

# The New York Times

## A Seasonal Migration of Cultural Scope

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FRIDAY, AUGUST 8, 2003

**I**T is summer, when some of us will look for any flimsy excuse to be outside. There are people who can sit on a stoop, point their chins toward the sun and call it a day. I admire them. But there are also those of us, guilt-ridden, who need to feel we are going somewhere or doing something. The city, accommodating of most relatively harmless psychological maladies, fortunately satisfies a neurotic's needs with endless options, some frivolous, others less so.

As an option, art can go either way. That art pops up outdoors around now is one of the civic rituals of the season, like Shakespeare in the Park, guys hawking beers from Hefty bags in shopping carts at pick-up baseball games and street vendors with flavored syrups dispensing shaved ices. (Tamarind is a popular choice.)

A virtual industry of artists and arts organizations springs into action when the weather turns sultry. They are almost a community unto themselves. They move to the roofs and courtyards of museums. They take over leafy patches of city parks and try to spruce up concrete plazas. They have their spots where devotees know to congregate. Lately they have also been venturing onto the Astrovision screen in Times Square, competing for attention with the underwear billboards by providing a minute's artistic stimulation each hour, a noble lost cause.

It seems grumpy and possibly beside the point to say that on the whole outdoor art is bad. So I won't mention it. Let me stress instead that this year, as in most years, some of it turns out to be fine or even very fine. You can manage to kill a sunny summer morning and afternoon happily outside looking at art and in the process feel virtuous for being so productive. I did it. Here are some highlights of my day.



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### Jeremy Blake

I neglected to mention a stop after Central Park and before Madison Square Park, in Times Square, where Jeremy Blake is the latest artist to participate in "The 59th Minute: Video Art on the Times Square Astrovision," a joint project of Creative Time and Panasonic. His work is called "Cowboy Waltz" and was inspired, I gather, by a haunted house in California. It consists of three one-minute videos.

As for appearing on the 59th minute, incidentally, that turns out to be either wishful thinking or an approximation. Within sight of the screen are half a dozen digital clocks disagreeing about the time. My watch said 12:56 when one episode of Mr. Blake's work suddenly appeared: florid ink drawings, abstract patterns and woolly designs in saturated colors, like Rorschach blots morphing into a final blaze of light. Some people, accustomed to advertisements and the subtitled sight of Katie Couric, may have thought the screen's computer had contracted a virus.

Mr. Blake is clearly hoping to insinuate his art into the sensory consciousness of the crowds passing through Times Square, if only subliminally. To an art critic, young artists' fascination with 1960's psychedelia came to mind. So did a work by Robert Gober from the 1980's, now at the Venice Biennale: a film of a painting changing.

Mr. Blake, who describes his works as moving paintings, would no doubt describe himself as a painter using digital equipment. He introduces the elements of time and narrative — abstract narrative — into the medium of painting, sacrificing the aura of the one-of-a-kind handmade object. I also prefer to think of him this way. Digital art still conjures up projects primarily about technology. Mr. Blake's work is more aesthetically arresting than most digital art.

Whether passing tourists will register it on their way to Toys "R" Us or MTV doesn't really matter in the end. There are limits beyond which even the most theatrical outdoor artist can't be expected to go. To coincide with "Cowboy Waltz," several of Mr. Blake's videos are being shown at the American Museum of the Moving Image in Queens, where there is no guitarist singing in his underwear or toy store with a life-size model of a Tyrannosaurus rex vying for attention.