

*Forbes*

## Nicole Eisenman Installation Puts Exclamation Point On Fenway Development

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Nicole Eisenman with her installation, *Grouping of Works from Fountain*, 2017-2019. 401 Park Collection, Samuels & Associates, Boston, Massachusetts. Courtesy of Goodman Taft.

PHOTO: ARAM BOGHOSIAN. COURTESY THE ARTIST / ANTON KERN GALLERY, NEW YORK © NICOLE EISENMAN

Steve Samuels set a budget to acquire a centerpiece art installation to highlight a new public green space in front of his Boston real estate development firm's most ambitious project to date: 401 Park—the complete reimagining of a nearly 1,000,000 square foot building in the city's Fenway neighborhood.

Like many art collectors, the founder and chairman of Samuels & Associates promptly blew past that budget. Way past.

“I had a lot of people pissed off at me,” Samuels said on the eve of the sculpture’s public unveiling June 2. “They won’t be pissed off (when they see it).”

Nicole Eisenman’s *Grouping of Works from Fountain* was worth the stretch.

The installation features three massive, welcoming, asexual figures with streams of water spouting from their stubbly lower legs. The bronzes, with greatly oversized hands and feet, inhabit a small, shallow pool in front of the former Sears, Roebuck & Co. building, which was originally constructed in 1928.

Samuels, who admits he’s not an “art guy,” describes the installation as, “unusual, interesting... you love (the figures), you smile when you look at them.”

Samuels & Associates was presented with roughly 30 artists to choose from—a list gathered by Abigail Ross Goodman, Maria Taft, and Molly Epstein of Goodman Taft, a curatorial and advisory firm focusing on modern and contemporary art—before selecting Eisenman, who stands as one of the hottest figures in contemporary art.

In 2015, she won a MacArthur ‘Genius Grant’ for what the organization described as, “expanding the expressive potential of the figurative tradition in works that engage contemporary social issues and restore cultural significance to the representation of the human form.”

A predecessor to *Grouping of Works from Fountain* became a star attraction in 2017 at a once-every-10-year German sculpture show. She has work featured in this year’s Venice Biennale. At the opening of the [Whitney Museum of American Art in New York’s Biennial](#) last month, her fantastical, bizarre, whimsical, political, humorous installation *Procession* (2019) became [the most talked about piece](#).

*Grouping of Works from Fountain* reunites Eisenman with Boston. She spent the summer of 1985 in the city, much of that time in the Fenway area where her installation now resides.

“It was kind of an important summer,” Eisenman said at a public event hosted by [the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston](#) the day before the installation’s unveiling. “I was a sophomore in college, I came here with \$40. I got a job, an apartment and a bicycle in one afternoon and felt very independent for maybe the first time in my life when I was 19 years old.”



Nicole Eisenman, *Grouping of Works from Fountain*, 2017-2019. 401 Park Collection, Samuels & Associates, Boston, Massachusetts. Courtesy of Goodman Taft.  
PHOTO: ARAM BOGHOSIAN. COURTESY THE ARTIST / ANTON KERN GALLERY, NEW YORK © NICOLE EISENMAN

While the 401 Park development has been eight years in the making and is nearly finished, Samuels' vision for the Fenway neighborhood has been 20 years in the making. Transforming Fenway from a place to watch the Red Sox into a place to live, work, play, eat, drink and watch the Red Sox involved the combined efforts of numerous partners and was aided by new ownership taking over the formerly-cursed baseball team in 2001.

Prior to John Henry assuming control of the Sox, a serious conversation was taking place in Boston about the team leaving Major League Baseball's oldest stadium. Henry shut that talk down, [invested \\$300 million into the park](#) for renovations, and now Fenway provides baseball's—and maybe all of sport's—best mix of historic charm and modern amenities.

Stabilizing the ballpark's future and upgrading its experience has allowed for the surrounding area to flourish, a surrounding area Samuels has invested heavily in. His firm has completed or is currently developing 11 properties in the neighborhood including the [jaw-dropping Pierce Boston](#), a 30-story luxury residential tower completed in 2018 across the street from 401 Park.

Samuels sees 401 Park serving as the “center of gravity for the western part of the city.”

“Instead of a barrier, it’s become an anchor,” Samuels said. “Instead of walking around, we’re inviting people in.”

In addition to Eisenman’s fountain, Samuels & Associates upgraded the livability of the Fenway neighborhood in a major way by removing a parking lot Sears demanded the city provide its employees in front of the building in the 1960s. That parking lot dropped a concrete blockade in the middle of Boston’s Fredrick Law Olmstead-designed [Emerald Necklace](#), a seven-mile-long chain of contiguous green space which snakes through the city.

After reconnecting the Emerald Necklace in front of 401 Park, Samuels & Associates added an additional one-acre lawn where *Grouping of Works from Fountain* is situated.

With restored green space, new office, retail and restaurant space (including one of the first [Time Out Markets](#) in the United States), and an influx of residential options, more Bostonians are calling the Fenway neighborhood home as well.

“My hope is that families that live in this neighborhood will bring their kids,” Eisenman said. “I really love to have children activate this sculpture.”

That began taking place minutes after a podium introducing the fountain to the public was taken away. By the time the group assembled to celebrate the occasion had dispersed, numerous children—and adults—were wading, playing, splashing and climbing on Eisenman’s “guys” and in the fountain. Which is just the way she wants it.





A boy explores Nicole Eisenman's 'Grouping of Works from Fountain' at its unveiling.  
CHADD SCOTT

“We’re used to not entering fountains... but I really want you to go there and take your shoes and socks off and stick your feet in, and talk, and bring your kids and let them wade around,” Eisenman said.

While Eisenman is a darling of the gallery and museum world—a similar five-figure version of her installation was recently acquired by the prestigious [Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas](#)—she’s still acclimating to having her work in public spaces.

I’m really spoiled. I’m used to working under the umbrella of an art institution and the protection and the careful thinking that happens around art within these institutions. Any museum or art gallery, the mission is to put art first, so, as an artist, the work is treated beautifully. When you’re out in the commercial world, you’ve got to fight a little more for what you need, and the work gets used differently. I have to get comfortable with having my work in such close proximity to a site of commerce. It would be like for me putting an ATM into a gallery space. There’s a beer garden next door, which is great, I like that, and I think the intention of the developers are very good.”

Those developers are not ceasing their commitment to art in public spaces with *Grouping of Works from Fountain*.

“Nicole was our reach... and we’re going to continue to back that,” Samuels said of Eisenman’s involvement and his firm’s future plans to bring more art to the Fenway neighborhood.

Whatever the neighborhood becomes, Eisenman will be watching.

“I’m really looking forward to coming back over time and bringing my kids back here a year from now when the fountain has settled back into its environment and the shrubbery has grown up around it and people are kind of used to it in the neighborhood and feeling what the vibe is—just coming back to visit and check up on my guys,” Eisenman said.



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