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MIKE STARN

Depending on how you look at it, "Big Bambú," a new installation by the artists Mike and Doug Starn, brings to mind a cross-section of bone viewed under a microscope or a game of pickup sticks that has been abandoned by an extremely large child. But the artists, 47-year-old identical twins and fixtures in the New York art scene since the '80s, say that this is what their work has always been about: playing with scale and, ultimately, our perceptions of where we stand in the world.

The piece, which is made from 2,000 bamboo poles lashed together with some 16 miles of nylon rope, was assembled under the artists' direction by a team of about a dozen rock climbers over a period of 10 weeks. Seemingly self-generating, "Big Bambú" grew from within itself, without the support of external scaffolding, making it more akin to a living organism than anything constructed by human hands. At its highest point the random matrix skims the ceiling of the nearly-50-foot factory space (the former home of the Tallix foundry, in Beacon, N.Y., known for fabricating sculptures for artists like Jeff Koons, Frank Stella and Louise Bourgeois) and coheres into an elegant arch.

"Why we need to work on *this* scale, I don't know," says Mike, adding that after overcoming their initial feeling of intimidation, the two found themselves wishing the ceilings were another 20 feet higher. The artists have even encouraged visitors to the studio to try their hands at free-climbing the piece. "It's so much fun getting to the top," Doug says.

The first pole was posted last September, and "Big Bambú" will be open to the public in May (Charles Renfro of Diller Scofidio & Renfro helped to design a viewing platform that will frame the piece from the second floor). Still, it remains a work in progress. Later this spring, the Starns plan to start "walking" the piece across the factory floor and back again, generating forward momentum by removing poles from the original mass and reattaching them at the front. As Mike says, "It's always finished and it's never finished." ALIX BROWNE

Photographed by Jason Schmidt in Beacon, N.Y.

