

## Breathe Easy! To Make 600-Foot-Long Work in Central Park, Jeppe Hein Asks Hundreds to Exhale and Paint

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Jeppe Hein instructs New York City school children on how to participate in his public art piece, *Breathe With Me*.

ANNIE ARMSTRONG/ARTNEWS

On Sunday, before a crowd at the United Nations in New York, politicians and dignitaries debated solutions to declining air quality across the world, as part of the 2019 Climate Summit. Artist Jeppe Hein was on hand, and in response to their speeches, he offered the audience a simple directive: take a deep breath. Three days later, on Wednesday, a group of onlookers in Central Park assembled before Hein, and he gave them the same prompt. Inhaling deeply, he said, “We are all breathing the same air, and we need this air, and we all need to know that we are all connected.”

No, this was not a meditation class. Hein was standing in front of 600 feet of blank canvas that currently snakes down a path in Central Park as part of an art project he has titled *Breathe With Me*. Presented in collaboration with Art 2030, a nonprofit that ponders environmentalist issues and their relationship to the art world, Hein’s new work involves the painting of blue streaks across the length of that canvas. Through this Friday, passersby are invited to contribute.

By connecting world leaders at the United Nations with the public in New York, *Breathe With Me* reminds us that we are all in this together,” Nanette Brown, a representative from the United Nations’ department of communications, told the crowd. “We all breathe the same air. We all depend on the climate that we can live in, and we all must take action for a healthier planet.”



A view of the progress of Jeppe Hein's "Breathe With Me."

ANNIE ARMSTRONG/ARTNEWS

On Wednesday, near the Naumburg Bandshell, pots of cobalt paint were stationed at different sections of the canvas, with each segment manned by a docent who was trained by Hein to oversee participants’ breathing while making the work. Participants were told to inhale as they dipped their paintbrush into the pot, continue holding their breath while reaching up to the canvas, then exhale as they made their strokes. Each blue mark

became a record of its maker's breath—at the top, the strokes were round and full, then they thinned out as the brush slid closer to the canvas' bottom.

That was just for the first breath, however. “Now, for your next breath, focus even harder,” docents told participants. (Focusing hard wasn't necessarily a bad idea, since each participant only got two strokes, and most weren't able to create a straight line on their first try.)

Some of the most creative participants were children who had come to the project on a field trip arranged by the Metropolitan Museum. “Breathe in deep, deep, deep!” Hein said to some of the kids, twisting his face up like he had just eaten a lemon. “And then *roar* out like a lion!” The kids and Hein then roared as loud as they possibly could, and their lines turned out a bit shorter and a lot bolder than those painted by the teachers and chaperones that accompanied them.

“Why aren't you wearing shoes?” one of the children inquired of the artist.

“Well, I had to be at the UN for four days with all of these people in tight ties and tight shoes,” he said, grinning. “Today, I want to feel the ground below me!”

Hein, who currently has a solo show on view at 303 Gallery, began making paintings about his breathing about a decade ago, when his battle with a mental illness prompted him to begin practicing yoga and undertake mindfulness training.

“I quite literally lost my breath,” he told *ARTnews*. “To change my life, I needed to start breathing differently. My body was telling me that I needed to take a breath.” With this exercise, he began making watercolors of his inhales and exhales, each of them featuring a set of blue stripes. Eventually, he amassed over 1,000 of these works.

He had a breakthrough when he started having other people do the painting. “People would tell me that they had never felt their breath like this before,” he said. Thus, the idea of *Breathe With Me* was born. (At 303, works in the breathing series were painted by artists Kim Gordon, Doug Aitken, Bjarke Ingels, and Shirin Neshat; curator Hans Ulrich Obrist; and Met director Max Hollein.)

“I want everybody to feel their breathe on their body,” Hein explained as he watched participants painting. “To really feel how it can open up your heart and show empathy, and be very present in the moment.”