

SWISS ARTIST UGO RONDINONE'S GINORMOUS ROCK TOTEMS IN THE NEVADA DESERT

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Rendering for a portion of Ugo Rondinone's "Seven Magic Mountains."

When Swiss artist Ugo Rondinone's "Seven Magic Mountains" is finally installed on the side of I-15 near the Jean Dry Lake Bed, there will be brightly colored totems of stacked artificial boulders towering over the terrain, visible for miles and massive in scale—a simultaneous nod to Nevada's role in earth art and the simulacra of Las Vegas.

That it's only planned to be in place for two years plays into the city's famously ephemeral nature and stands counter to another ongoing public art project north of here—Michael Heizer's "City," four decades in the making and designed to last millennia.

Both bring international focus back to Nevada's role in large-scale contemporary art, Heizer working directly with the land and Rondinone paying homage to land art while critiquing Las Vegas' trademark imitation (and, dare we say, flash?). Made of artificial stone and painted DayGlo colors, Rondinone's totems are slated for installation on Bureau of Land Management property in early 2016. They are not the originally proposed mountains made of piled boulders but will likely offer the same wallop of faux nature aggressively inserting itself into the landscape and forcing discussions about reality in the 21st century.

“It’s a significant piece for the artist and a significant piece for us,” says Michele Quinn, who helped curate CityCenter’s \$40 million art collection. “We have an opportunity to embrace something that’s challenging, and it ties into the conversation about Heizer. It really synthesizes who we are and shows that we are more about the landscape than people think.”

Quinn is a Las Vegas-based adviser on the project, co-produced by New York’s Art Production Fund and Reno’s Nevada Museum of Art. The Nevada Museum is home to the Center for Art + Environment, a research hub focused on “creative interactions” between people and their environments, natural or manufactured. With the Aria resort serving as the largest sponsor of “Seven Magic Mountains” and the work located just outside Las Vegas, a connection between the state art museum and Southern Nevada will likely be established, particularly with the museum presenting lectures, films and educational programs in Las Vegas.

“This project is specific to Las Vegas,” says Nevada Museum of Art spokesperson Amanda Horn, who was in town this week discussing the work and says that a Las Vegas paving company will be working with the artist. “It’s opened up the dialogue and gives us a presence in Southern Nevada. We believe we serve the entire state when it comes to fine art.”