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## 500 WORDS

RECENT | ARCHIVE

- Holly Woodlawn talks about art and life
- Nancy Rubins on her latest large-scale public sculpture
- Linda Mary Montano talks about her retrospective
- Richard Foreman discusses life and work
- Michelangelo Frammartino on *Alberi*
- Lucy McKenzie discusses her current exhibition and projects



NEWS | DIARY | PICKS | SLANT

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- Jiten Thukral and Sumir Tagra
- Scoli Acosta
- John Riddy
- Cécile Bart
- Nick Mauss
- Etel Adnan
- Wolfgang Tillmans
- Abigail DeVille
- Alice Könitz, Pamela Jorden, and Jeff Ono
- Mika Rottenberg
- Bethany Springer
- "Without Reality There is No Utopia"
- Anne Hardy
- Antonio Adriano Puleo

## Nancy Rubins

05.13.13



Nancy Rubins, *Monochrome for Paris*, 2013, stainless steel and aluminum, 40 x 50 x 40'. Photo: Erich Koyama.

*Just steps from the Seine, a tangled mass of aluminum rowboats, kayaks, and canoes arches across a typically busy courtyard on l'Université Paris Diderot's campus. Echoing the steely gray Parisian skies under which it was unveiled this spring, Nancy Rubins's largest public project in France is also her first permanent commission for the capital. While directing the crane-maneuvered installation, Rubins spoke about how Monochrome for Paris, 2013, came to be.*

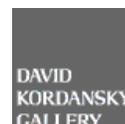
**ALMOST FOUR YEARS AGO**, I was approached by the city of Paris through curators tasked with commissioning public sculptures to honor the city's new tramline. With these kinds of projects, there are always many ideas about how the art should be approached. It was important for me not to let the work get diluted by all the different cooks in the kitchen; this piece in particular can be built in umpteen million configurations to yield to the situation. But, ultimately, it needs to relate to the environment it will live in.

It was a fortunate accident that I ended up at Paris Diderot University and not along the tram route; it's far more beautiful and I like the university atmosphere. Physically, the location is better because the boats can cantilever over the outdoor walkways, which are really the corridors to and from the classrooms. Students, professors, and other people involved in the university walk through there every day. When I first saw the site, I knew immediately that I wanted to make a cascading form over the plaza, but when we started to install, it became a bit more improvisational. We had to situate it against markers like a tree or a door and think about how the shape would be viewed from a particular angle.

Initially, the city of Paris wanted me to use French boats for the sculpture, but I realized that there were no aluminum boats produced in France. In the end, the boats came from Northern California and some from Canada. They are so beautifully worn, the surface and its resulting patina. Though the sculpture is close to the Seine, that's not really what's important in terms of the work and the site. It's much more about the architecture of the plaza than the river environment. One could even put this sculpture in the middle of the desert because it's not really about boats; it's only about using them.

I often get asked how many boats make up the sculptures. From my point of view, asking this is like trying to embrace and perceive a Cézanne landscape by analyzing how many strokes of paint are in the painting, providing some finite yet no real understanding of the actual work of art. I'm always thinking about macro things, how something micro like molecules can make up crystals in the way they grow. I'm a

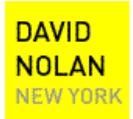
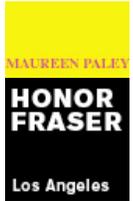
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person who handles large things comfortably, and that quality can lend itself well to these public commissions. Still, I don't really think of myself as a "public art artist." These are more just my giant sculptures.

— *As told to Mara Hoberman*

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