



Tattered lion statues replaced by new, cement replicas in Newark park

Published: Sunday, November 13, 2011, 8:45 AM



[Eunice Lee/The Star-Ledger](#)

By

[NEWARK](#) — After nine months away, the lions are back. Well, partially.

A pair of 8-foot-tall limestone statues that stood sentinel in Branch Brook Park in Newark have been replaced with newly fashioned cement replicas that arrived from Pennsylvania earlier this month.

So, what's the consensus on the new and improved cats?

"I think they're quite fierce," said Scott Kreilick whose conservation firm oversaw the project. The original statues were damaged and missing parts of claws, teeth, tails and manes. Kreilick's team of conservators studied photographs from the 1930s of the old Prudential building in downtown Newark where the lions flanked the entrance until 1956.

While still wrapped in plastic, the replica lions — named Art and Pat in honor of retired Prudential president and CEO Art Ryan and his wife — have been noted by residents like Miguel Perez, a 73-year-old retired cook and regular jogger. They were installed in the park's southern concert grove area near the Clifton Avenue entrance on Nov. 4.

Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo hailed the return of the lions as "a significant step in the park's revitalization."

Meanwhile, the original lions are at sculptor Pavel Efremoff's studio in west Philadelphia. Upon returning to Newark in a few weeks, the pair will make a new home outside the Hall of Records on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, county spokesman Anthony Puglisi said.

In February, the nearly 110-year-old cats were transported to Efremoff's studio, where a five-person team gave them some heavy-duty spa treatments.

First came the exfoliation, in which the team removed five or six coats of paint, each covering a layer of graffiti, Efremoff said.

Second came the wrap: The 3,000-pound lions were swaddled in cotton rag paper soaked in distilled water, creating a "poultice" for the cleaning and desalination process. The wet coverings remained until evaporation sucked out impurities from the porous statues. The process was repeated several more times.

Next, things get a bit heavier with reconstructive surgery.

"We're not trying to make something really sharp and perfect-looking because that will really stand out on a sculpture that has been standing outside in the elements for a hundred years or so," said Efremoff, who patched the lions using mortar and a technique called Dutchman repairs. Both Kreilick and the Branch Brook Park Alliance had to approve the changes.

For Efremoff, a 35-year-old Moscow native who comes from a long line of artists, the most fascinating step followed when a digital scanner took a three-dimensional image of the restored statues.

Digital Atelier, a Mercerville company, made life-size models of the lions from urethane foam, which then got shipped to a studio in Clifton called Metropole, where rubber casts were made and filled with a cement mixture.

Technology was key in forming the model, but still Efremoff made small tweaks by hand, using a file-like tool called a rasp.

"It's a computer making these things not a human hand, so there needs to be an artist hand involved," he said. After drying for two days, the replicas get an acid wash to complete their aged visage.

The county's initial plan placed the original lions indoors, but the cats refused to be domesticated. As Puglisi explained it, they were too heavy to be supported by the floor inside the Hall of Records.

The lions are part of a larger \$3 million park improvement project by the county that includes restoring two small buildings and updating the concert grove.

Related coverage:

- [Conservationists to restore stone lions in Newark's Branch Brook Park](#)

© NJ.com. All rights reserved.