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PREVIEWS NOV. 08, 2013

Mary Miss Walks Broadway

by Sarah Cascone

Environmentally engaged artist Mary Miss is teaming up with the organizers of Marfa Dialogues/NY, a two-month-long symposium on climate change that will run through the end of November. This Sunday, Miss will present "Broadway: 1,000 Steps," consisting of three walking tours along Manhattan's main drag, as part of her ongoing project "City as Living Laboratory: Sustainability Made Tangible Through the Arts."

The walks are scheduled begin at three different points on Broadway: 23rd Street at Madison Square Park at 12:00, 173rd Street at 1:45, and 168th Street at 2:45. They will be led by artists, scientists and experts focusing on environmental issues germane to each neighborhood. Miss held a longer version of this walk in May of this year, a two-day event that stretched the entire length of the street, from Van Cortland Park in the Bronx to Battery Park at Manhattan's southern end, and touched on such topics as flood zones, green roofs, high asthma rates and composting.

A longtime advocate of environmental awareness, Miss was eager to participate in the Marfa Dialogues, she said in phone conversation with *A.i.A.*: "Anything is better when there's a group of voices rather than just a single voice."

Fairfax Dorn, of Texas contemporary art center Ballroom Marfa, founded Marfa Dialogues in 2010, hosting programming that explored issues related to the U.S.-Mexico border. A second edition on climate change followed in 2012. This year, the organizers hope to expand the program's reach by extending its length to two months and by holding it in New York. Previous Marfa Dialogues have been held in the small Texas town (pop. 2,000) that gives the event its name.

"Broadway: 1000 Steps." Mary Miss, 2011.

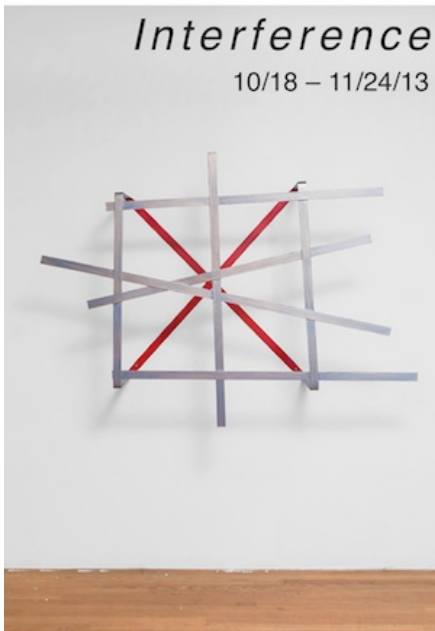


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Miss has been working in New York for decades. Her interest in Broadway stems from the street's length, she said: "It slices through the whole city, going through so many neighborhoods, each with its own conditions. This offers an opportunity to look at so many important topics: land, air, water, waste, food supply, energy."

The goal for "Broadway: 1000 Steps" is to create a series of hub sites where Miss will introduce markers on the urban landscape to indicate important elements of interaction between the city and nature that normally escape residents' notice. By placing convex mirrors at specific locations, Miss will call attention to details that appear alongside the viewer's reflection, and invite the viewer to make a phone call to learn more. In 2011, a test site was installed at 137th Street and Broadway with texts written by author and urbanist Tony Hiss. In addition to highlighting local history, the site drew attention to local problems of poor nutrition and obesity.

Miss has created similar work in Indianapolis, Ind., and Boulder, Colo., but she sees New York as particularly well-suited to this type of work, thanks to its preponderance of pedestrians. "Maybe they just stop to check themselves out in the mirror," she said, "but as they're stopping, they're having a storm sewer pointed out to them."

Her Indianapolis project, *FLOW: Can You See the River?*, explored the local watershed and the effects rising flood levels were having on animals and plants. In Boulder, Miss placed 300 blue markers across the city, each indicating the level that water would rise in the event of a so-called "500 year flood" of Boulder Creek. The 2007 installation, titled *Connect the Dots: Mapping the Highwater Hazards and History of Boulder Creek*, proved prescient: the creek's banks overflowed in deadly fashion this September.

Potential flood markers in Miss's New York project have also become realities following last year's Superstorm Sandy. "I had been studying the Bowling Green area and Battery Park very closely because it's one of our hub sites," said Miss. "Before Sandy, I had already determined how to set up one of my mirrors to reflect the point where the storm surge point would be."

Her husband has a studio near Bowling Green, and when the two went down to check on it the day after the storm, they found that the storm surge line had left its mark on the streets and the sidewalks with garbage. "The litter followed the line that I had been looking at on maps," Miss said. "I wish that line of debris could have been marked permanently, because it would be much more meaningful than just telling people that they're in evacuation area one or two or three."

Despite the sensory overload of New York, Miss believes it's an opportune location for thought-provoking work like hers.

"Sometimes people say 'Oh, New Yorkers are too busy to pay

attention to these things," says Miss. "But we *aren't* too busy. We *can't* be too busy to understand how closely we're connected to the environment and how dependent we are on natural systems."

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