

METRO PICTURES

Laster, Paul. "Pan Trees," *Time Out New York* (September 5-18, 2018): 52-53.

TimeOut

Art

Edited by Howard Halle
timeout.com/nyart @HowardHalle

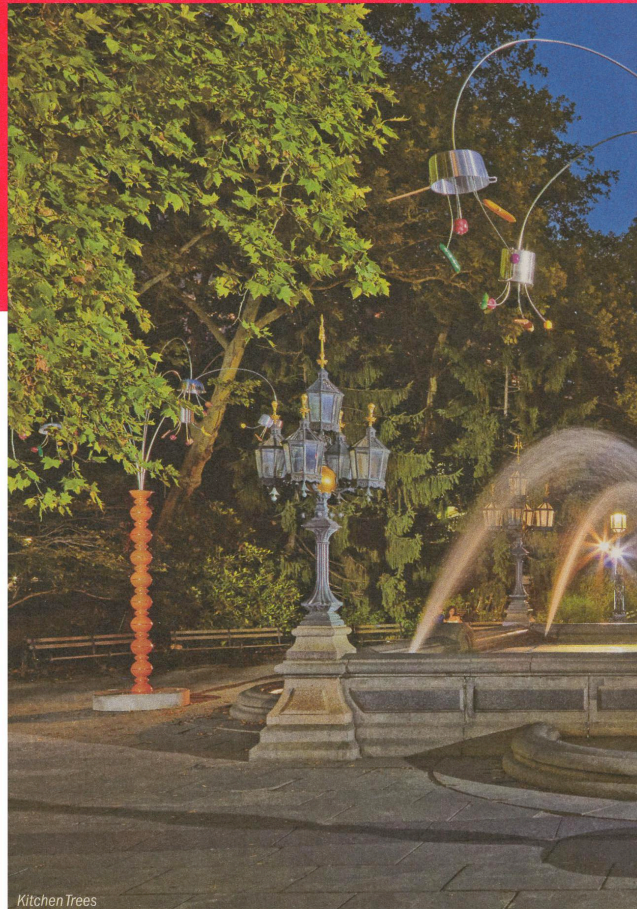
Pan trees

B. Wurtz rummages in the cupboard for his largest ever work, currently in City Hall Park. By Paul Laster
Portrait by Marisa Chafetz

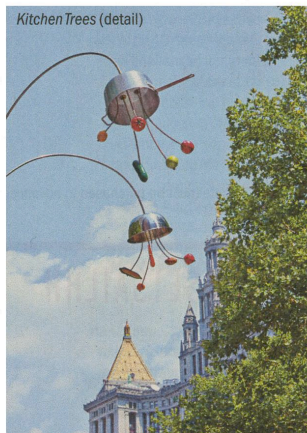
FOR 50 YEARS, California native B. Wurtz (his preferred moniker) has been employing cheap, throwaway materials to create whimsical, idiosyncratic sculptures that touch upon, as he puts it, "sleeping, eating [and] keeping warm." He labored under the radar for years, creating small-scale assemblages, but since 2011, he's enjoyed worldwide success with solo shows at major museums and galleries. Now, he's stepping into the role of outdoor artist with a Public Art Fund project at City Hall Park. Titled *Kitchen Trees*, the installation comprises arboreal forms made from pots and pans that are hung with plastic fruit. The artist recently sat down with us to discuss his new work, his passion for recycling and his fascination with plastic.

How did you wind up choosing kitchenware to compose your installation?

Since the early 1970s, I've been making assemblages out of everyday objects. I wanted people to look at things in a different way, but I also knew I needed to impose some order on the process. So, I came up with the idea of dealing with just three topics—food, clothing and shelter—which are the basics of human existence. Kitchen items fit right into the food category.



Kitchen Trees



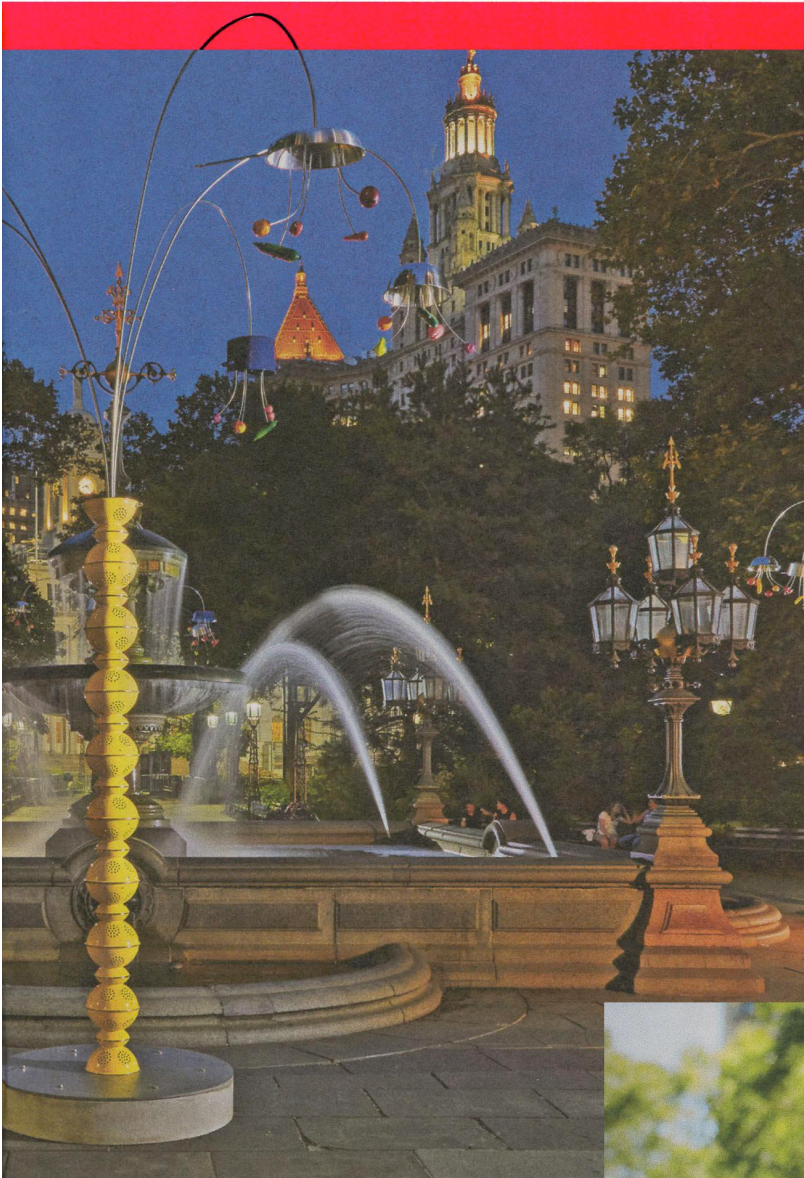
Kitchen Trees (detail)

Are you making a point about recycling? Some of the everyday objects you use are considered trash—like shopping bags, for instance.

Personally, I'm a rather militant environmentalist, and I'm extremely concerned about recycling. But my work isn't about that. I used plastic bags because they were the most ubiquitous things around; they're in the kitchen because we bring home groceries in them. But I was also attracted to them for their colors and patterns. That's how I always work: I prefer that objects come with their own kind of subject matter. That way, it keeps the meaning of the work more open-ended.

The fruit you've incorporated into this installation is also made of plastic. Do you have an interest in the material?

I really do. Plastic is the most incredible material—it's the most incredible human



“In a way, I’m not so different from an outsider artist.”

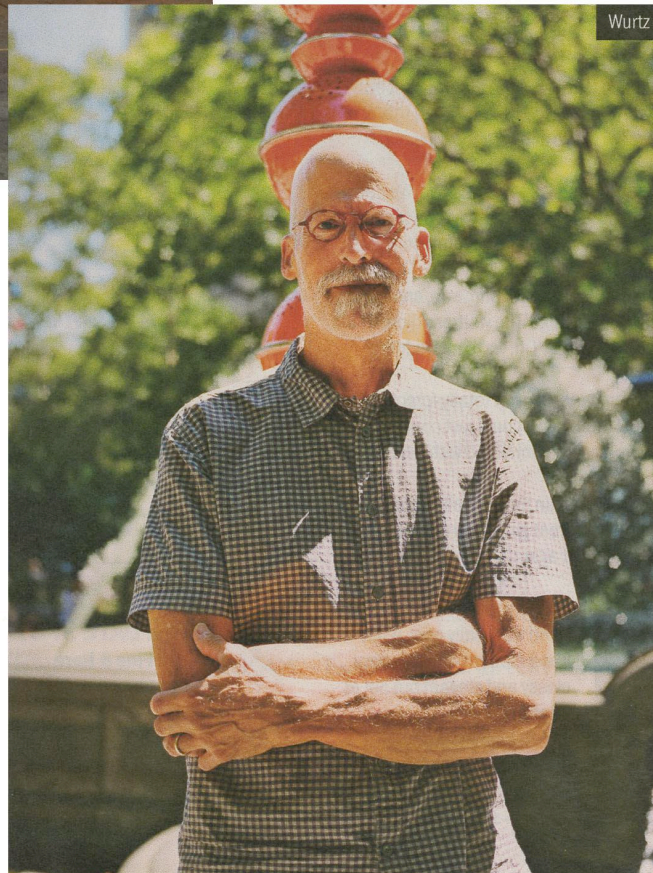
like I feel that I should go out and make more big things right away. Maybe I’ll make them once in a while, but I’m still interested in small, intimate objects.

Do you employ assistants?

For this project, yes, which was a challenge because I always make all of the work myself. I sit by myself and make my work by hand, which is a huge part of it. In a way, I’m not so different from an outsider artist.

→ B. Wurtz’s *Kitchen Trees* is at City Hall Park through Dec 7 (publicartfund.org).

Find more exciting NYC exhibitions at timeout.com/nyart.



PHOTOGRAPHS: JASON WYCHE, COURTESY OF PUBLIC ART FUND, NY; METRO PICTURES, NEW YORK; KATE MACGARRY, LONDON; MAISTERRA/BUEÑA MADRID; LISBOA AND RICHARD TELLES FINE ART, LOS ANGELES

invention. In my mind, it’s more valuable than a diamond, at least as far as what you can do with it. As far as the fruit is concerned, I did go back and forth on thinking about 3-D–printed scans of real produce. But I finally decided that it would have been too expensive and overdone.

Why do you tend to use inexpensive materials?

When I started out, I knew right away that if I was going to be an artist, I wasn’t going to make much money. I learned to live really frugally, which isn’t the worst thing in the world. That said, it’s fun to make art out of inexpensive things.

***Kitchen Trees* comprises the largest works you’ve made to date. Has it motivated you to think even bigger or will you return to smaller-scale projects?**

I’ve never done anything like this, but, for now, I’m just going to wait and see. It’s not