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Small World

David Byrne Sets the Pace

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Mustafah Abdubaziz for The Wall Street Journal

David Byrne with his installation, 'Tight Spot,' at the West 25th Street lot recently acquired by the Pace Gallery.

Byrne-ing Down the World

By KIMBERLY CHOU

At the West 25th Street lot recently acquired by the Pace Gallery, visitors are encouraged to touch and squeeze the outsized inflatable globe that David Byrne has crammed beneath the elevated tracks of the High Line. But the public's interaction with "Tight Spot," the temporary sound and sculpture piece inaugurating this space, may not be quite as tactile an experience as the artist and former Talking Heads frontman first had himself.

"It was fun when we were doing the tests—it wasn't fully inflated and you could kind of squeeze through and get totally squished by this thing," Mr. Byrne said in an interview at the site this week, flattening the backs of his hands against his face to demonstrate. "When we got it to full 100% inflation I realized you can't do that anymore. You'd get pinned in there and get suffocated."

The finished, less viewer-endangering work, which opens to the public on Friday, is 48-feet-

by-20 feet of fan-powered, plastic-coated fabric. It appears to strain against the High Line's support beams and the confining brick walls of this otherwise vacant outdoor space. Speakers inside the globe emit a looped series of watery basso heartbeats, created by Mr. Byrne's filtered

voice. Though "Tight Spot" is inspired by the pastel Mercator projection globes found in grade-school classrooms, Mr. Byrne admits it technically isn't even a sphere.

"But I think it's believable that maybe it could be, which is the most important [thing]," he said. While planning the installation, Mr. Byrne took photographs of the space and painted his idea of a giant globe balloon. He or-

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dered inflatable beach-ball globes and began playing with them, deflating and mashing them to see if they could achieve the bulging shapes he imagined. The Pace production team built a model of the High Line and he jammed the beach balls in there, too.

"The space is wider than it looks, and if we took a spherical globe and squished it, most of the continents would be lost underneath or on top," Mr. Byrne said. "You would end up seeing just a strip in the middle between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, which really wouldn't give you the im-

pression. So we thought, 'Well, we can cheat.'"

The resulting ovoid is about three or four feet wider than what can actually be accommodated in the lot, Mr. Byrne said. "[The goal was] to get enough of the bulging that it not fit neatly, but that it be too big." Though he and the gallery made the initial renderings and models, the inflatable work was outsourced to a company in Minneapolis called

Landmark Creations, whose work typically leans toward portable batting cages and mascots.

While it's possible to see a sliver of sky just above either edge of the globe due to the low buildings on either side, one cannot see all the way around the globe. But Mr. Byrne asserts that all of the countries and continents are indeed there. Australia is toward the back, with a giant zipper running across it for access to the globe's inner machinery.

After "Tight Spot" is taken down, Pace will begin preparations for a Bill Katz-designed space, which will be connected to the gallery next door at 510 W. 25th Street, also owned by the art-world giant. Mr. Byrne currently has two pieces in the "Social Media" group show at the 510 gallery: a series of fake iPhone apps and a tessellation of digital photo frames showing fighting parliamentarians.