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What are the new sculptures along Kelly Drive? They're a contemporary art display here through the fall

'Steel Bodies' by artist Maren Hassinger has been installed just beyond Boathouse Row among the existing statues at the Ellen Phillips Samuel Memorial



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ARTS & CULTURE [Public Art](#)



JON TULEYA/PHILLYVOICE

There are 10 new sculptures on display along Kelly Drive. They are part of series called 'Steel Bodies,' created by artist Maren Hassinger, that will be on display at Philly's Ellen Phillips Samuel Memorial until mid-November.

Statues representing early American settlers, freedom fighters, miners, preachers and scientists have dotted the Ellen Phillips Samuel Memorial, a garden located beyond Boathouse Row along Kelly Drive, for decades. But this week, some modern sculptures joined them as the site welcomed its first new pieces in over half a century.

"Steel Bodies," a collection of 10 abstract metal sculptures by New York-based artist Maren Hassinger, opened Monday for its five-month run at the popular outdoor space. Originally presented at Socrates Sculpture Park in Queens, the exhibit is inspired by different vessel structures and shapes, suggesting, as Hassinger [puts it](#), "We are ALL vessels capable of compassion, and we are all equal. We share our humanity."

This marks the first outdoor sculpture exhibit in Philly for Hassinger, a widely exhibited sculptor and performance and video artist. But it's an even bigger first for the Kelly Drive public art space. The Ellen Phillips Samuel Memorial has not hosted a contemporary public art exhibition in its 90-year history or

commissioned a new piece in over 60 years. Hassinger also is the first Black artist to be featured at the site.

The memorial's permanent collection of 17 sculptures, installed between 1933 and 1961, focuses on early American history and themes of freedom and rugged individualism. Funded by the arts patron and philanthropist Ellen Phillips Samuel upon her death, the memorial features artists selected through three international expos held at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1933, 1940 and 1949.

But the Association for Public Art, the steward of the site, acknowledges the site's "[narrow view](#)" of history. Most of the statues honor white European settlers; one, "The Slave," depicts a Black person in chains; and the current art lacks Indigenous representation, apart from "Stone Age in America," a sculpture of a Native American mother and her children moved close to, but not into, the site in 1985.

The aPA hopes to highlight more contemporary art and artists of color like Hassinger, a spokesperson said. The group aims to mount additional temporary installations after "Steel Bodies" concludes, though nothing has been announced yet.



JON TULEYA/PHILLYVOICE

There are 10 new sculptures on display at along Kelly Drive, just beyond Boathouse Row. They are part of series called 'Steel Bodies' by artist Maren Hassinger and will be on display at the Ellen Phillips Samuel Memorial until mid-November.

For now, visitors can view Hassinger's pieces until Sunday, Nov. 12, and participate in [adult art workshops](#) inspired by the sculptures. The exhibit's original curator [recommends](#) looking up and through the pieces and returning at different times of day to see the shadows they cast.