“What does it mean to belong?” is the question posed by the inaugural biennial Project 1: Crossed Lines by ArtPrize taking place in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The public art exhibition aims to spark dialogue around questions of access and boundaries through a showcase of public events, sculptures, art installations, and urban interventions. By asking five artists to engage with the community, temporarily alter public space, or create new space, the work exhibited also begs the question: How and for who is the city made?

The five artists selected for this year’s iteration include Amanda Browder, Heather Hart, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Olalekan Jeyifous, and Paul Amenta & Ted Lott. Each produced a piece evaluating how lines are drawn and how public and private space is determined—a theme inspired by Grand Rapids’ legacy of public art “defining and enhancing civic space” as outlined in Project 1’s mission.

A 25-ft tall metal sculpture stands upright on a wide sidewalk. The sculpture resembles an abstracted form of a high rise building and features windows of various sizes. The middle of the sculpture contains a cage-like section made of metal beams and it holds multiple red house-shaped forms.

The Boom and the Bust by Olalekan Jeyifous references the challenges of housing discrimination and urban inequality. (Bryan Esler Photography)

The Boom and the Bust is one such project that references the challenges of housing discrimination and urban inequality, past, and present. The monumental sculpture was created by Olalekan Jey-
Ifous, a Nigerian born, Brooklyn-based artist and architect whose work spans installation, large scale murals, drawing, and sculpture. The 25-foot-tall sculpture resembles an abstracted high-rise building with various styles and sizes of windows. In the center lies a cage-like structure constructed of metal beams. Inside are a collection of small red house-shaped forms.

In an interview with ArtPrize, the artist said, “Public art appeals to me because it’s high visibility for the artwork. It allows me to center the art first and put it in front of a larger public audience who may not have access to or even know about gallery openings.”

A typical roof of a single family home appears submerged into the ground. The house appears to be a small, green cottage with dormer windows. It is located in the middle of a downtown area.

Heather Hart’s Oracle of the Soulmates invites viewers to climb on and enter the submerged roof. Performances will be hosted on top of the roof throughout the exhibition. (Bryan Esler Photography)

Another highlight from the exhibition is the Oracle of the Soulmates by Brooklyn-based sculptor and performance artist, Heather Hart. Hart’s work often looks at how rooftops serve as thresholds between public and private space. She engages her viewers and activates the installations through oral histories and performances, thus transforming the everyday image of the roof into a stage in which urban space can be reclaimed and personal narratives shared.

Two of Hart's submerged rooftops can be found in Grand Rapids during the exhibition. One is located in the center of Rosa Parks Circle downtown and the other on the lawn of MLK Park. Visitors are invited to climb on the sculpture, go in the attic, and attend one of many performances staged there throughout the biennial.

Voice Bridge by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer is an interactive sound and light installation on Grand Rapids' Blue Bridge. (Bryan Esler Photography)
Hart is not the only artist in the show engaging the intersections of architecture and performance. Rafael Lozano-Hemmer does just that in his site-specific installation, Voice Bridge, which takes place along the handrails of Grand Rapids’ Blue Bridge, a pedestrian walkway that connects the east and west sides of downtown. The bridge is adorned in 400 lights controlled by the user’s voices. Participants are asked to speak into the intercoms at the end of the bridge and their recorded messages then playback as a loop across the span of the structure.

Now in its 10th year, ArtPrize is one of the world’s largest art competitions, distributing $500,000 in cash prizes by public vote and jury. Rosalynn Bliss, Mayor of Grand Rapids said in a press release, “For the last decade, ArtPrize has infused the City of Grand Rapids with unparalleled energy… this next evolution of the event will generate new ways for us all to be inspired and challenged, to come together as a community and deepen our connection.”

This year’s programming will run until October 27th. The biennial schedule for years to come is as follows:

2019 — Project 1
2020 — ArtPrize, Sept. 16-Oct. 4
2021 — Project 2
2022 — ArtPrize, Sept. 21-Oct. 9
2023 — Project 3
2024 — ArtPrize, Sept. 17-Oct. 5