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Gearing up for Sculpture Key West

Contemporary sculptures created by 34 international, national and local artists will be displayed against two oceanfront Civil War-era forts during Sculpture Key West. The critically acclaimed annual open-air exhibition begins its three-month run on Jan. 20.

The largest sculptures will include artist Aaron Lee Benson's intriguing maze-like structure of interlocking two-by-fours measuring 108 feet long and 8 feet tall that visitors can enter and explore. Several other oversized pieces will be placed in unexpected locations around Key West – among them a depiction of an iconic mythological creature that must remain nameless until its installation.

Pieces will be displayed on Jan. 20 at the West Martello Tower, Atlantic Boulevard at White Street, placed among the lush flowers and foliage that frame the historic fort. Sculptures will be unveiled on Feb. 24, in the oceanfront state park surrounding Fort Zachary Taylor at the end of Southard Street, beyond Truman Annex.

As in past years, participating artists include leaders in the national and international sculpture world, such as Robert Chambers, Karlis Rekevics, Robert Hickman, Ralph Provisero, Monika Goetz and Key West residents John Martini and Susan Rodgers.

The exhibition will include work in a wide variety of traditional and experimental media, with many pieces built on site. As in past years, organizers encouraged site-specific sculptures that reflect and enhance their setting.

Artwork planned for the 2008 exhibition includes Hickman's "Street Sign Project" of Key West-inspired faux traffic signs, a 13-foot steel construction titled "The End of the World" by German artist Goetz, the monolithic solid glass "Dasein Columns" of Steven Darrow and Mitch Blessing's "Flotsam," composed of more than 20 floating life-size hollow casts of the artist's head that communicate the struggle to keep one's head above water.

Each piece was chosen for display by a jury panel headed by Mary Ceruti, executive director of New York's Sculpture Center.

Sculpture Key West kicks-off with Art Lights Martellos, a 6-9 p.m. Jan. 20 fundraising gala on Higgs Beach behind West Martello Tower. The evening will include video art projections, live music and a cash bar and hors d'oeuvres. Cost is \$15 per person.

The exhibit at Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park will debut with a free afternoon of viewing from 3-6 p.m. of Feb. 24.

All sculptures will remain on display through April 19.

For more information, call 305-295-3800, or visit www.sculpturekeywest.com.