

VAN ALEN INSTITUTE

30 West 22 Street
New YORK NY 10010

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PRESS RELEASE

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Van Alen Institute presents Variable City: Fox Square

Public Reception: **Tuesday, September 28, 2004, from 6:30-8:30pm**
Hours: **Exhibit open Monday—Friday, 12-6pm through Nov. 19**
Events: **Lectures and events posted at www.vanalen.org**
Location: **30 W 22 Street, 6th Floor (between 5th & 6th Aves)**

Critically acclaimed experimental arts organization J Mandle Performance teams up with renowned design think tank Van Alen Institute to explore and present the unique hybrid of outdoor site-specific performance and urban design research. A special street performance at the Van Alen Institute site will take place on opening night, and the exhibition will be on view through November 19, 2004.

Van Alen Institute is developing this *Variable City* installation as part of its ongoing commitment to new methods for designing public space, as in its earlier 2004 exhibits "The Blind City/Colors of Berlin," and "Texture City" (Rome). The exhibition is being curated by Zoë Ryan, Senior Curator, Van Alen Institute and is being designed by Julia Mandle (Artistic Director), Bethany Koby and Sidney Blank.

The exhibition takes forward an ongoing project that was initiated with a site-specific performance at a key crossroads in a fast-changing district of Brooklyn, New York. Artistic director Mandle, urban designer Ariel Krasnow, and choreographer Mark Jarecke worked in Fox Square, downtown Brooklyn, demonstrating how performance art—with its ephemeral nature and public appeal—can engage the community in creative responses to urban regeneration.

A *Van Alen Report* will accompany the exhibition, providing an overview of other current innovative practices that prompt a reexamining of urban public space and the approach to its planning and design.

Project Development

Fox Square was named after the Fox Theater, which was one of more than 200 theaters that were formerly located in the area. This project celebrates the cultural and social diversity of the site, which remains a busy crossroads but has the potential to be more than a thoroughfare but a destination point in the heart of downtown Brooklyn. *Variable City* was spearheaded independently from the Brooklyn Academy of Music Local Development Corporation's plans to create a vibrant, mixed-use multicultural arts

district in downtown Brooklyn but is part of envisioning new ways of approaching urban redevelopment.

The performances, generated by site studies, were conceived of as an innovative method of conducting urban design analysis and generating feedback from the local community. They prompted passersby to take note of their surroundings, their daily patterns of movement and the other people using the square.

Exhibit/Installation:

Together with site analysis, props, costumes and other materials made specifically for the performances will be displayed. Large-scale photographs of Fox Square introduce the viewer to the site. A slight incline in the floor of the first gallery, which echoes the gradual difference in gradation of Fox Square takes visitors to a seating area from which they get a view of the entire show and can watch video footage on one of the three screens in the back gallery. Video footage of the performances projected onto floor-to-ceiling-size panels and photographs bring the experience of being at Fox Square into the gallery. In the central gallery space the main research and analysis will be presented as well as background information that will provide a context to the site and explain the interrelationships between performance and urban design. Costumes from the performances and props such as the bright orange newspapers that were designed as handouts and contain a narrative description of the project will also be displayed.

Information

Address: Van Alen Institute
30 W 22 Street, 6th Floor (between 5th and 6th Avenues)
Subway: N, R to 23rd St (at Fifth Avenue) F, V to 23rd St (at Sixth Avenue) 1, 9 to 23rd street (at Seventh Avenue)
Hours: Monday – Friday 12-6pm (check www.vanalen.org for extended hours, open on Saturday Architecture Week/Open House New York, October 9)
Admission: FREE

About Van Alen Institute: Projects in Public Architecture

Van Alen Institute is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving design in the public realm through a program of exhibitions, competitions, publications, lectures, and forums. Based in New York, the Institute initiates interdisciplinary collaborations between designers, students, educators, community leaders, and the public.

The Institute has a history of including artists in its programs and has been a strong proponent of the important role art can play at the start of urban regeneration projects. As well as programs with artists such as Muntadas, Mary Miss, and Vito Acconci, the Institute co-organized the Creative Cities conference held at P.S.1 in 2001 and in 2002 co-organized and hosted the “Art to Start” forum. Information at: www.vanalen.org.

J Mandle Performance is a Brooklyn-based not-for-profit experimental arts organization founded in 1996 by artist Julia Mandle de Bever. The company creates and produces performances, often site-specific, that aim to heighten how audiences perceive their environment. The company has performed and exhibited work in a broad range of venues including Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, New Museum of Contemporary Art, and Storefront for Art and Architecture. More information at: www.jmandleperformance.org.