



Rendering of Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel's wall for Union Square.

Letting Off Steam

When Manhattan's Union Square South residential and retail complex is completed next year, the design that artists Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel created for its front facade should have no trouble fitting into the neighborhood. The 100-by-60-foot wall is engineered, like New Yorkers, to let off steam and blow its own horn.

In this case, it will happen twice a day, to announce the arrival of noon and midnight, as part of the work's examination of time. The explosion of steam from an illuminated hole in the center area of the wall will be enhanced by the sounding of a long, tapered horn that echoes the passing of time. The punctual release of white steam was inspired by natural phenomena, like Old Faithful. "People wait for these geothermal events to occur," says Ginzel, "and even though they know what's going to happen, the tension is still there"—the same way it is on New Year's Eve, waiting for the ball to drop. But, he notes, "that moment is such an artificial kind of increment."

Of course, incremental clock time is a very real part of New Yorkers' lives, as the digital clock on the left side of the wall demonstrates. It augments the frenetic movements of the city by simultaneously counting and subtracting the hours of the day, so that at noon the clock reads 1200000000,0000000012, with the left indicating the 12 hours that passed, and the right, the 12 remaining. The converging digits in the middle are absorbed by a blur of activity, suggestive of the present. Indeed, explains Ginzel, "We're always either remembering the

past or projecting into the future—but the moment in which we're alive is something we can't ever grasp."

To slow things down a bit, the artists inserted a revolving lunar clock into the opposite end of the wall. The half-gold, half-black surface of this small sphere introduces another representation of time that urbanites may have lost touch with.

"We wanted someone who shops at the park every Saturday to notice the slight movements of the clock," Ginzel says. "People popping out momentarily from the subway probably won't know what's going on, but it's something that can reward the long-term observer."

Bricks set in concentric circles around the central hole are also glazed with gold. Jones and Ginzel made one-foot-deep ripples in the brick surface, maximizing its visual energy. "It's as if you took a large stone and tossed it in a pool of water," Ginzel says, "but that pool of water is the side of a building."

Rising from these ripples is a rock symbolizing the geological origins of Manhattan. "There's something so completely undeniable about this rock, which functions in a geological time so different from our own," muses Ginzel. "The city will come and go, but the rock will be there, no matter what."

And, reaching out from the top of the brick section is a three-foot-long hand—a fragment of the statue of George Washington in Union Square Park. "Washington is sort of caught in time in that statue," Ginzel says, "out of synch with what's going on around him in the park today."

Beyond giving New Yorkers the time of day, Ginzel explains, they want the wall to "give people in this city a chance to question their own mortality, their own ephemerality, and their own moment in time." **GEORGINA KEENAN**