

# Fun with Inflatables

Blowing up the Art World

# The Ghost Army

The 23rd Headquarters Special Troops, also known as the "Ghost Army," brought together artists, career military officers and audio experts in a unique unit devoted to the art of deception — "the first mobile, multimedia, tactical deception unit in U.S. Army history," [according to the National WWII Museum](#) in New Orleans. The museum features a number of Ghost Army artifacts in the special exhibit "[Ghost Army: The Combat Con Artists of World War II](#)," on display until Jan. 3, 2021.

Using a combination of science and art, the Ghost Army staged nearly two dozen missions between May 1944 and 1945 with the sole purpose of tricking Nazi troops about the whereabouts of Allied forces in Europe. In the process, their efforts saved the lives of thousands of Allied soldiers. Its existence was kept secret for more than 40 years after the war's end; the Ghost Army remained officially classified until the mid-1990s, according to the WWII Museum.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDNIQuTbVC4> (4 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6g1H3GJqBkc> (Trailer to the movie)

- <https://chatnewstoday.ca/2021/03/05/from-military-tactic-to-90s-bedroom-staple-the-history-of-inflatable-furniture/>









# Inflatable Architecture

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmp-DtkE\\_qE&t=30s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmp-DtkE_qE&t=30s)
- <https://www.trendhunter.com/slideshow/inflatable-architecture>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vgoa007BHTo>
- <https://www.dezeen.com/tag/inflatable-architecture/>











# History of Inflatable Art

From children toys to military industry air-filled forms have found its purpose in almost every segment of human life, including art. Though the roots of **inflatable art** can be found in 18th-century hot air balloons that were at times embellished with striking art designs, until recently inflatable objects were associated almost solely with advertising, children entertainment and holiday decorations. Inflatable art is a relatively recent form that originated in the 1960s when artists [Andy Warhol](#) and [Claes Oldenburg](#) created their first air-filled pieces whose purpose was purely artistic. Andy Warhol's 1966 *Silver Clouds* installation composed of numerous pillows-like objects filled with helium and oxygen represents a pivotal work in that regard. Inflatable art reached its peak in the works by [Jeff Koons](#) and [Paul McCarthy](#) who used inflatable artworks to blow up everyday objects to the point of unfamiliarity, thus detaching them from their usual appearance and purpose. And while the inflatable art by Jeff Koons still keeps the likeable form of the adorable objects on which it's based on, artist Paul McCarthy newer fails to gross us out, by adding a touch of malice to cherished childhood myths and icons and by placing them in violent or sexually deviant situations.

Today inflatable art seems to be more prevalent than ever with an incising number of air-filled peaces created an over the globe after 2010. Many artists use inflatables to explore the complex subject matter such as identity and violence but also question the role of materials in art. Playing with scale, color and the **lightness of balloons**, these artists have always been keen to experiment and break additional grounds.



Andy Warhol

<https://www.publiair.com/project/inflatable-art>



# Jeff Koons

In *Inflatable Flower (Tall Orange) Corner*, conceived in 1979, a tall inflatable flower with vibrant orange petals and a yellow center perches, perkily, atop an open structure of mirrored glass tiles that fits into a corner on the floor. The mirrors reflect the surroundings bringing to mind affirmation. The tall vinyl inflatable flower, multiplied in the mirror's reflection, is associated with fertility, the cycle of life, and springtime. The *Inflatables* series acts as a “poetic vehicle through which to conjure states of equilibrium and instability, fullness and emptiness, joy and disgust, life and death—the prosaic objects of the outer world made lapidary mirrors of our inner ones.” (S. Rothkopf, “No Limits,” *Jeff Koons*, exh. cat., New York, 2014, p. 17).

In the late 1970s, Koons's interest in the readymade manifested itself in his East Village apartment, where he installed found objects he collected downtown, including various inflatable toys and dollar store treasures. The result was a boisterous and absurd satire, a surreal and subversive interrogation of high versus low art. Colorful arrangements including inflatable flowers with anthropomorphic qualities were displayed on pre-cut mirrored glass tiles throughout the room, creating a dialogue between Pop Art and Minimalism. All at once, the installation was both an homage to Andy Warhol's silkscreened flowers of the '60s while also recalling Arte Povera and Minimalism.

- <https://www.cnn.com/videos/international/2014/12/19/spc-talk-asia-jeff-koons-b.cnn>





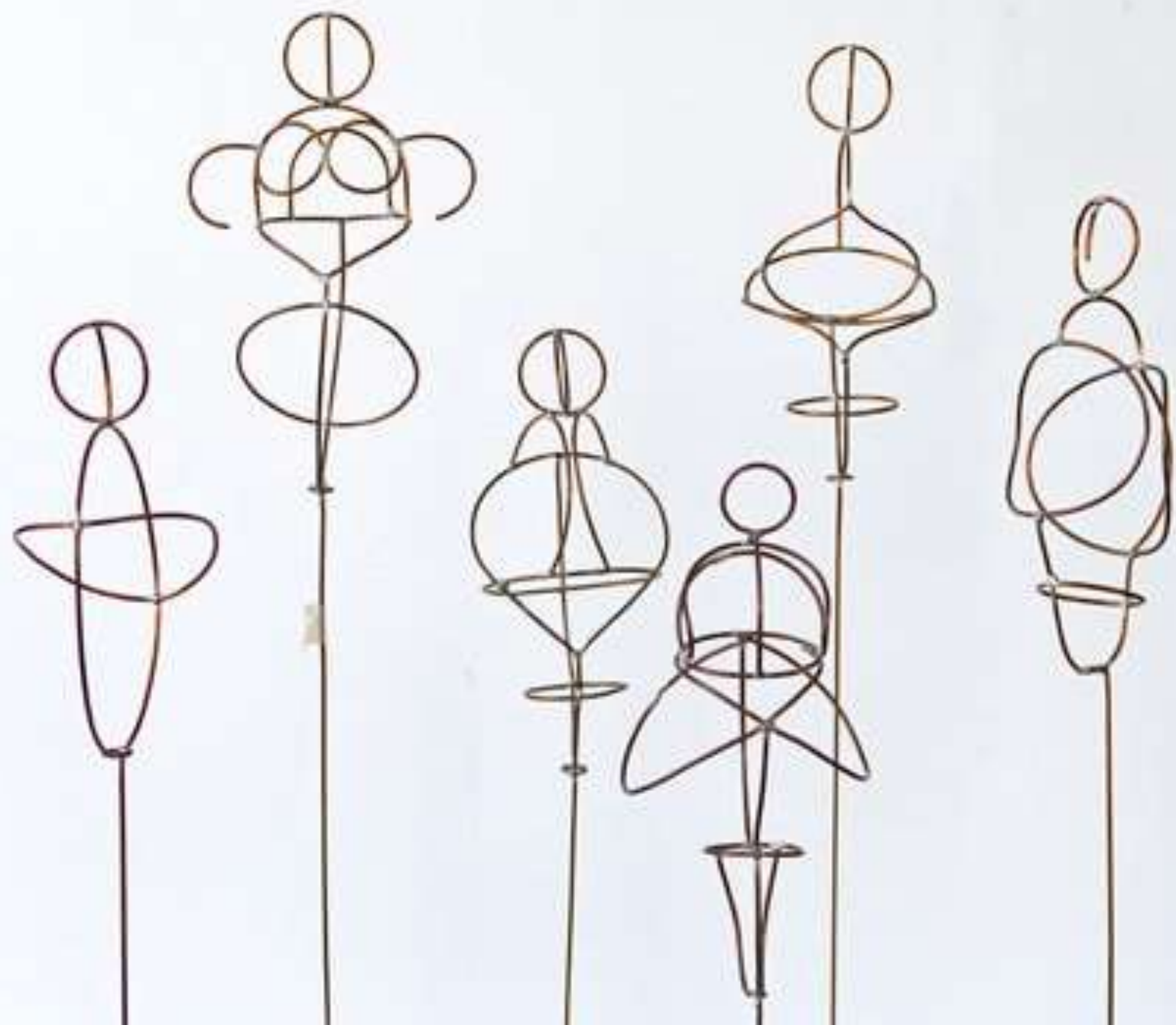




# Reddish Studio

Although research suggests the ancient Venus figurines were created as [totems of survival](#) amid a changing climate, the enigmatic forms continue to puzzle historians, their exact cultural context and relevance unknown. The mysterious statues, with exaggerated physical features like large, distended bellies and generally plump appendages, recently inspired a playful project by Naama Steinbock and Idan Friedman, the designers behind [Reddish Studio](#) based in Tel Aviv-Jaffa.

Titled “Venus of Jaffa,” the series interprets the prehistoric sculptures as lighthearted, impermanent forms. Each figure is structured with a thin, copper frame designed to hold a balloon. Once inflated, the latex—the studio used neutral tones to evoke both flesh and the original earthenware—puffs around the armature to form the supple curves of a female body. In a statement, the studio describes the works, which were originally shown at [Jerusalem](#)













# Air Dancers

Where did those dancing inflatable men, called AirDancers or “tall boys”, originally come from? **Trinidadian Carnival artist Peter Minshall created these long-armed, long-legged, exuberant dancers — plastic, body-shaped tubes set on fans — for the 1996 Summer Olympics.**

- <https://thekidshouldseethis.com/post/the-origin-of-the-dancing-inflatable-tube-man>



# Paweł Althamer

Polish Contemporary sculptor **Paweł Althamer** placed this massive large-scale portrait of himself in various public places all over the globe where it served as a kind of a temporary [public sculpture](#). The nude image of a man floating in the sky aims to redefine the traditional perception of the art of sculpture while simultaneously referencing the human desire of having an ability to fly. The artist simultaneously looks down on the viewers like some sort of modern divinity but also remains vulnerable to the judgment of passerby's eyes.

One of Many





# Tam Wai Ping

Tam Wai Ping's *Falling into the Mundane World* reference the populous reality of life in Hong Kong but also the issues concerning our modern society. The images of a woman and a cockroach turned upside down and immersed into the ground represent the omnipresent indifference toward the violence in the modern world. But the artwork also references the contemporary art and its propensity toward producing spectacle.

<https://publicdelivery.org/inflatable-sculptures-occupy-a-park-in-hong-kongs-city-center/>



# Tadao Cern

The rising star of contemporary art scene **Tadao Cern** [attracted the attention of the media](#) and the crowd at this year's ART.FAIR Cologne with his *Black Balloons*, inflatable art series. The artist used both heavy and light gas to create two lines of balloons that represent each other's reflection in space. Beautifully simple and polished to the max, the minimalist yet fascinating monochromatic artwork by Tadao Cern evokes the feeling of **childlike curiosity** while simultaneously evoking the emotions of panic, excitement, humility, and admiration.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYl3pTI9tk0&t=7s>







# Virginia Melnyk

This vibrant, lightweight geodesic dome was built from off-the-shelf inflatable beach rings— symbols of summertime fun. The multi-colored pavilion was constructed as part of the C!here Art Crawl in Beijing, forming an intimate space within a public area; in this instance, it sat within a large housing development in the city. Artist Virginia Melnyk hoped that being inside the colorful pavilion would provide visitors with a new perspective of their urban surroundings. After the event, the inflatable pool toys were donated to a charity for local children to enjoy.





# Arata Isozaki and Anish Kapoor—Ark Nova

Created two years after a major earthquake and tsunami hit Japan in 2011, Ark Nova was intended to bring culture and spirit to communities still rebuilding after the devastation. Conceived by the architect and artist team of Arata Isozaki and Anish Kapoor as a travelling concert hall, the 30 m (110 ft) diameter, 18 m (60 ft) high, eggplant-hued, air-filled membrane could be transported to a venue, inflated, then deflated and folded, ready to travel to the next location. The uninterrupted internal space could accommodate five hundred people, and held events such as jazz concerts, performing arts shows and exhibitions.

<https://anishkapoor.com/4869/ark-nova-2017>







# Atelier Sisu

Whether illuminated by the sun or spotlights, the undulating layers of [Atelier Sisu](#)'s playful installations are a presence in public spaces. The Sydney-based studio, which is a collaboration between artists Renzo B. Larriviere and Zara Pasfield, celebrates community interaction and joy in their vibrant, inflatable designs. A buttress between art and architecture, their practice focuses on the interaction between art and the surrounding environment. "Our aim is not simply to create something beautiful or a temporary sculpture but to re-interpret our public spaces through architectural choices," the studio says in a statement.

<https://www.cultureliverpool.co.uk/atelier-sisu-evanescent/>

<https://www.facebook.com/vividsydney/videos/1057007651571684/>





















# Matthew Szösz

The art of blown glass takes on new meaning in [Matthew Szösz's \*Inflatables\*](#) series. About 15 years ago, the artist was interested in challenging assumptions about how the material could be worked and what form it could take. "In the craft and design field, the way that we make things has a profound effect on what we make," he tells Colossal. "Blown glass and thrown pots are round; houses and furniture are rectangular. I spend a good portion of my time experimenting with process to try and use a new way of making to create new families of objects and forms." The resulting sculptures capture a playful tension between fragility and strength, ephemerality and durability.

<https://www.thisiscolossal.com/2022/11/matthew-szosz-inflatables/> (1:20)

<https://americanart.si.edu/artist/matthew-szosz-30195> (show first)













# Pneuhhaus

A spectrum of glowing light pulses through 23 inflated columns that ascend from the ground in [Pneuhhaus](#)'s new public installation, illuminating an invisible world just beneath our feet. For *Grove*, the Rhode Island-based design collective drew inspiration from an ancient biological structure known as the [mycorrhizal network](#). Often referred to as the “wood wide web,” the underground system is characterized by a complex symbiotic relationship between certain types of fungi and the roots of trees, enabling them to communicate with one another and share nutrients.

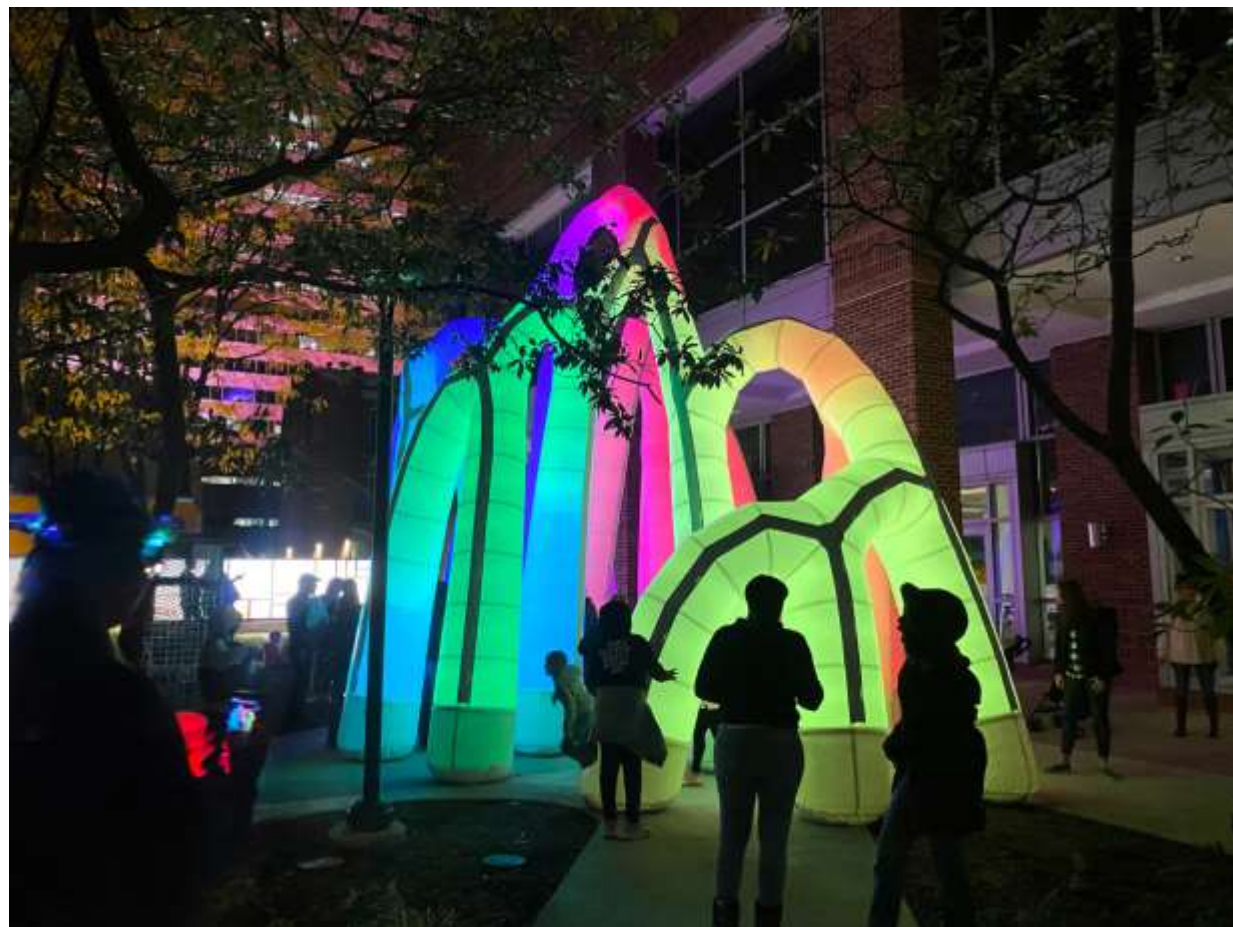
*Grove*'s inflatable, branching arches invite visitors to gather and wander through a colorful, forest-like installation, drawing parallels between the web and the support networks communities rely on to nurture unity and growth. “Nature builds in relationships,” Pneuhhaus says, “(and) for *Grove*, we followed that lesson to create a transportive space designed to excite and support community gathering.”

*Grove* was designed for [BLINK Cincinnati](#) to mark the festival's return following cancellations due to the pandemic. To construct the complex, organic shape, Pneuhhaus utilized a unique algorithm inspired by the way slime molds move around in search of food. “Integrating this kind of living logic enabled us to design a form that expresses a truly root-like connectivity,” the team says. They also teamed up with [Smooth Technology](#) to incorporate vibrant lighting and interactive animations.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMZP-RyqL18&t=29s>







# Joshua Allen Harris

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PH6xCT2aTSo>















# Masayoshi Matsumoto

Armed with colorful balloons and plenty of air, [Masayoshi Matsumoto](#) ([previously](#)) twists and ties a playfully quirky menagerie of inflatable creatures. A chemical engineer by day, the artist spends his off hours stretching the malleable material into a sticky-fingered tree frog or plump squirrel, elevating the creations typically associated with children's birthday parties or carnivals into elaborate sculptural works.

Matsumoto is loyal to the bendable material and forgoes paints, glues, and other fasteners, and many of the animals accentuate the shape of the balloons themselves: deflated tips resemble claws and puffed oblongs hang like shaggy fur or splay upward like a rooster's crest.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/tv/lifestyle/art-japan-party-animals-balloon-b2214630.html>

<https://www.collater.al/en/incredible-balloon-art-masayoshi-matsumoto/>









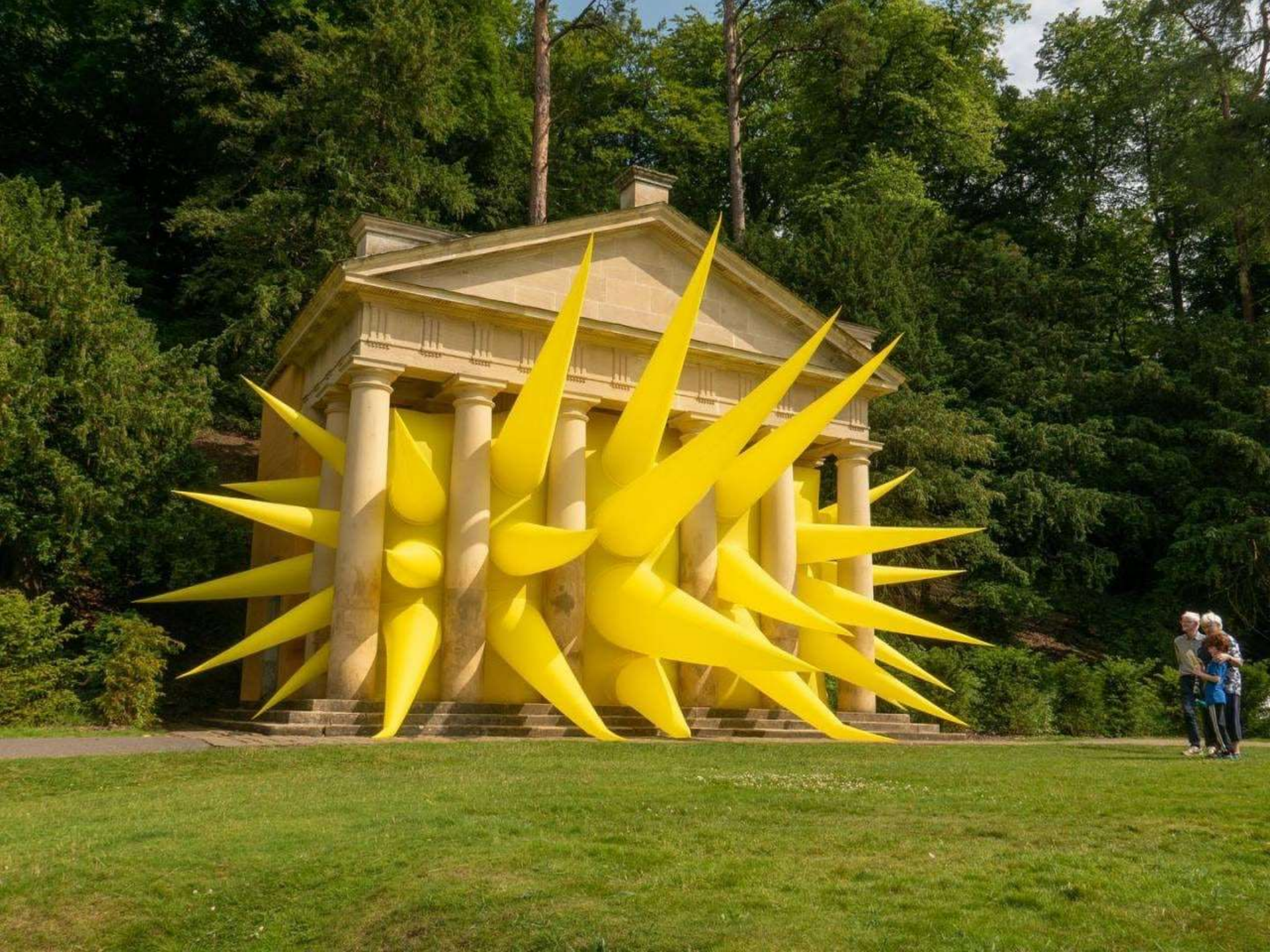
# Steve Messam

U.K.-based artist [Steve Messam](#) is known for his [artistic interventions](#) in the landscape, reinterpreting historical monuments, buildings, or rural areas with bold, ephemeral installations. Often inflated, his works reimagine or disrupt perceptions of our surroundings and impact how people move around and through them. Bright colors and striking forms that jut from colonnades, facades, and river banks prompt viewers to consider their relationships to the built environment.

As part of [BlowUp Art Den Haag](#), a three-week outdoor exhibition featuring large-scale, temporary, inflatable artworks throughout The Hague, the artist has unveiled new work marking two notable locations. For one, a bronze statue of William I, or Willem de Oranje, who founded the Netherlands as an independent nation, a tube of green spikes playfully encircles the monument, transforming the atmosphere of the main square it overlooks.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CzRBCMRATlc&t=4s>

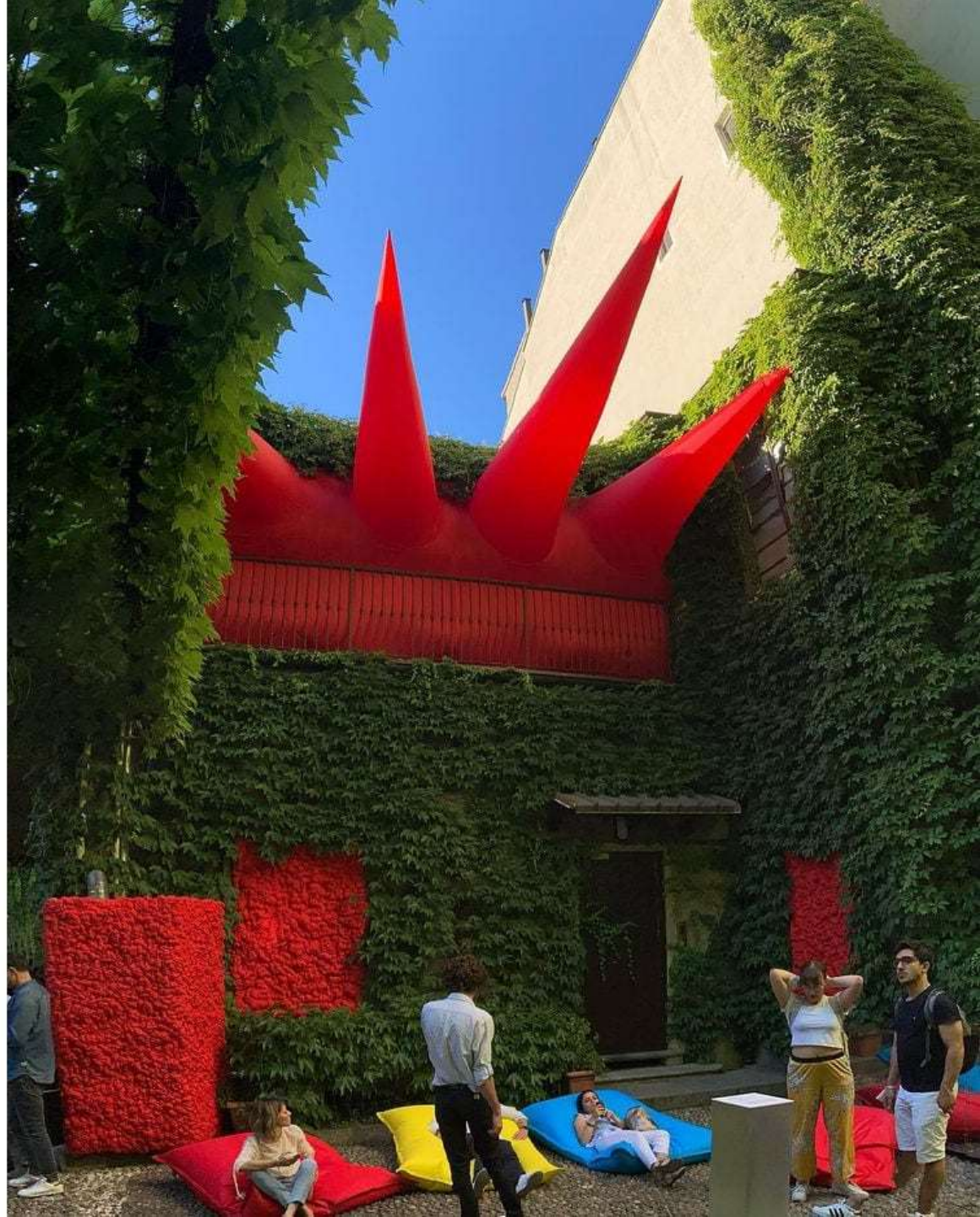




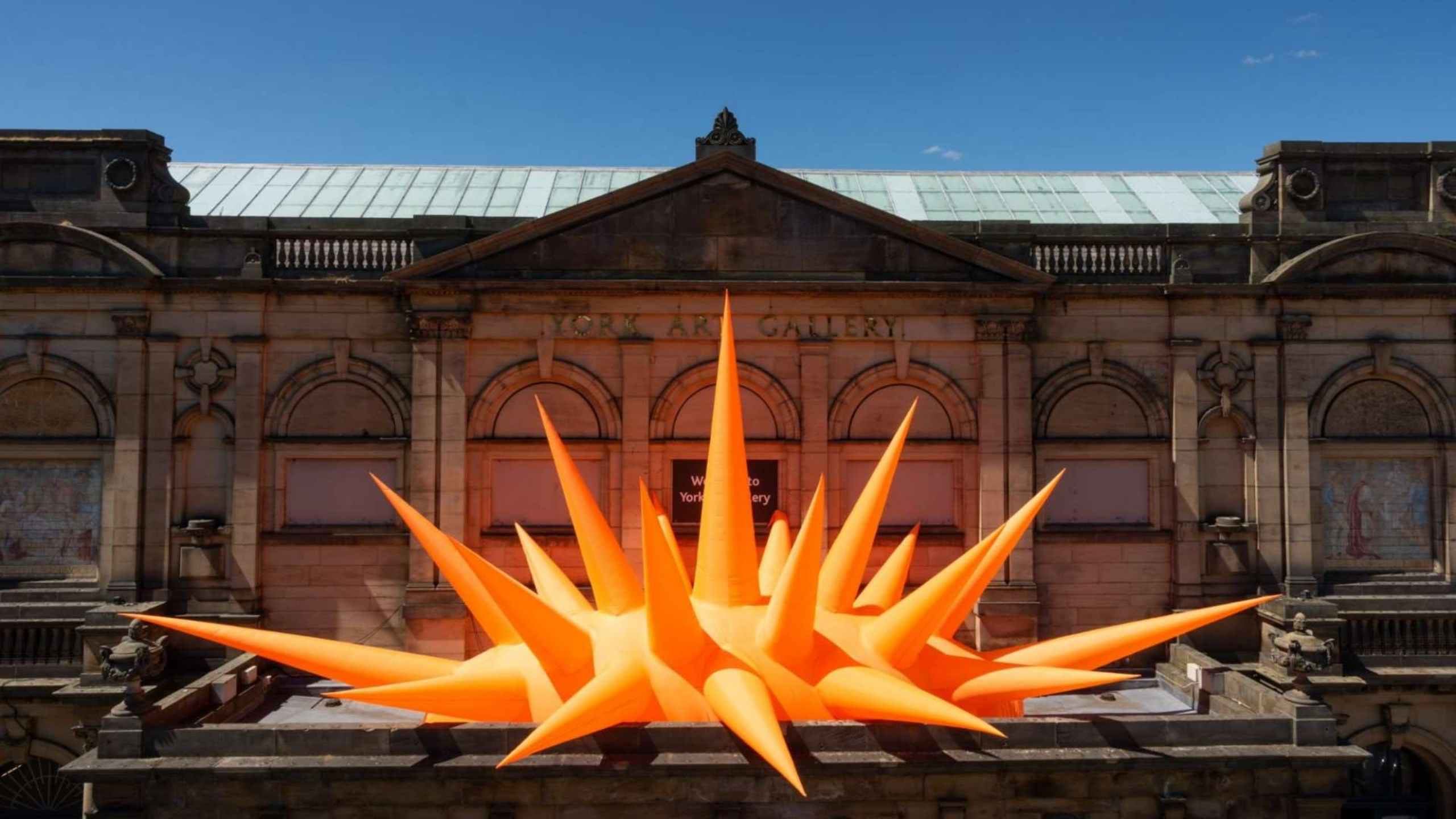














# Inflatable Show in San Francisco

The [Exploratorium](#) summer show, curated by Colossal, has filled the museum and exploration space to the roof—literally!—with eye-catching, mind-boggling, and joy-inducing interactive inflatable art. Take a peek at the exhibit, which includes artwork by Shih Chieh Huang, Jason Hackenwerth, Amanda Parer, Jimmy Kuehnle, and Pneuhaus. ‘Inflatable’ is on view through September 3, 2018 in San Francisco. Find out more on the Exploratorium [website](#).

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzz-zNR7CIQ&t=12s>

# Kurt Perschke

Started in 2001, the ongoing *RedBall Project* is a globetrotting temporary art intervention. A huge red vinyl sphere measuring 4 1/2 m (15 ft) in diameter and weighing 114 kg (250 lb), it is squeezed into unexpected, interstitial spaces including bridges, public squares and buildings. While undoubtedly playful, the ball also creates a sense of unease, squashed as it is into areas that appear too small. To date, *RedBall* has travelled through thirty cities, including Toronto, Paris and Sydney. A new site is chosen for the ball every day, with its installation in each place lasting between one and two weeks.

<https://www.unc.edu/discover/redball-project-rolls-into-chapel-hill/>









# Shih Chieh Huang

Technology, electronics, and everyday materials collide in Taiwanese artist [Shih Chieh Huang](#)'s responsive sculptures. Huang, who is based in New York, will be installing *Guardian of the Disphotic*, a fleet of interconnected sculptures that move and breathe in response to their environment.

[https://www.ted.com/talks/shih\\_chieh\\_huang\\_sculptures\\_that\\_d\\_be\\_at\\_home\\_in\\_the\\_deep\\_sea](https://www.ted.com/talks/shih_chieh_huang_sculptures_that_d_be_at_home_in_the_deep_sea)

<https://www.worcesterart.org/exhibitions/reusable-universes-shih-chieh-huang/>











# Jason Hackenwerth

[Jason Hackenwerth](#), renowned for his massive balloon sculptures that often simulate the universal biology of living things, will be building an inflated sculpture comprised of thousands of hand-tied balloons.

*Cauldron Veil* will be built in front of the public at the Exploratorium in the days before the exhibition opening, and hoisted up to the ceiling where it will be suspended over visitors.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtSUkMo3JfY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HewVMjcAVH4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JbehUzt2elw&t=12s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5kd30oHReU>













# Jimmy Kuehnle

[Jimmy Kuehln](#)e taps into interactivity, wonder, and humor in his diverse range of artworks. For Inflatable, he'll be building a forest of glowing air-filled columns that invite museum-goers to explore his art from within. The Cleveland-based artist describes the spirit of his creations: "If I can make something that you can't quite put in a category, then maybe there's going to be a short circuit and you'll have a genuine interaction."

<https://www.columbiamuseum.org/view/wow-pop-bliss-jimmy-kuehnles-inflatable-art>







# Amanda Parer

Tasmania-based artist [Amanda Parer](#) examines the relationships between humans and our natural surroundings in her large-scale white inflatable sculptures. Parer's series, *Fantastic Planet*, includes two enormous humanoid figures that will be hard to miss as they tower over gallery walls.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyBYRCIjL0c&t=8s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QpZ-02W-2g>





EDIT SUISSE

# Stefano Ogliari Badessi

Badessi's inflatable works often completely envelop his viewers, who can walk inside or throughout the sculptures. He has used plastic bags and wraps to construct installations that are intended to take over his viewers' senses as he plays with space, light and material.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVAJ49wF3kk&t=49s>





# ENESS

Giant striped characters, the world's first inflatable fountain, and a mass of towering arches occupy the otherworldly installations designed by [ENESS](#). The Melbourne-based studio creates immersive worlds of whimsical creatures and puffy, illuminated structures that spring from the ground. Often paired with upbeat soundscapes and interactive elements like squirting water and digital eyeballs, the air-filled sculptures are arranged as wonderlands of light and color that at night, bathe the viewer in a kaleidoscopic glow of LED bulbs.

<https://www.thisiscolossal.com/2022/03/eness-inflatable-sculptures/>













# Haruka Kojin

An unlikely sight was spotted hovering over Tokyo earlier this month in a disorienting installation by the Japanese collective [目 \(Mé\)](#). Titled “[Masayume](#)” or “prophetic dream,” the eerie artwork featured a giant human face printed on a balloon, which launched above the city on July 16 as part of the Tokyo Tokyo Festival, an event organized to coincide with the start of the Olympics.

Bizarre and unexpected for most passersby, the single-day piece was derived from a dream Mé artist Kojin Haruka had as a teen. “‘Masayume’ will be carried out suddenly and without prior notice nor a clear reason, just like an image a 14-year-old Japanese girl saw in a dream, momentarily disabling the ordinary,” [a statement](#) reads. “The face will be gazing back at us from the sky in the midst of this pandemic. It is as though we are a part of the spectacle.”

“Masayume” is a follow-up to a 2013-2014 project titled “[Day with a Man’s Face Floating in the Sky](#)” (shown below) that floated a similar black-and-white balloon over Utsunomiya City, Tochigi. Each of the anonymous figures depicts a real person, and about 1,400 people applied to have their faces loom over Tokyo this round.

<https://laughingsquid.com/giant-head-hot-air-balloon/>

[https://fahrenheitmagazine.com/en/modern-art/plastics/A-giant-head-took-the-Tokyo-sky-by-surprise#.ZDDFd\\_bMKM8](https://fahrenheitmagazine.com/en/modern-art/plastics/A-giant-head-took-the-Tokyo-sky-by-surprise#.ZDDFd_bMKM8)











# Jan Hakon Erichsen

Don't invite [Jan Hakon Erichsen](#) to your next birthday party. The Norwegian artist is on a mission to destroy every balloon he encounters with an endless array of awkward Rube Goldberg-esque setups. Erichsen documents his inventions in "Destruction Diary" videos, which he posts daily on [Instagram](#), and aggregates into compilations on YouTube. Erichsen's usual balloon-popping tool of choice is a steak knife, but he has also employed bananas, cacti, and [saws](#) to do the deed. The artist explains in a statement that he "works within a variety of media focusing on topics like fear, anger and frustration". In addition to his balloon-centric video work, Erichson explores other found materials in his structural D.I.Y. projects, which you can see on his [website](#). If you enjoy Erichsen's creations, also check out [Simone Giertz's robots](#).

<https://www.thisiscolossal.com/2019/08/jan-hakon-erichsen-balloons/>





# Pop Air

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PI\\_5YdBt1Ps](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PI_5YdBt1Ps)

# Assignment Suggestions...

- Make something puffy
- Use bubble wrap in an artwork
- Make a simple inflatable and take a video:
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7XqQ-FDWSI>