with fountains could continue my practice of making works that were dedications, gifts, and offerings, but that I could do it at a larger scale," they said.

"Since 2017, I've been traveling to all these different cultural heritage sites around the country and the world, thinking a lot about monuments and large mark-makers. So when this opportunity came about, I had already done more than enough research to adapt my vision to this scale—I can't wait to go bigger!"

Though it will sit in the heart one of the busiest public spaces in the world, A Fountain for Survivors is meant to be a protective, private enclosure. The work's vibrant shell creating a safe space for a moment of reflection. But the work's title is open to interpretation

"When I say survivor, it's not about overcoming trauma or resilience," Council said. "In making the work, I have chosen not to define it. I leave it up to survivors themselves to claim that title."



*"Pamela Council: A Fountain for Survivors" will be on view in Times Square, Duffy Square, 7th Avenue between West 46th and 47th Streets, New York, October 7–December 8, 2021.*

*"Pamela Council: Bury Me Loose" will be on view at Denny Dimin Galley, 39 Lispenard Street, New York, September 10–October 23, 2021.*