



Alicja Kwade invades corporate New York tower with celestial sculpture

A 22,000 kilogram spherical stone now dangles over the lobby of a skyscraper on 550 Madison

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Alicja Kwade, *Solid Sky* (2021). Photo: James Ewing (2021). Courtesy Gensler.

Alicja Kwade will unveil a monumental permanent sculpture in New York early next year, titled *Solid Sky* (2021).

The work follows the Polish-German artist's acclaimed sculptural project *ParaPivot* (2019) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which engulfed the museum's rooftop with a constellation of stone spheres installed on intersecting steel grids. The constellation, Kwade said, evoked the solar system.

The commission, which has been produced for an undisclosed amount, is part of the revitalisation project of the Philip Johnson and John Burgee-designed corporate tower 550 Madison in Manhattan, whose previous tenants included AT&T and Sony Music. The 37-storey Midtown skyscraper was completed in 1984 and has been under renovation since 2016, after it was purchased by the Saudi investment firm Olayan Group. In 2018, it became designated a city landmark.

The work comprises a nearly 22,000 kilogram polished spherical stone suspended from the ceiling of the glassbox lobby with stainless steel chains. It is made from a rare quartzite called Azul do Macaúbas that was quarried in northeastern Brazil (and only exists otherwise in few parts of Africa) and contains various intensities of blue delineated by white veins.

"This rock is the result of a metamorphosis that took place over one billion years ago, and a metamorphosis always has something metaphysical and magical about it," Kwade tells *The Art Newspaper*. "We cannot fathom such a period of time at all—it makes us feel small and unimportant and fills us with awe."

Kwade likens the work to planet Earth. "It appears very fragile and small, in comparison to the entirety of the universe," Kwade says. "Here it hangs in chains, almost like a wrecking ball that is standing still, or like a warning. The surroundings of the work are rushing past while the rock stands still, representing the systems in which we live—that of capitalism—and reminding us where this system takes place: on one racing globe!"

The Berlin-based artist has presented work in the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017 and the most recent edition of Desert X this year. In 2015, Kwade was commissioned by the Public Art Fund to create a work for the Doris C. Freedman Plaza in Central Park. She created a 19th-century style clock titled *Against the Run* (2015) that rotated backwards while showing the correct time, warping perceptions of time and space.