



FINISHING TOUCH

Park House taps Brooklyn-based artist Sarah Crowner to install an outdoor water feature, completing the private club's robust art program.

BY TERRI PROVENCAL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MEGAN GELLNER

Terri Provencal (TP): When Park House's art advisor, John Runyon, visited your Brooklyn studio, you had just completed a ceramic water feature concept for a foundation in Mexico. Did this work inform the Park House commission? How are they similar or different?

Sarah Crowner (SC): My commission in Veracruz, Mexico, is affiliated with a local artist residency there, called Fundación Casa Proal. My intention was to design a "painting you can swim in," or the ultimate exercise in making a truly "immersive" artwork. The water feature is a fully functioning outdoor pool, comprised of handmade tiles, which the artist residents are able to swim in. With Park House, the ceramic fountain offers a similar opportunity for viewer engagement. While you cannot swim in it, you can sit on the edges, look inside, and chat there with a drink. In both artworks, the painterly composition in the basin of the fountain is distorted by the moving water, which I think is an interesting way to experience a painting.

TP: You mine the foundations of modernist design, the decorative arts, and even theater in your artwork, and are a frequent collaborator, even with Jessica Lang and the American Ballet Theatre, on costumes and scenery. For this tile

installation and others, you worked closely with José Noé Suro of Cerámica Suro. Will you take us through that process? I understand John Runyon also met you at José's factory in Guadalajara.

SC: My installations are often architectural in scale and scope, so collaborative relationships are a vital aspect of the overall process. Working with the American Ballet Theatre last fall was fascinating for me personally, and a true learning experience in a professional sense. In many ways, ballet is the ultimate collaboration, with music, dance, lighting, and scenography to contend with.

José Noé and I have worked together for over six years now. The tiles in my artworks are fabricated by his factory in Guadalajara, handmade by families of local artisans who have been creating ceramic work for generations. José and I trust each other, and after all these years he understands the kind of look I am going for intuitively.

TP: I understand you worked with Cerámica Suro on the Guggenheim NY site-specific project. Is there any connectivity to the Park House project stylistically and/or conceptually?

SC: The Park House project includes some of the same arrow forms

I used in the Guggenheim, but the colors and intentions are very different. The fountain for Park House marks the first time I have used multicolored tiles to create a dynamic composition, reminiscent of my sewn-canvas paintings.

TP: You have a passion for Mexico and just had your first solo exhibition, via Highpoint Editions, in Nordenhake, Mexico City, at Galerie Nordenhake. Small jacaranda trees were placed within the gallery during this exhibition. How important are natural elements in your work, and particularly in Texas, for your Park House water feature?

SC: With the exhibition in Mexico, called *Post Jacaranda*, I filled the gallery with baby jacaranda trees. The idea came during a visit to the gallery last year, when I noticed that every room had multiple windows and skylights and felt to me like a greenhouse. Many public spaces in Mexico have plants and trees integrated into the architecture, and I was inspired by this. I liked the idea of hanging paintings on the wall and having them be obscured by the plants, so they are directly affected by and contingent on their environment. I feel that we do not experience art in a bubble, we always have to reckon with a setting or context, and I continually search for ways to expose this in my work. When I was offered a permanent outdoor installation at Park House, it felt like a perfect opportunity to explore these ideas and integrate my love of painting, public art, and the natural world.

TP: Like your exquisite stitched canvases, the seams between the tiles create a connectivity, and these tile abstractions provide a surface that people can walk on /swim in /or interact with in some way. This work for Park House is functional, as guests may sit on the framed edge of the pool and enjoy a cocktail while listening to the restrained and soothing sound of the fountain. In these nontraditional art environments, you are combining

art and architecture in such fresh way. When creating your concepts, do you think about this human interplay?

SC: Yes! Creating accessible, immersive, and participatory environments within which my work can be not only observed but actively explored—experienced bodily by the viewer—is a vital part of my practice.

TP: Similar forms appear frequently within your work, though they may be reversed or flipped. You have an identifiable color and geometry sensibility. Will you tell us about your vocabulary? And colors also reappear, yes?

SC: The reversing or flipping of certain forms or motifs in my painting began as an intention—I was thinking about the meaning of the word “pattern”: a pattern in nature, a pattern in painting, and the literal definition, as in a dressmaker’s pattern. A pattern is something that is made to be repeated. I liked inserting this concept into the process of making a painting.

TP: I am told you have many fans in DFW. Some of our prominent collectors who own your work are members of Park House: Charlotte Jones, Jennifer and John Eagle, Howard and Cindy Rachofsky, Park House architect David Droese. Do you have plans to visit Park House?

SC: Yes! As soon as I can!

TP: In April, the American Academy in Rome selected you as one of the recipients for this year’s prestigious Rome Prizes. What do you plan to work on during the eleven-month residency at the campus?

SC: I hope to expand my knowledge of tiles—specifically tile making, setting, and the mosaic. In Rome there is a rich tradition of integrating painting into architecture through frescos, colorful mosaics, or stonework. This will be my primary focus of research and study during my fellowship in 2020. ♦

