

High School Memories

Public yet out of sight, rich with history in an artificial environment, mail art that has ceased to travel: these are the paradoxes that inform *Mnemonics*, a work by Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel that is scattered throughout New York City's brand-new, \$150 million Stuyvesant High School.

The current building, replacing an 88-year-old one, opened in September on landfill at the edge of Battery Park City. The modest, almost hidden

Percent for Art installation is out of scale both with most public art and with the 10-story, 350,000-square-foot school; in addition, strict security measures at the school make it extremely difficult for the general public to view the installation.

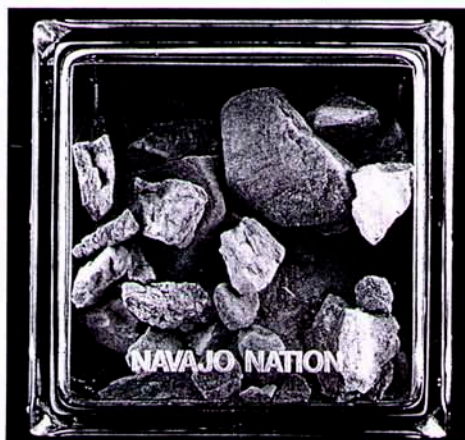
Mnemonics is made up of 400 8-inch-square glass blocks containing an encyclopedic array of items solicited by mail from around the world and set into the walls, "dispersed at random to give the impression that they are everywhere," says Jones. The artists wanted the piece to be an antidote for its context: "a sterile new building on a piece of land with no history—a fictitious site," explains Ginzel. The old school "had an incredible patina."

To ease the "sense of foreboding" that the 2,700 academically gifted students might feel on "leaving this old womb," Jones and Ginzel got in touch with alumni from the school's first 88 years and asked them to submit objects for their installation. The souvenirs so far include everything from yearbooks and dance cards to lunch fare (50 cents in 1952) to small bowls from a 1919 metal-smithing class.

To accommodate the future, the artists set 88 empty blocks, each sandblasted with a year, through 2080, around the school for subsequent classes to fill and seal in the wall. The remaining blocks contain a startling array of objects that form a global time and space network.

Through the city's Department of Cultural Affairs, the artists wrote to cultural and scientific institutions and to every American embassy around the world for items that would epitomize a nation but could not be purchased—water from the Yellow River; pieces of the Berlin Wall and the Acropolis; frankincense from Oman; a boar's-tusk necklace from New Guinea; scarabs. From Bill Asadorian, a Queens College librarian, who'd done some digging in New York, they got 10-inch oyster shells and 200-year-old brass buttons from British army uniforms.

"We wanted to build a piece that could be discovered over time," says Jones, "that could provide a parallel experience to learning and leave a mark on the process itself." —Peter Slatin



COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS

Memories are made of this: 400 glass blocks in the walls of Stuyvesant High School's new building in lower Manhattan. The installation, *Mnemonics*, is by Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel.