

Maya Pontone, "Poignant Public Artwork Honors New Yorkers Lost to AIDS,"  
*Hyperallergic*, June 27, 2023

**HYPERALLERGIC**

## Poignant Public Artwork Honors New Yorkers Lost to AIDS

Jim Hodges's sculpture "Craig's closet" sits in the heart of Greenwich Village, a neighborhood whose gay male residents were disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS.



Jim Hodges, "Craig's closet" (2023), granite and bronze, 90 x 57 x 28 1/2 inches (© Jim Hodges; all photos by Daniel Greer, courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery unless noted otherwise)

New York City's AIDS Memorial Park has a new sculpture. Unveiled at the beginning of Pride Month on June 9, "Craig's closet" (2023) by artist Jim Hodges sits in the center

lawn of the Memorial Park at St. Vincent's Triangle in Greenwich Village, where it will remain on view through May 2024.

A granite and painted bronze replica of a bedroom closet frozen in time, "Craig's closet" is an intimate interior space brought outdoors that explores the intangible experiences and memories contained in material objects left behind: shirts and jackets on hangers; filled drawers and packed shelves; stacks of untouched books and folders; bags and boxes holding unknown treasures. Its solemn black color is a distinct contrast against the striking white of the park's triangular monument and the facade of the Greenwich Village Lenox Hospital that peaks through the green tree foliage in the background. From the front, Hodges's sculpture depicts a crowded closet coated in black full of minute details that each tell a story; from the back, these features are condensed into a monochromatic wall whose only details are the sunlight and shadows bouncing off its watery surface.

The sculpture is a copy of the closet belonging to New York City musician Craig Ducote, with whom Hodges lived until he passed away in 2016. But although the work's details and specific name allude to Hodges's personal experiences, the sculpture focuses on a collective understanding of loss that stretches beyond its origins.

"The inspiration for a work from the site of Craig's closet occurred shortly after Craig's death in 2016, but it took a couple of years to formally begin the process of making it," Hodges told *Hyperallergic* over email.

Hodges explained that he first compiled a photo archive of the original closet in May 2017, and a year later, he enlisted the Portland sculpting studio Form 3D Foundry to take three-dimensional scans of the real-life closet and build a digital rendering of the sculpture. The next three years were spent exploring potential materials for its



construction and he eventually settled on black granite sourced from Italy's Garfangana Innovazione. Hodges said he opted for bronze castings "for delicate details that could not be realized in carved stone" that were made at the Walla Walla Foundry in Washington.



Left: A close-up view of "Craig's closet"(2023) from the front (photo by Daniel Greer); right: A view of Hodges's sculpture from the back, which only depicts a monochromatic black wall (photo Maya Pontone/*Hyperallergic*)

On a recent Thursday afternoon, hurried passersby and park visitors seemed unaware of the striking dark sculpture situated in the grassy clearing. Sitting on the benches lining the park's perimeter and splayed across the stone steps leading to the lawn, many appeared oblivious that afternoon to the park's new centerpiece as they continued to scroll through

their smartphones or converse with friends in typical New York fashion. But Sumit Kaur, who stumbled upon the memorial while exploring downtown Manhattan, found herself immediately drawn to the dark closet when she entered the park from its northeast corner.

“The textures have been beautifully executed: the shirts, the jackets, the creases in the bag — they are really beautiful,” Kaur told *Hyperallergic*.

Formerly the chief architect for urban planning in the Indian city of Chandigarh, Kaur said that she has always been fascinated by the use of public spaces. She was particularly interested in the specific objects displayed in “Craig’s closet,” such as what appears to be a rolled-up yoga mat at the sculpture’s base and the contents of the mysterious bag on the closet’s top shelf.

“Art is meant for interpretation in your own way,” Kaur said. “You might not necessarily follow the lead of the artist. I think everybody will look at it in their own perspective based on their experiences, and their background, and look at things differently.”

The NYC AIDS Memorial Park is located in the heart of Greenwich Village, a neighborhood whose gay male residents were disproportionately affected by the disease in the late 20th century. The site of the park is near the former location of St. Vincent’s Hospital, a frontline center during the HIV/AIDS crisis that was also the location for many LGBTQ+ activist demonstrations. Before the nine-building hospital complex was sold and converted into residential housing in 2011, the health center was once home to the first and largest AIDS ward on the Eastern seaboard — historically referred to as “ground zero” during the epidemic. In addition to St. Vincent’s, many other historical sites are within blocks of the memorial, including the LGBT Community Center, the original headquarters of the Gay Men’s Health Crisis (GMHC), and the former office of

community physician Dr. Joseph Sonnabend, who helped lead the effort for AIDS treatment and later co-founded the AIDS Medical Foundation. The memorial park was built on top of the site of the hospital's now-demolished Materials Handling Center, where medical supplies and the bodies of deceased patients were transported through underground tunnels.



The NYC AIDS Memorial Park sits in the heart of Greenwich Village. (photo Maya Pontone/*Hyperallergic*)

Located at the trisection of Seventh Avenue, Greenwich Avenue, and West 12th Street, the triangular park opened to the public in December 2016 on World AIDS Day to commemorate those who lost their lives to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and honor the activists and healthcare workers who continue to fight stigma, discrimination, and the systemic neglect of HIV-positive people. Since its opening, the memorial park has hosted many installations and events through its public arts program, including works by Jean-Michel Othoniel, Steven Evans, and Jenny Holzer.

“Craig’s closet” is being presented alongside a series of programs and musical performances. Its unveiling earlier this month was accompanied by a concert by Tender Ness and Jamie Reynolds. This Thursday, June 29 at 6pm, the park will host a poetry reading featuring poet Pamela Sneed with composer-musicians Natalie Greffel and Mazz Swift.

“Art generates endless opportunities to expand its presence and multiply its usefulness, function, necessity,” Hodges told *Hyperallergic*. “For many years I’ve invited artists to use occasions and contexts to respond and add. In a similar spirit that I was invited to give a response to the occasion, I extend the offer to others. Because ‘Craig’s closet’ will be on view for a year, it offers me the opportunity to engage other artists and invite them to use the piece, the time, the inspiration, and the space for their own work.”

Dave Harper, executive director of the NYC AIDS Memorial, hopes that the new installation will encourage people to “remember those lost, reflect on the past, and renew themselves to continue the fight to end AIDS.”

“We also hope they will forge personal connections between individual and collective memory in relation to a complex history and this significant and sacred site,” Harper said.