

November 29, 2004

Hanging at Columbus Circle, a Thing of Light and Colors

By DAVID W. DUNLAP

New Yorkers who do not like the color of the new environmental sculpture at the Time Warner Center have only to wait three minutes. It will change. And change again.

Known as the "Prow Sculpture," this glowing nighttime exclamation point over Columbus Circle was installed by Time Warner as part of its headquarters. Set in a 150-foot prowlike glass showcase on 58th Street, the sculpture is divided vertically into 12 groups of 36 lighting panels, looking something like a giant keyboard set on end - if keyboards came in red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple.

Since mid-November, the sculpture has been illuminated each evening from 4 to 11 p.m., showing off a range of patterns. The panels change color for three minutes, then hold their color for 30 seconds. The display pauses every quarter hour to tell the time, using large panels to indicate the hour and smaller panels for five-minute increments. (For example, six large panels and three smaller ones would mean 6:15.)

Equally significant is what the prow has not been doing. There have been no sightings of promotions for "Alexander" or HBO or People magazine or any other Time Warner brand or product.

George H. Ladyman Jr., a Time Warner vice president and the sculpture's executive producer, said the deal struck with the city called for no third-party commercial use of the sculpture. The company may use it from time to time to promote special events like a concert in Jazz at Lincoln Center or the premiere of a Warner Brothers movie. But Mr. Ladyman said the sculpture was meant to complement its surroundings and the architecture of the building.

"This is a piece of art," he added, "a piece of technological art."

As such, it is a vivid reminder of how color can set a mood. On a recent evening, as the palette of the sculpture changed, the images it brought to mind went from a desert sunset to ocean depths to a polar landscape to a wooded glen. Then the sculptural tower would turn briefly into a quiltwork.

"We were listening to music just to get a feel for the rhythm and evocative transition," said David Rome of RomeAntics Productions. His company designed and programmed the sculpture, which was made by Cinnabar, with systems by Scharff Weisberg Lighting.

There are strips of light-emitting diodes behind the double-sided translucent polycarbonate panels, which are 2 by 8 feet, 6 by 6 feet and 4 by 12 feet, supported by a 121-foot vertical truss. The lighting arrays would stretch 728 feet, almost to the top of Time Warner Center, if laid end to end. The entire sculpture weighs 10 tons.

Though designed as part of Columbus Circle, the sculpture may be most effective when seen from