Five New ArtPrize Commissions Will Transform Grand Rapids Into a Public Art Wonderland This Fall

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Heather Hart, Amanda Browder and others have revealed details of their installations.

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ArtPrize, one of the world’s largest art competitions, is entering a new chapter this fall with the launch of Project 1, a biennial that will present new works and commissions across its home city of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Now, the organization has released details on the projects, which range from the transformation of an artist studio complex into a public space for community engagement to the installation of large-scale fabric installations that wrap four skywalks in the heart of downtown.

From 2009 to 2018, ArtPrize was an annual art competition that allowed anyone over 18 to participate; winners, as chosen by the public and a jury of art experts, walk home with a combined total of $500,000. Last year, the competition switched to a biannual schedule, and the organization announced plans to launch a new biennial during the off years.

The three main locations for “Project 1: Crossing Lines” seen on a map of Grand Rapids, MI.
Unlike most biennials, Project 1 features a trim list of just five artists described as either emerging or mid-career, who have been invited to create work reflecting on the project's theme: “Crossing Lines.” The five artists—Amanda Browder, Heather Hart, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Olalekan Jeyifous, and the duo Paul Amenta and Ted Lott, in collaboration with DisArt—were selected by artistic director Kevin Buist and a committee of curatorial advisors including Larry Ossei-Mensah, senior curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit, and curator Dan Cameron.

Between September 7 to October 27, Project 1 will transform Grand Rapids into a public art playground. The central sites will be Martin Luther King Jr. Park, in the southeast side of the city; Tanglefoot, a former industrial campus now used for artist studios; and the general downtown area.

“We are interested in how lines are drawn, both literally and figuratively, throughout our city, and how these lines inform our sense of belonging,” Buist said in a statement.

Amanda Browder’s project, Kaleidoscopic, is created from the literal fabric of the community—a series of draped sculptures made up of fabric donated by Grand Rapids denizens and then sewn by local volunteers. It will be erected in MLK Park and around the skywalks that connect buildings downtown. Canadian artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, the best-known artist in the bunch, is presenting a new work on the city’s Blue Bridge, which connects the East and West sides of the Grand River, featuring a sound and light installation created from the voices of participants that will run on a loop, like a soundtrack to the light spectacle.

Other artists will create architectural installations, including Heather Hart’s twin sculptures of rooftops and Olalekan Jeyifous’s bisected and abstracted multi-story building inspired by the artist’s research into Grand Rapids’s housing policies.