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Nine Massive Humans Move Into Rockefeller Center

By [JAMES BARRON](#)



Michael Nagle for The New York Times Workers installed one of nine statues by the artist Ugo Rondinone at Rockefeller Center on Monday morning. Each statue weighs 17½ tons.

It is double-take time for the blasé New York types who do not pay much attention to what is in front of 30 Rockefeller Plaza the rest of the year — that is, the 10 or so months between when one tree comes down and the next one goes up.

The streetscape has changed drastically in the last few days with the arrival of massive stone statues by the Swiss artist Ugo Rondinone. They are part of an art installation called “Human Nature” that had to be maneuvered into place by cranes in the middle of the night. Each statue weighs 17½ tons, which is 7½ tons more than the tree.

But there is only one tree. There are nine statues.

“It’s the ultimate combination of art and engineering,” said Keith M. Douglas, the managing director for Rockefeller Center at Tishman Speyer, the real estate firm that controls Rockefeller Center.

He said the plaza could hold 300 pounds per square foot, and the installation brought the load to only about 250 pounds per square foot, even with several layers of concrete that are being poured to anchor the statues, with their towering legs, massive torsos and block-shaped heads.

Over the years, Rockefeller Center has been the setting for other large art displays: Jeff Koons’s giant terrier, fashioned from 70,000 flowering plants; Louise Bourgeois’s nine-ton bronze spider; and Takashi Murakami’s 30-foot Buddha-like figure with multiple arms. “Human Nature” is the first since 2008, when the recession was closing in. It is also the first to be spread out in front of the G.E. Building.

“Seventy-six hundred square feet of sculpture,” said Nicholas Baume, director of the [Public Art Fund](#), which helped organize the project.

Mr. Douglas said he remembered the moment when Mr. Rondinone first described what he had in mind: A large-scale transformation of the plaza.

“My first thought was how big,” Mr. Douglas said. “He was saying ‘huge colossal sculptures,’ and I’m thinking, ‘In comparison to what?’ and multiplying times nine.” He said that when Mr. Rondinone delivered renderings, the scale and shape were “exactly right.”

Mr. Rondinone made the sculptures of bluestone from a quarry in Pennsylvania and left the stone surfaces rough and then cut them into slabs and blocks, forming primitive-looking figures that proved unexpectedly sturdy: “Ugo had one standing at the quarry during Sandy,” Mr. Douglas said, referring to Hurricane Sandy last fall. “Didn’t move a muscle.”

Mr. Baume said that Mr. Rondinone has a country house “five minutes away” from the quarry, “but until this, had never worked with bluestone.” He said Mr. Rondinone was “gifted at coming up with site-specific designs,” and Mr. Rondinone said he went to the plaza every day for a couple of weeks last November. “Before the tree,” he said.

He said the huge, coarse figures stand in contrast to the 70-floor building. “This is the most highly developed part of America, Midtown,” Mr. Rondinone said. “To bring in something so basic is very powerful.”

He said he made 50 miniature statues and named them before deciding which to choose for the full-scale treatment. He said the statue closest to 50th Street was “Joy,” and he pointed to “Excitement,” “Glad” and “Uplifting.”

"I don't remember them all," he said. "But it's not an intellectual work. It's a work you have to feel."