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Carol Vogel

Ripe for Sculpture

The New York sculptor Tom Otterness is well known for his cartoonlike bronze creatures. Over the years, New Yorkers have seen them on the sidewalks of Brooklyn, in the subway station at 14th Street and Eighth Avenue, and along the Broadway malls for five miles from 60th to 168th Streets. They have also appeared in cities around the world and are currently around downtown Indianapolis.

Starting Monday, visitors to the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx will see a new work by Mr. Otterness that is quite a departure for him. At the entrance plaza of the new Nolen Greenhouses will be a bronze sculpture depicting stages in the life cycle of the *Amorphophallus titanum*, more commonly known as the world's largest flower.

It's also known as "Mr. Stinky" for the foul odor it releases when it blooms — so pungent it has been described as "rotting elephant corpse."

Mr. Otterness happened on the *Amorphophallus titanum* when he was researching plants after he was asked to create a sculpture at the botanical garden. The size and shape caught his attention, but his interest was further piqued when he learned that the plant, discovered by an Italian botanist in Sumatra in 1878, first bloomed in the United States at the Botanical Garden in 1937. At the time it created quite a stir when it grew to more than eight feet.

Referring to Claes Oldenburg's monumental sculptures of everyday objects like hamburgers and erasers, Mr. Otterness said, "This is an homage to him."

The phallic sculpture is 8 feet tall (10 feet with the base it stands on). Since the flower is known for attracting dung beetles, Mr. Otterness has created some out of bronze. These whimsical creatures are on animated stamens and pistils.

"There is also a pair of them," Mr. Otterness said, "kissing at the top of the erect flower."