

Giant Hands Installations Book

Created in and around New York City
2018-2021

by

Mirena Rhee

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The Story of the Hands

The story of the Hands started in a small room with a red chair in Harlem. I had moved from Silicon Valley, where I was working as a video game Star Wars artist, having given up my six-figure salary and most of my possessions to move to New York City.

Living in a fairly small room with everything I owned and an air shaft window, I turned my attention to my intimate space, science defines it as 1.5 meters in diameter. I started looking at and drawing my hands, paying attention to the "hands theater" and the doings of the hands. A realization that a simple act of peeling apples is an extraordinary act on the micro-level, where electric storms of electrons introduce ordinary changes in reality. This "hands theater" is in essence a violent act, not in the way of doing harm but an epic battle to make a change, to rupture.

Hands became the building blocks of most drawings, and since, most of the installations. The hand is the place where the ideal world of ideas and thoughts could become an object in the material world. My own hands serve as the models and main building elements of my work because they are always present and available, constantly gesturing, traversing and dominating my personal space.

About Giant Hands Installations

Giant Hands site-specific installations consist of giant hands made out of lined bond paper painted with acrylic paint. In the past year I've created numerous site-specific installations using Giant Hands. I design the installations to have very little turnaround time and be easily transported rolled up, deployed and collected, creating from hour-long to several-days-long site-specific work. The installations consists of hands hanging from the ceiling, being attached to walls in a non-destructive manner or simply being draped over objects or walls, to create what I call gestural mounds.

These Giant Hands installations begun while I lived in two apartments in Harlem, right on Broadway. The energy of the borough of Harlem and also Broadway seemed like direct electric power source for the work. The first work in Beacon was also my escape from that energy. I have been looking for escape from the noise and started hiking upstate and as a result discovered Dennings Point Ruins by accident on one of the hikes - for some reason I decided to return to the ruins and discovered the back open area where I immediately loved the space and begun hanging hands.

This series of installations arose from the realization that during simple and mundane daily activity, like holding onto the rails in the subway, the hands draw extraordinary three-

dimensional shapes. As they move through space they create flowing, complex structures of hand trails - this body of work explores these ephemeral constructs.

I first create a small hand sketch which I refine into a line drawing. I enlarge the line drawing and then transfer it to paper. I then paint the enlarged hands using acrylic paint. I then wire the paper hands using wooden dowels and fishing line. The spaces I targeted were abandoned buildings, scaffoldings in front of unoccupied store fronts in New York City, as well as natural and artificial formations in Central Park. In the latter spaces I had to work illegally and gorilla style.

When hung loosely, the hands travel in a series of gestures, follow a think line and coalesce into three-dimensional structures.

How Giant Hands Installations evolved

The Giant Hands series of installations started with a month-long, site-specific installation in Beacon, NY, created illegally inside Dennings Point Ruins.

I first created one simple paper hand and hung it from the rafters. Later on I made 12 more hands as simple line work and with these I made a few days of installations. Next I painted the hands and all 12 had color.

With the 12 painted hands I made a series of installations, illegally, around New York City streets and in Central Park.

Most installations that I created in public spaces in New York were made illegally but I went to great lengths not to go into confrontation with authorities because I figured that I wanted to continue working in the city and didn't want to deplete people's good will. I would generally talk both private administrators like the buildings' board or Central Park authorities into letting me leave the installation for some time with the promise that I would take it down in a timely manner.

I was invited by Chashama to make an installation with the hands at a former bank on the Lower East Side and this was my first more permanent project which lasted for about 10

days. For this project I made additional 24 hands for a total of 36. The additional 24 were line work hands.

I took the 36 hands and I took over a studio space for about a week where I created a small room made entirely out of the 36 hands. I called it the Hands Tesseract. It was literally a cube of hands with a hand painting I had done which was the floor of the cube. Over three days I painted the interior of the cube thus painting all of the 36 hands together into a integrated 3d giant hands painting.

With the newly painted 36 hands I used the emptied out and quiet New York city, with less foot traffic due to the Covid lockdowns and more lenient authorities due to the lockdown and the protests, to create installations on Times Square and in Central Park. I still had small altercations with the Central Park conservancy especially for the Gothic Bridge installation but I offset with collecting trash in the area and making sure the hands do not leave any trace on the plant life.

In 2021, in response to the Old Masters colors of Central Park and as a continued response to the Lockdowns, I created a series called Remember Summer, Tree Hugs and Reflections, in various locations around Central Park.

I've come to understand that the Giant Hands represent all of us in New York City together. They represent the human culture, the first ever figurative art, our civilization. Our human diversity as people from all kinds of ethnic backgrounds living together on spaceship earth.

Giant Hands in Beacon, 2018

Month-long, site-specific installation in Beacon, NY, created illegally inside Dennings Point Ruins in 2018.

Due to the fact that it was created in a State Park - I had to setup from scratch every morning and fold everything every evening, leaving no trace. Hence its ephemeral, and inherently mobile and shifting nature. I apologize to the state of New York for not applying for the permit they would have never given me anyway. That's why I didn't ask.

While hiking in the area I found the most beautiful space - abandoned brick factory which has been taken over by nature. While passing by I only saw a brick wall, partially collapsed and had no idea the area just around the corner held this amazing environment.

I walked by, the place called me and I answered. It's my magical forest sans the mushrooms. I was in love and spent much time here.

They call the place Dennings Point ruins, I found them much improved though, and much more beautiful. imagine the sheer mundanity of a brick factory building with all the brick making stuff in it. Now it has been beautifully rearranged by nature and you have the most lively soundscape too. It was made so much more beautiful.

Art is about a punch to the stomach. I figured what the difference is between art and art, art gives you a punch so when the art is absent and the artist is absent you still hold the image in your head. You say ah!

If there's no ah it is just making stuff, or being creative which is of course absolutely valid too it just isn't all that interesting.

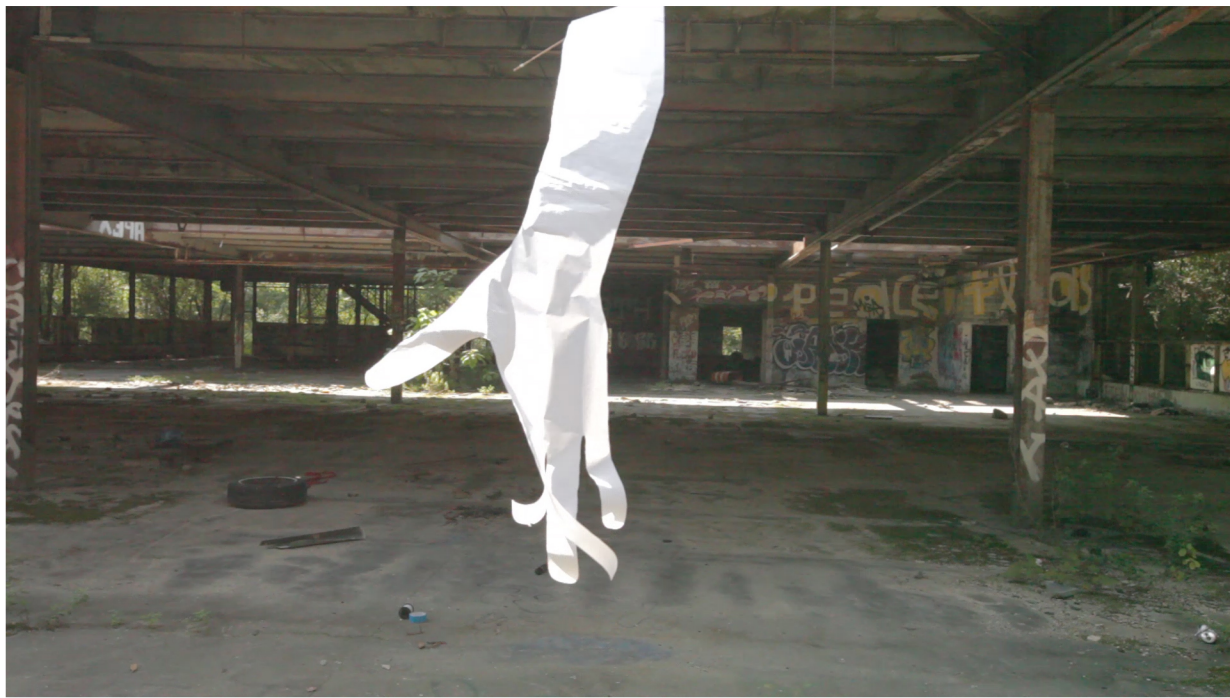
I loved being in this space, in the company of bushes, crickets, birds, wind, greenery, ruins, graffiti, and random humans.

To create a brand new visual experience, and fleeting.

I loved the sounds of the space as well, it's like nature was pushing its way into the building but couldn't take over and get all in.

Plus I had the local bullies come in and complain about the yuppies coming to their town, and to be honest I was scared but not terrified but my friend freaked out so i had to start folding. I will make sure to come alone next time because I do not care to "burn with my art" - this was the only time I have been threatened to be burned with something I created so I feel it was quite special.

And then the cops showed up, they were really nice.









Hands Dry Waterfall, 2018

Site-specific installation in Central Park, 2018.

The first of three site-specific installations in Central Park, created spontaneously over the course of one day. I worked illegally but with the silent understanding with the park staff that I only leave the installation for an hour, making sure not to leave any trace or damage



Hands Over the Waterfall, 2018

Site-specific installation in Central Park, 2018.

The second of three site-specific installations in Central Park, created spontaneously over the course of one day.



Hands Over the Arch, 2018

Site-specific installation in Central Park, 2018.

The third of three site-specific installations in Central Park, created spontaneously over the course of one day.



Giant Hands on Broadway, 2018

Giant Hands on Broadway. Two site-specific installation on Broadway in Harlem and Broadway and Bleecker, each created over the course of one day, 2018.

The spaces I targeted in these two projects were scaffoldings in front of unoccupied store fronts in New York City.



Giant Hands in East Village, 2019

Giant Hands in East Village, 2019

A week-long site specific installation created over three nights and one day on site at 172 E 4th street by invitation from chashama.org.





Hands Tesseract, 2019

Also called Hands Room, 10 x 10 x 15 feet, 3D painting and installation, 2019.

A giant white cuboid inside which I hung all the hands from previous installations, painted using acrylic paint. The Hands Tesseract stood for 3 days before being demolished.





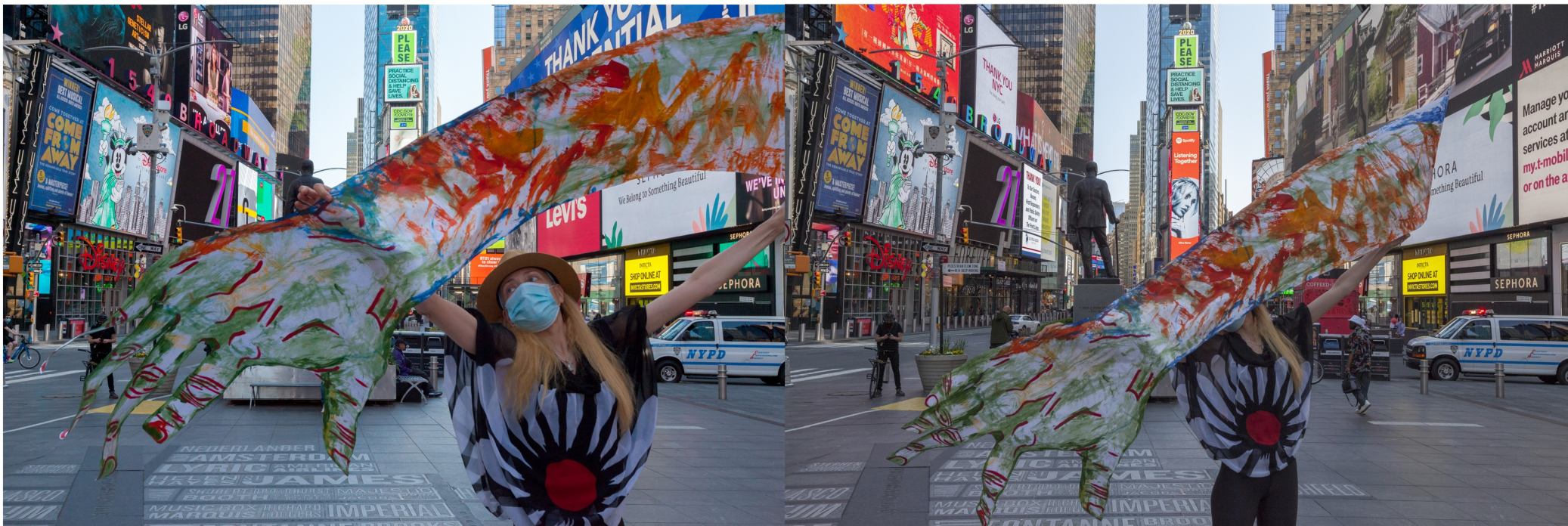


One New York, 2020

Also called Giant Hands on Times Square, a Performance and Installation with Giant Hands on Times Square in New York City created in May 2020.

Created at the tail end and as a response to the Great Manhattan Lockdown due to the Coronavirus Crisis.







Hands Crop Circle, 2020

Installation with Giant Hands in Central Park created in May 2020.

Created at the tail end and as a response to the Great Manhattan Lockdown due to the Coronavirus Crisis.



Hands Over The Bridge, 2020

A day in the life of not so ordinary a bridge.

Giant Hands over the gothic bridge in Central Park, a public art installation, a part of the Giant Hands series of installations.

The installation developed over two weekends - Aug 1st and 9th, 2020

I decided to come back to the Gothic Bridge and hang all 36 hands, based on a suggestion from the audience and my personal feeling for the place and the bridge.

This was the second weekend working on the Bridge. Created Sunday, August 9th. @centralparknyc I continue the tradition of @christojeanneclaude except I work quick, light and without permission - simply throw my body, my soul and my hands at it. Btw Christo was from a town in Bulgaria famous for their humor, and which is also my mom's home town - Gabrovo. There's a joke about people from the town that they're so stringy they take their shoes off to dance to the music from the neighboring town.

The best thing of the day yesterday was the audience, the audience is always an equal participant in the performances and installation work I do in New York.







Strawberry Fields Forever, 2020

Strawberry Fields Forever is an Installation with Giant Hands created over three days during the Labor Day Weekend 2020 in Central Park.

IT WAS THE SUMMER IT WAS THE LIGHT IT WAS THE
MUSIC AND THE PEOPLE. THE AIR WAS FILLED WITH
SO MUCH MUSIC YOU COULD BREATHE NOTES

Strawberry Fields Forever Installation was inspired by Strawberry Fields in Central Park which the artist created for three days in a row, hanging the hands in the morning and taking them down in the evening. It continued in tune with the music that surrounded the artist in Central Park. There was music everywhere and the sounds of it inspired the artist to hang the hands over and over again and just let them flutter, sometimes.

I had such a blast working in Central Park over the Labor Day weekend, it is hard to come out of the fairy tale land of my hands forest and hands field and into the real world

I met so many people, critters, insects, squirrels. i had a conversation with a little girl whether what i do is decorating.

Hmmm. I had to think a while and I decided an answer - a decoration is a small addition, an improvement to a thing.

Art is a thing by itself, it has transformed the thing into a new thing.

The park was filled with so much music it was impossible not to start dancing in your head.





Summer Playfield, 2020

An installation with Giant Hands at the Wisteria Pergola in Central Park created in September, 2020. A series of Three One Day installations in Early September where the artist would hang the hands in the morning and take them down in the evening. Photographed by the Artist.

A fairy tale of trees, leaves, color, green and the amazing wisteria pergola in @centralparknyc Thanks for coming to see this colorful incident and thank you, #CentralPark for not tearing me down although I worked illegally and without permission, I did it for the betterment of mankind and for all of us in #NewYorkCity just because no one else will do it. An #art #installation of #GiantHands created over 3 days and every day was a different arrangement of hands - one day the hands looked like Roots, another day they looked like flags and of course I created it randomly just putting #hands up as they came out of the bag. everyday I will come at noon and put the hands up and then I will take them down in the evening at dusk, like hands Cinderella I had the privilege of spending three days in @centralparknyc - the best music, the most talented drummers and the kindest people who of course make this the greatest city in the world. Did I mention the bubbles guy Kishan who saved my ... work. ———— ————— Don't worry no nails involved, they just hang like leaves - they'll be gone tonight but be back tomorrow —————

For the Summer Playfield I used a very simple method of hanging the hands - I would just wedge the wooden dowels in between the pergola beams and occasionally I would just tie the wooden dowel with a simple thread to the beam. Imagine that for complicated structure. And of course I brought my own ladder to the affair, I will not have been able to hang the hands without a ladder. The park people came and I was sitting by the ladder and I saw them turn around and they oh so there is the ladder, so they understood that I'm committed to the hands. They sat there they never spoke to me they simply radioed someone I guess in headquarters or something and they just left afterwards.







Remember Summer - Tree Hugs, 2021

Series of Installations in Central Park, 2021

Remember Summer - Tree Hugs is a series of installations in Central Park created to complement the old masters colors of the park with streaks of red, orange, yellow and blue. Created by artist Mirena Rhee without the endorsement of the park.

Remember summer - can't wait for spring - tree hugs - minimalist installation in central park inspired by the Colors of Central park which are Old masters colors this time of the year. And the fire ladders all over the park which beckoned to me to splash some color here and there. I was stalking some trees which look incredibly honest and beautiful this time of the year. If you see a Rembrandt painting you will see the same colors except for Vermilion, Yellow and Ultramarine which at this time of the year are hidden in the colors of the birds. The colors and the shapes and of course the Fire ladder inspired me to make a few minimal installations which will come back next week just in time for spring. I love working in the park, it is incredibly beautiful but it is also full of culture, which is the mix of street culture of New York city as well as the neighborhood cultures of UES and UWS, the cultures of the performers, the drum circles, the musicians, the bubble guy, the museum going crowd, the Boathouse crowd, the joggers and the bikers and the boarders, and the skaters.





Remember Summer, 2021

Installation in Central Park, 2021

Remember Summer is a series of installations in Central Park created to complement the old masters colors of the park with streaks of red, orange, yellow and blue. Created by artist Mirena Rhee without the endorsement of the park.

Also a response to The Red Ladders scattered around the park.



Reflections - Hieroglyphs at The Point, 2021

Installation with 36 Giant Hands in Central Park, 2021

In response to the Lockdowns, I created a series of installations in Central Park, this is the third series.

Inspired by the Trees and Colors of Central Park.

This installation - Reflections - Hieroglyphs at The Point - is of course random on the very surface, the hands are randomly placed but a result of a long time of observation and working on ideas about the space in Central Park and especially the forms, the shapes of the trees, the colors of Earth and bark.

The Old Masters colors of the park ambushed with the sharp burst of Color in Acrylic Paint. It's a bit chemical burst, but as natural as the wavelengths of light are natural.

Just like randomness in the shapes of the trees and branches is only on the surface but follows an inner logic of growth and reach up to ultraviolet light, so is my installation a natural progression of many years of study as well as spontaneous work with the environment to create an ephemeral work, a temporary pigment, a visual language for one afternoon.

I call it an ephemeral sign language. Hieroglyphs made out of painted hands. Squiggles, and Graffiti. Reflected in the water.

They say Light doesn't travel but ripples,

and doubles the World.

It makes us all, humans and trees,

tremble a little.







Reflections, 2021

Installation with 36 Giant Hands and Red Cloth in Central Park, 2021

Reflections, an installation created for Easter Sunday in the Rambles area of Central Park made out of 36 hand-painted Giant Hands each measuring over 12 ft, and Red Cloth.

The Installation was a culmination of a series of installations around the park created in response to the Old Masters painting colors of the park in early spring.

The color scheme of the Hands and the Red Cloth are homage to Christo and Jeanne-Claude.





About Mirena Rhee

Mirena Rhee was born in Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria, and went to the National Academy of Architecture in Sofia, Bulgaria. Mirena received a Full Scholarship and Research Assistantship toward an MA degree at DAAP in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Shortly after arriving in Cincinnati, OH, Mirena discovered she loved creating art on the computer and in 2000 moved to the Bay Area, California. Mirena spent 10 years in the Silicon Valley as a Video Game Artist for blockbuster franchises like Star Wars.

This type of commercial work involved working in a three-dimensional space on the computer and her work carries over that three-dimensional play and often includes geometric bodies and Star Wars allusions like the Darth Vader helmet.

Mirena moved to New York City in 2010 and began drawing her own hands in pen and ink. She uses an archaic technique of drawing dating back to the reed pens of 400 BC. Her own hands serve as the models and the reason they became a building block of her drawings is because of their accessibility - being constantly present and available.

Mirena creates ephemeral Giant Hands installations in public spaces. They are designed to be easily deployed and

transported. Although created illegally, Mirena strives to work responsibly and with respect for the public, the spaces, and the organizations that maintain them.

Mirena's performances are created in public spaces in New York City where she collaborates spontaneously with the general public. In these performances, she uses canvas objects which become three-dimensional crusts covered in graffiti. Writings, pictograms, and drawings by people from all walks of life, ages, races, and countries, just like New York City, reflecting spontaneously on the sidewalk on their human condition.

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