

Students offer Art in the Park

By **BRENDAN McHUGH**

Soon to take shape in Van Cortlandt Park is a work of art by students at one of America's premiere art schools.

The Art Students League, a 135-year-old institution with alumni such as Georgia O'Keeffe and Jackson Pollock, has teamed with the Department of Parks and Recreation to create a public sculpture that will be assembled and presented in the park.

"We teach people the process of making art. This project with parks and recreation is teaching that at an enhanced level," said Ira Goldberg, executive director of the Art Students League.

The project, dubbed The Mask, is a collaborative piece created by an international team of seven artists in the league's Model to Monument program. The artists assembled the piece over the past week, and the public will have an opportunity to meet with them at the end of the month. An official opening ceremony for the completed work is scheduled for June 24.

"We're very proud of this program that takes league artists through the entire process of creating public art for people to contemplate and enjoy," Goldberg said.

Students visited the park to brainstorm ideas for what they wanted to create. A circle of children playing, bird-inspired pieces connected to the marsh and to the popularity of bird watching, and several ideas connected to the public theater in the park were all considered. Eventually, students chose a play on the tragedy and comedy masks to reflect the public theater in the park. The sculpture will stand behind the Van Cortlandt Park Museum.

In class, mentor Greg Wyatt had each of the seven students do a sketch of an idea. The sketches were passed around the table and each artist worked on the

other's sketches.

The Mask will be 15 feet tall, 9 feet wide and 5 feet deep and will be made of steel and aluminum.

The component parts were completed at the Art Students League last week, and the sculpture is now being assembled in an open studio in the park. The students hope to have the piece finished by Thursday, June 8.

"We are going beyond a straight studio practice and actually connecting the artists with the rigors of creating public works," Wyatt said. "These works will receive public reaction, contact, praise, criticism and outdoor weather for one year. That we have the amazing landscape of the public parks and traffic in which to present them is a great gift."

The Mask will be in the park until May 2012.

"I'm actually pretty excited about that," artist Elizabeth Allison said about working in a public space. "But I'm nervous about getting everything done on time."

Allison said the artists are "welding furiously" to get everything ready.

One of the objectives is to provide a professional context for the sculptors with a project that has a set beginning, middle and end goal that forwards with their professional development. After having worked on a public piece for the city, the students will be better prepared to obtain their own public art commissions.

The seven students are also working on individual public art projects in Riverside Park South, where their pieces will be on view along the Hudson River from West 59th to West 72nd streets.

The sculptors are Allison, Selva Sanjines, John Balsamo, Noa Shay, Allston Chapman, Matthew White and Akihiro Ito.