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Geometry in the Park

A number of contemporary artists these days are looking at the work of the architect Buckminster Fuller for inspiration. The Argentine artist Tomás Saraceno said he studied Fuller when he created "Cloud City," the dizzying multipolygonal habitat of reflective stainless steel and acrylic now on the roof of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The American artist Leo Villareal also considered Fuller in creating "Buckyball," a monumental sculpture that will be on view in Madison Square Park Oct. 25 through February 2013.

Mr. Villareal has done several prominent works in recent years. In March, at the entrance to the European Fine Art Fair in Maastricht, the Netherlands, he installed 20,000 cascading white LED lights. And in 2008 the National Gallery of Art in Washington commissioned him to make its first site-specific light installation, which features 40,000 LED nodes that span the 200-foot-long walkway between the East and West buildings.

For "Buckyball," Mr. Villareal applied concepts of geometry and mathematical relationships inspired by Fuller to produce two nested geodesic sculptural spheres made up of LED tubes arranged in pentagons and hexagons. Individual pixels, each capable of displaying 16 million distinct colors, will appear every 1.2 inches along the tubes, creating random compositions of varied speed, color, light and scale.

"I'm responding to the installation being in the park," Mr. Villareal said in a telephone interview. "The balls are lifted off the ground on pedestals to mimic the traditional monuments found in parks, but the work is very contemporary. What makes it different is that it is a form found in science and nature and not something expected like a figure on a horse."

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