

# All tangled up in Manhattan

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A jungle has sprouted from the Metropolitan Museum's sedate rooftop. Shoots of supple bamboo jut, twine and cantilever above neat box hedges, towering over the picturesque paths and lush, leafy greens of Central Park. This is "Big Bambú: You Can't, You Don't, and You Won't Stop", a highbrow playground, realised on a monumental scale by a team of rock-climbers, craftsmen and dreamers.

This meditation on construction and entropy sprang from the minds of Doug and Mike Starn, 48-year-old identical twins best known, until now, as photographers of trees, leaves and snowflakes. "Big Bambú" is bolder and noisier.

It grows and changes daily, bends in the wind and creaks under the weight of climbers who scamper about the unruly structure, lashing together 5,000 poles, each 30 or 40 feet long, with lengths of coloured nylon. Wobbliness is a permanent part of the design: it will continue to sway and grumble as guides lead small groups of visitors in rubber-soled shoes (no sandals or high heels!) over the rickety catwalk.

The piece is both childlike and resolutely adult, a fortress tower and an evolving organism. It's a metaphor for childhood seeping into adulthood and lingering there. "It represents me – in that I am who I was, and I am completely different than I was when I was a little boy," Doug Starn writes.

Those who aren't up for clambering – or who can't score one of the scarce timed tickets – can still wander among the giant stands of woody grass. The scale of the vegetation seems to shrink the visitor, instantly collapsing all those arduously bolstered boundaries between inner child and outer adult. "The reason we had to make it so big is to make all of us feel small," Starn explains. "Once we are aware of our true stature we can feel part of something more vast than we could ever have dreamed before."

Fusing architecture, performance and sculpture, the maze-like arrangement taps into a whimsical vein of secret gardens, haunted woods, secluded tree houses and uncharted jungles. It's a nest of fairy tales and mystery, hovering over the hectic urban matrix.

In the centre, the bamboo stalks soar like cathedral columns, creating spooky, muted vaults. At the rough



Playground art: The 'Big Bambú' installation in New York

and ragged edges, the piece evokes the joy of controlled chaos as if vapours of Manhattan craziness had crystallised on the museum's rooftop trellis.

"Big Bambú" evokes dynamic networks on both smaller and vaster scales: electronic pathways on a computer's motherboard, arteries traversing the body, subway lines snaking through the city, individuals enmeshed in society.

The Met has tackled these analogies on its rooftop before: last summer, Roxy Paine used it as a stage for "Maelstrom", a wintry forest of downed stainless steel trees. But while Paine's branches appeared to have been snapped and scattered by some malevolent, unruly force, the Starns' installation looks more tenderly on the relationship between human beings and nature.

Instead of suggesting organisms uprooted, smacked down and metallised, "Big Bambú" will continue to grow. By the time the piece comes down in October, the suspended pathway will terminate 50 feet above the museum, and the structure will extend more than 5,000 square feet.

Only the relentless schedule of seasons and exhibitions nips its spread; otherwise it feels as if the tropical scaffolding could keep spreading indefinitely, overflowing the roof, throwing suspension bridges across Fifth Avenue, and climbing wildly into the sky. [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org)

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