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NY CULTURE

Angels and Ice Flakes at Central Park Festival

Central Park Conservancy's Heartie Look Organized the Festival, And Said the Sculpture Represents Purity and Healing

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BREBECCA BRATBURD
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Sculptors at work in Central Park. Yoshio Itagaki

Wielding chain saws and chisels, artists Shintaro Okamoto, Thomas Brown and Kan Asakura went to work at Central Park on Saturday. They glanced at the 8-foot-tall bronze Angel of the Waters statue in Bethesda Terrace, then at 10 300-pound blocks of ice.

Representing Long Island City-based Okamoto Studio, the three ice sculptors worked for three hours to replicate the angelic figure as a part of Central Park Conservancy's third annual Ice Festival.

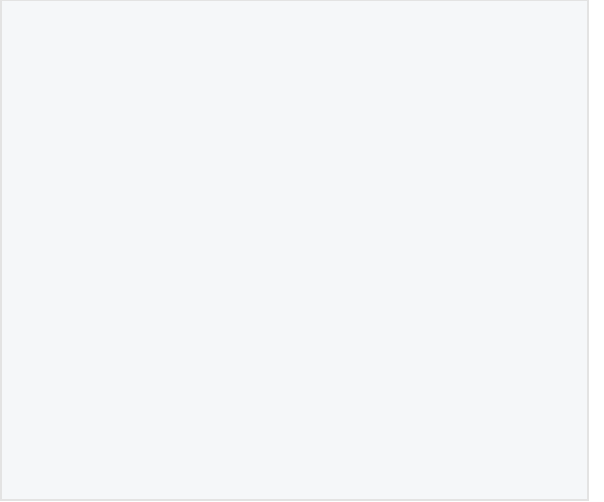
"It's a great privilege to be able to try that and to have the crowd cheer us on," Mr. Okamoto said. "To make ourselves vulnerable in front of the crowd and then work through it, it was great fun."

Some 4,000 onlookers dropped by to see the action. Some sipped hot chocolate from the Van Leeuwen truck while getting a history lesson from Central Park Conservancy's pack of volunteers.

For instance, the city unveiled the Angel of the Waters statue in 1873 as a way to commemorate the Croton Aqueduct, which supplied Manhattan with fresh water for more than a century starting in 1842. Emma Stebbins, the artist behind the sculpture, was the first woman to be commissioned for public art in New York City.

Central Park Conservancy's Heartie Look organized the festival, and said the sculpture represents purity and healing.

The ice-sculpting team carved smaller pieces inspired by sandstone sculptures at the base of the terrace's two staircases. A butterfly; a mother bird with her hatchlings; a stag; and birds on barren branches represent each of the four seasons.



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All the while, a stream of ice shavings propelled by the chain saws shot into the air.

"The electric chain saw is the first tool you pick up when you sculpt ice, no matter how small, how big or how detailed the piece is," Mr. Okamoto said.

He uses a chain saw for at least the first half every ice sculpture. "If you use chisels or saws, you have to really push or cut" into the ice, Mr. Okamoto said. "There's a lot of disturbance to the ice and it could break."

The wintry weather presented a new set of challenges. For Mr. Okamoto, rain is bad news.

"For one, make it really unpleasant for us to be outside, but once we get there we have to stack the raw blocks and they need to melt on top on each other," he said. "The rain really warms up the ice and made us nervous."

Luckily, the festival ended with a hint of sunshine and much applause for the artists.

—Rebecca Bratburd

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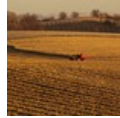


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