

# The Creators Project

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## Giant Fluorescent Totems Rise in the Nevada Desert

Noémie Jennifer — May 12 2016



*Ugo Rondinone: Seven Magic Mountains, Las Vegas, Nevada, 2016. All photos by Gianfranco Gorgoni, courtesy of Art Production Fund and Nevada Museum of Art, unless otherwise noted.*

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The Nevada desert can already feel like a dreamscape, but now, the view towards the horizon looks even more surreal. Ugo Rondinone's *Seven Magic Mountains*, located off Interstate 15, ten miles south of Las Vegas, has officially opened to the public. The majestic, fluorescent cairns, each over 30 feet high, have had Nevada drivers asking questions and making detours for a couple of weeks now—if anything, to confirm that what they are seeing isn't a vision of their own making.

Rondinone's installation sits beside hallowed ground, by art historical standards: Nearby Jean Dry Lake is where Jean Tinguely staged his *Study for an End of the World No. 2* in 1962, and where Michael Heizer created *Rift 1* six years later. As the first earthwork completed in over 40 years, this is a big moment for large-scale land art, dropping a contemporary pin in the movement's timeline.



Screengrab of video showing stacking process

For the project's co-producers, the Nevada Museum of Art and the Art Production Fund, this also meant facing contemporary hurdles. "In the old days, if you wanted to build something monumental in the landscape, you didn't have all the restrictions you have today," explains Museum Director David Walker. "You didn't have to file an Environmental Impact Report. You didn't have to work with licensed contractors. And certainly today you need a lot of political support, which we got." The fact that the chosen site sits on federally owned land made the logistics even more complicated. "And then, there's the little matter of raising \$3.5 million," adds Walker.

In the end, the *Magic Mountains* took five years to implement. The final phases of construction are documented in a series of short videos on the project's timeline, which show skilled workers cutting and coring the massive boulders, stacking them in place, and painting them in hyper-real, neon hues.

The finished product is an awe-inspiring addition to the landscape. "When artists use natural materials, their work tends to have a visceral resonance," reflects Walker. "This piece certainly does that. These are monumental towers, and when you encounter one of them—not to mention seven of them—they have a spiritual presence." For him, the first encounter with the work unearthed old memories: "When you're driving towards them and see them in the distance, they're this wonderful gesture of color. It reminds me of being in a car as a child, around 1969, and seeing Las Vegas for the first time—seeing all the colors and neon lights. They kind of simulate that experience."

Walker is looking forward to documenting other visitors' encounters with the work. The Nevada Museum of Art will be collecting the entire archive of the project, up until the work is taken down, two years from now—so make sure to get that Southwestern road trip in by 2018.