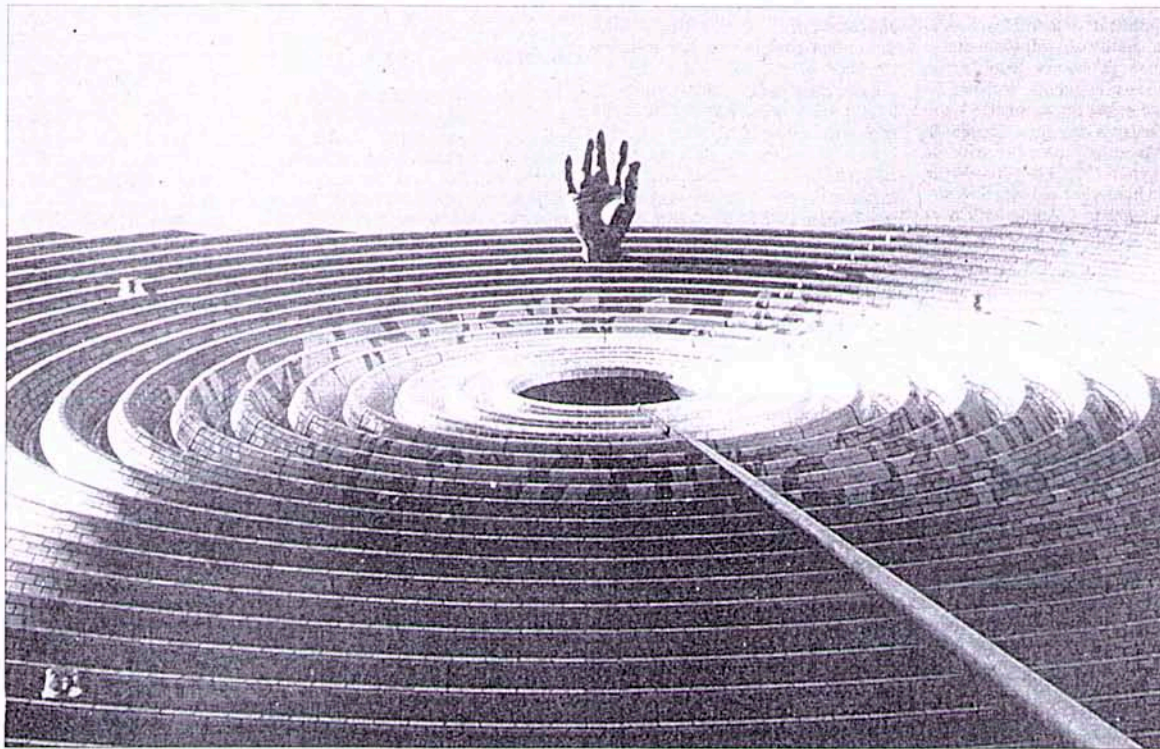


### A Giant Timepiece That's Also a Piece About Time



Marion Harders

"Metronome," by Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel, on Union Square, with George Washington's hand seen from below.

By JEFFREY KASTNER

**I**F you took all the faxes we've sent back and forth about this project and weighed them, it would be about equivalent to that rock," said Kristin Jones, laughing as she nodded toward a dark lump on a nearby flatbed truck and hugging a cup of coffee to ward off the chill.

It was just after 1 o'clock on a bitter March morning and Ms. Jones was standing on a windy corner at 14th Street and Broadway in Manhattan, just as she had on dozens of other nights during the preceding six weeks. Across the lanes of traffic, a hail of sparks suddenly showered the darkened sidewalk, illuminating a half-dozen construction workers as they clambered over what appeared to be a colossal hunk of granite, working to cut it loose from a steel frame before attaching it to a crane. Nearly two tons of concrete shaped like a large boulder, the rock was being readied to take its place as part of "Metronome," an artwork designed by Ms. Jones and her partner, Andrew Ginzel, for the facade of a new retail, entertainment and residential complex on Union Square.

When the artists left the site just before dawn, the object had been painstakingly positioned and anchored some 40 feet in the air. And the complicated artistic puzzle of "Metronome" — which Tom Eccles, the director of New York City's Public Art Fund, has called "the most prominent commission of a public artwork in the city since the Statue of Liberty" — was one piece

closer to completion.

The elaborate allegorical ensemble of "Metronome" has been slowly evolving at the site, 1 Union Square South, since construction began in February. A 98-foot-high by 50-foot-wide wall of gravity-defying, rippling brick went up first, creating a kind of stage on which Ms. Jones and Mr. Ginzel choreographed other sculptural elements — the rock, a 67-foot-long bronze cone and an enormous hand, cast from the square's equestrian statue of George Washington and then enlarged.

These parts are arrayed around a central five-foot void that puffs steam throughout the day and emits an ever-changing tympanic tone at noon. To one side of the brick wall, a sphere slowly rotates in sync with the lunar phases. On the other, a 15-place digital clock simultaneously registers the time both elapsed and remaining within the current 24-hour cycle (at precisely noon, for instance, the digital panel will read 1200000000000012).

Functionally, "Metronome" is obviously meant to be a kind of grand clock for the thousands of people who pass through Union Square every day. But, the artists say, the work is less a timepiece than a piece about time, a meditation on both how we define it and how it defines us.

Getting the many parts of "Metronome" to function in harmony — compositionally, technically and administratively — has required a finely tuned collaborative effort. For the developers who initiated it, the work represents an unprecedented commitment to art — indeed, its \$3 million-plus budget makes it one of the largest privately commissioned public-art projects in New York City history. For the dozens of engineers, fabricators and construction workers in-

involved, the technical challenges of the piece have tested conventional methods and patience again and again. And for Ms. Jones and Mr. Ginzel, the dedication of "Metronome" late next month represents not only the conclusion of more than three years of proposing, designing, negotiating and cajoling, but also the realization of the most ambitious undertaking in the history of a personal and professional partnership that goes back nearly two decades.

Sitting in their Greenwich Village apartment on a warm spring morning several weeks later, the two artists were amiable, if still a bit bleary, from the late nights spent on the "Metronome" site. Discussing their long partnership, they often turned to each other to verify historical facts, frequently finishing each other's sentences. Mr. Ginzel, a wiry 45-year-old with sharp features and a shock of sandy hair, typically weighs in

administrative slogging is essential, that doesn't mean she particularly enjoys it. "I do moan about it," Ms. Jones admitted, settling back into her chair after yet another interruption. "Though it is sort of fascinating to try to do the impossible in the midst of all the banality and monotony. But we believe in the concept of the art. That's what keeps us alive."

The concept for "Metronome" was first developed more than three years ago when the Related Companies — a New York-based real estate firm involved with more than \$7 billion of developments around the United States, including the Coliseum site at Columbus Circle — asked the Municipal Art Society and the Public Art Fund to help identify someone to create an artwork for

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#### A new building on Union

Square is getting a

complicated artistic

puzzle for its facade.

when talk turns to the technical big picture. Ms. Jones, two years younger and quick to laugh, usually fields the more detailed questions about the project's nuts and bolts.

Although the two conceptualize and design their artworks together, Ms. Jones is clearly the project manager, repeatedly jumping up to take calls from members of the far-flung team involved with "Metronome." While she acknowledges that such



# A Timepiece All About Time

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the facade of their new building, designed by the architectural firm Davis Brody Bond, on the south side of Union Square. It's a high-profile spot, both figuratively and literally, and visible from some angles for dozens of blocks. The call for submissions generated some 100 responses, and an advisory panel made up of representatives from all the parties involved, including community groups, winnowed the list to six. Each respondent was asked to create a specific proposal based on an original budget of \$600,000 for the enormous blank space. From among the finalists — including Tom Otterness, Matt Mullican and Frank Stella — Ms. Jones and Mr. Ginzel's conception for "Metronome," with its theme of temporality and its layered references to the urban context, was selected in December 1996.

The process was bumpy in the beginning. "At first, Related was like, 'You design it, we'll build it,'" recalled Ms. Jones. "They literally felt our work was done once we handed in the plans." Mr. Ginzel continued, "Meanwhile, time is passing and now it's April of 1997, and one morning, Kristin wakes up in tears."

"I had this revelation that nothing was happening," said Ms. Jones. "So we started talking to people ourselves. We figured if this was going to get done, we were going to have to do it."

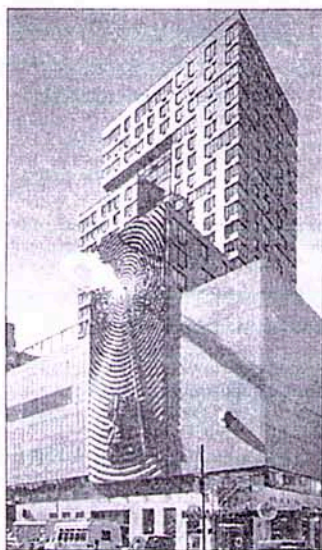
David J. Wine, the president of Related Residential Development, who spearheaded the project with Related's founder and chairman, Steven M. Ross, said that despite the occasional lags, the process was as straightforward as could have been hoped, given what was being done. "The spirit was very positive," Mr. Wine said. "Everyone wanted to make it happen."

He was also sanguine about the quintupling of the original budget. "The point was to realize what they originally proposed. I'm certainly not going to make it sound like every-

**Getting the pieces of 'Metronome' to function in harmony has taken a finely tuned group effort.**

thing was idyllic. It wasn't. But that's how it goes. There's no question that it was different from your typical business deal. But shouldn't dealing with art be different than dealing with business?"

It wasn't the first time Ms. Jones and Mr. Ginzel had found themselves straddling disparate worlds. The story of their own partnership is a case in point. They met in 1981, when each was helping other artists install work for a show at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington. Ms. Jones, the daughter of a diplomat, was a world traveler who spoke a half-dozen languages and was studying for an M.F.A. at Yale after graduating from the Rhode Island School of Design.



David Sundberg/Esto

"Metronome" emits steam from a hole called the void.

Mr. Ginzel, the child of Chicago-area artists, dropped out of Bennington and moved to SoHo in 1974. Making a living doing loft renovation and working as an assistant to artists like Red Grooms and Alice Aycock, Mr. Ginzel began to exhibit in the fledgling downtown scene, having his first solo show at Artists Space in 1975 at the age of 21. But despite their different backgrounds, the artists found common ground in their artistic interests and began working informally on projects with each other.

After a year spent soaking up European culture together while Ms. Jones was in Rome on a Fulbright fellowship in 1983, the two artists — who had by then developed a personal as well as a professional relationship — returned to the city and secured a studio in the Clocktower complex in TriBeCa, where they began to collaborate in earnest. "It was a great opportunity," said Ms. Jones of the Clocktower days. "It was very active with shows and everyone would come through."

In an effort to take advantage of the traffic, Ms. Jones and Mr. Ginzel made one of their first "public" gestures, knocking a hole through the studio's exterior wall to create a window through which their work could be seen. People began to notice. One was Ingrid Sischy, the editor of Artforum magazine. "She came by and asked whose work it was," Ms. Jones recalled. "You know, who's helping who? It wasn't my work, and it wasn't Andrew's, it was both of ours."

Of their decision to work as a team, Mr. Ginzel said, "We were influenced by my experience traveling with other artists and realizing how solitary and often sad it was," Ms. Jones added. "It was exciting to not be so limited, to talk about things we could only do together."

In their first solo exhibition in 1985, the pair reconfigured Barbara Flynn's Art Galaxy on Mott Street as a kind of public tableau, modifying the entrance to provide a 24-hour-a-day aperture from the street onto the interior of the space. Inside, they engineered an elaborate stage set, like a Cornell box come to life, on

which a storm periodically raged, complete with fog, rain and wind.

During the next few years, they produced works for galleries and museums from New York to Italy to Switzerland; designed stage sets, costumes and lighting for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, and began to receive commissions for public artworks, the first of which, "Panamone," was created for the Public Art Fund in lower Manhattan's City Hall Park in 1987. In the years since, the two have produced both temporary and permanent pieces for municipal buildings, corporate offices, parks, plazas and other civic spaces throughout the United States.

Their impact has been particularly dramatic in New York City, where in the last decade they have created permanent works for the new Stuyvesant High School, for P.S. 102 in the Bronx and for the Metropolitan Transit Authority's World Trade Center subway station. The M.T.A. project, "Oculus," features 300 eyes, rendered in stone by the Roman mosaicist Rinaldo Piras and placed throughout the station's tunnels. The project is centered on a large-scale mosaic, also executed by Mr. Piras, featuring a stylized map of New York City. Composed of some 1.8 million individual tesserae of cut Murano glass, the work features subtly gradated bands of blue that wrap around a jewellike eye of gold and lapis.

FOR Ms. Jones and Mr. Ginzel, the experience of working with a master craftsman like Mr. Piras (whom they met in Italy while there as recipients of the American Academy's 1994-95 Rome Prize for visual arts) is one of the chief satisfactions of producing the large-scale multimedia works for which they have become known. Translating an artistic idea into a 1.8-million-piece mosaic — or a compositional wave pattern into a 500-ton wall of bricks — requires a sophisticated level of interdisciplinary collaboration, a willingness to enlist a wide range of non-professionals in what is typically the highly individualized process of art making.

The benefits of such relationships for Ms. Jones and Mr. Ginzel are easy enough to see, but the process is not a one-way street. From technical advisers to craftsmen to construction workers, the various people drawn into the artists' collaborative circle often end up with a new perspective on their own work as well. Ms. Jones recalled one night on "Metronome" when this was the case in more ways than one.

"It's four o'clock in the morning," she said, "and the workers happened to be at a level where we could be up on the roof watching them. We're looking at the lights of the city and it's cold and the park is there and there's a mist coming through. It's tense — you know, sort of an eighth of an inch this way or another on the crane. And suddenly I said, 'Would you guys just stop for a minute and look at the city?' It was fantastic. Five guys, 90 feet in the air, all just stopped and took the time to look at where they were and what they were doing — making this work, for this place." □