

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Christopher Parker, “‘Craig’s Closet’ Memorializes AIDS Victims in New York City,” *Smithsonian Magazine*. June 29, 2023.



‘Craig’s Closet’ Memorializes AIDS Victims in New York City

The sculpture stands near the former site of St. Vincent’s, a hospital at the center of the city’s AIDS epidemic



Craig's Closet was unveiled at St. Vincent's Triangle earlier this month. Daniel Greer / Gladstone Gallery

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St. Vincent's Triangle, a small park in New York City's Greenwich Village neighborhood, is named for the hospital that once stood nearby. A site of sorrow and loss for the LGBTQ+ community, St. Vincent's hospital was known as ground zero of the city's AIDS epidemic, opening the first ward for AIDS care on the East Coast in 1984.

The triangle is a fitting site for the New York City AIDS Memorial—which opened in 2016—and for a new sculpture unveiled earlier this month: Called *Craig's Closet*, the artwork will remain at the site until May 2024.

Dave Harper, executive director of the AIDS Memorial, tells Maya Pontone of *Hyperallergic* that the new installation will encourage people to “remember those lost, reflect on the past, and renew themselves to continue the fight to end AIDS.”

Created by artist Jim Hodges, the granite and bronze artwork is based on the actual closet contents of musician Craig Ducote. The two men lived together until Ducote's death in 2016. A few years ago, Hodges asked a sculpting studio to take 3D scans of the closet, which he then used for the sculpture.

While the project is personal for Hodges, he wants visitors to see their own experiences in it. As he tells Taylor Dafoe of *Artnet*, he hopes it will be a “portal of expansion for people to enter from their own points of reference.”



Hodges recreated the contents of the closet using 3D scans. Daniel Greer / Gladstone Gallery

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Hodges pays a subtle homage to Ducote, who is not identified on the sculpture. The contents of the closet—generic hangers bearing generic jackets and tees, haphazard stacks of storage boxes—could be anyone’s.

“The personal is all evident within the work itself,” Hodges tells *Artnet*. “I think to expand on that narrative takes away the focus of the object, and I would prefer not to do that.”

The sculpture is made from granite, with bronze castings “for delicate details that could not be realized in carved stone,” says Hodges to *Hyperallergic*. The shiny back of the sculpture is reflective, acting as a mirror for approaching onlookers. “One being able to catch a glimpse of themselves in the work is important to me,” the artist tells *Artnet*.

Nearby, passages from Walt Whitman’s 1855 poem “Song of Myself” are engraved on the pavement, a feature that’s existed since the AIDS Memorial opened, per Jameson Montgomery of the *New York Times Style* magazine.

At St. Vincent’s hospital, more than half of the 650 beds held AIDS patients by 1986, according to the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project. Since the early ’80s, more than 100,000 individuals have died of AIDS in New York City.

For the duration of the sculpture’s time at the AIDS Memorial, Hodges hopes it can start conversations not only among visitors but among the artistic community in Greenwich Village and beyond. A series of performance events connected to the sculpture’s debut are taking place at the site.

As Hodges tells *Hyperallergic*, “Because *Craig’s Closet* will be on view for a year, it offers me the opportunity to engage other artists and invite them to use the piece, the time, the inspiration and the space for their own work.”