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Inside Art

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Otterness's Playground

A playground filled with the Brooklyn artist Tom Otterness's whimsical bronze characters is being installed in what will be a two-and-a-half acre park on West 42nd Street between 11th and 12th Avenues. The space is part of two apartment complexes that will be home to some 2,200 residents and is being built by the Manhattan developer Larry A. Silverstein.

He discovered the playground through a Marlborough Gallery catalog and learned there were three. "I called the gallery and asked if any of them existed," Mr. Silverstein said in a telephone interview.

The answer was yes, but only in private collections. So he flew to Cape Cod to visit one of them. "I fell in love with the damn thing," Mr. Silverstein said.

The work, which measures 24.5 feet tall, 30 feet long and nearly 33 feet wide, was originally conceived in 2004 as an entry in a competition for an artwork in a public park in Milwaukee. Although Mr. Otterness didn't win, he made the playground anyway, in an edition of six, and has been able to place three on the grounds of private homes, in Cape Cod; Palm Beach, Fla.; and Aspen, Colo. The New York park where Mr. Otterness's playground will be permanently installed will open to the public in early spring.

"In my brain I always wanted to create anthropomorphic architecture," Mr. Otterness said by phone. "And this is like architecture."

His playground features 27 figures (six inches each), but it's dominated by a giant smiling character whose legs are slides and whose head is a lookout tower.

"Kids can also look through the eyes as if waking up with a 35-foot-long body," Mr. Otterness said.