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An Old Warehouse? To This Art Lover, It's a Canvas

By LYNDA RICHARDSON

ANNE PASTERNAK, the executive director of Creative Time, is stepping gingerly in beaded flip-flops inside the roofless shell of a 19th-century tobacco warehouse on the Brooklyn waterfront. The vast structure of brick walls, with its open-air arches, looks like a Roman aqueduct, except this ruin has the Brooklyn Bridge soaring overhead.

Ms. Pasternak stops to scrutinize things. She has wild plans for this old warehouse in the funky Dumbo neighborhood. As the head of a nomadic nonprofit group that presents experimental arts projects in neglected and unusual public places, she is always brimming with adventurous visions.

"I look at everything as a canvas," she says. She was also a major player in coordinating the "Tribute in Light," the temporary memorial near the World Trade Center site that so moved her she sobbed when the twin beams were switched on.

On this steamy afternoon, though, Ms. Pasternak is dealing with, let's call it, a situation.

Until recently, her organization had a permanent summer exhibition within the vaulted stone chambers of the Brooklyn Bridge anchorage. That's the bridge's leg on the Brooklyn side. (Try explaining that to cabbies.) It was a cool place to be in the hot months. But Creative Time was kicked out earlier this year because of national security concerns. The bridge's name was coming up in mentions of a possible terrorist threat, so the city demanded back the keys to the catacomblike chambers. The place was once used to store city truck tires.

"We had to surrender the space, surrender!" says Ms. Pasternak, 38, crisply enunciating her words and sounding faux put-out by the whole thing. "Can you say, 'Can I have the keys back, and thank you for your years of hard work and for maintaining the site?' No-o-o."

Yet it isn't so easy to put off Ms. Pasternak or Creative Time, which in nearly 30 years has presented offbeat projects in places like run-down storefronts along West 42nd Street, in skywriting, even in cyberspace.

In the warehouse, Ms. Pasternak is striding with the graceful gait of a dancer over the gravel and dirt. A willowy 5-foot-8, she has a wide smile.

"We lost one space, so we'll just take over a city block," she says, explaining how the anchorage exhibition, *Consuming Places*, is being redesigned for a show, running from mid-August to late October, in three structures on Water Street. "We're going to activate this block."

Looking upward in the warehouse, Ms. Pas-



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ternak points to where parabolic directional speakers will be mounted, transforming the site into a harmonic landscape with beehivelike recordings of bridge traffic and lapping waves and buoys. Listeners, she says, "will discover pools and pockets of sound" as they walk through.

Come again?

She moves on to the neighboring Empire Stores, a dark, shuttered warehouse. With an excitement that is contagious, she is talking about how artists will set up telescopes, using lenses embedded with sophisticated computer equipment, so that visitors directing the telescopes

toward the building, or even at the Brooklyn Bridge, can retrieve personalized messages left by voice or e-mail.

Come again?

Next, she trots up the ramp of a former horse stable to describe the third project. *Don't ever ask!* Suffice it to say that it has to do with an 800 square-foot glass box serving as a kind of parasitic media and advertising skin.

So how do you get these kooky ideas? Shrugging, she says, "We think about things in our culture that are changing and ask artists, 'What are you thinking?'"

MS. PASTERNAK realized her calling when she aced art history at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, where she also had the distinction of being the first woman to teach bodybuilding. (It's a long story but her roommate ribbed her for having skinny legs, so she decided to do something about it.)

She's not an artist but is known for thinking like one. "She's brilliant and inventive," says Amanda M. Burden, chairwoman of the New York City Planning Commission, who was chairwoman of the board of Creative Time when Ms. Pasternak got the job in 1994.

Ms. Pasternak is married to Michael Stern, an arts photographer who collaborates with his identical twin brother. They live in a small walk-up apartment in the East Village, with their 8-year-old daughter, Paris 99. Her husband fancied Agent 99 in the "Get Smart" television comedy (*Enough! The mind reels.*)

On a recent afternoon, Ms. Pasternak takes a coffee break in Jacques Torres Chocolate, a charming shop on Water Street. She uses it as her office away from her real office in Chelsea. She's self-effacing and funny, reflecting on her life. She says she grew up a nerdy kid in a suburb of Hartford. Her father, who worked for the federal government in charge of Medicare and Medicaid in the Northeast, and her mother, an antique dealer, hoped for the best: that she would perhaps snare a job as a secretary in an insurance office. From the time she was 7, though, her mantra was to get to New York.

So here she is, after various stints organizing gallery exhibitions from Hartford and Boston to Stockholm. Presenting public art, she says, is by far her favorite gig. "It turned out to be more perfect than I realized."

And the most profound work? "If somebody ever questioned the potency of art to reach and connect with people, they only need to look to the 'Tribute in Light.'"