

Time Out

New York

It's not just men on horses anymore

Public art in the Hudson Valley gets a cutting-edge upgrade with "Watershed"

By **Andrea Scott**

When Diane Shamash established a nonprofit organization in 1995 to support art in public spaces in the New York City area, she named it Minetta Brook, after the stream that used to flow into the Hudson River from the marshland that is now Washington Square Park. Minetta Brook is feeding the Hudson once again with "Watershed," a series of ten artist projects installed along an 80-mile stretch of the Hudson Valley. Viewers who equate public art with durable materials like marble and steel may be surprised by the experimental works Shamash has commissioned. There are films (by Matthew Buckingham and Peter Hutton), sound pieces (by Constance De Jong and Lothar Baumgarten) and even short stories (writer Lynne Tillman will invite four authors to revisit the Hudson Valley's heavy sleeper, Rip Van Winkle). The closest things to traditional public sculpture are the stylized cast-iron animals designed by Pae White for parks in Bear Mountain and Yorktown Heights: foxes, owls and frogs that double as barbecue grills.

Christian Philipp Müller's *Hudson Valley Tastemakers* is a multifaceted exploration of local agriculture whose centerpiece—an earthwork composed of a 100-foot-long ramp divided into six sections, each filled with soil from one of the Hudson Valley's six counties—is located on the grounds of Bard College. The sculpture suggests a cross between Robert Smithson's *Amarillo Ramp* and Walter De Maria's *Earth Room*, works by two artists who figure prominently in the collection of the Dia Art Foundation, which just opened a new museum in Beacon and is one of Minetta Brook's principle partners in "Watershed." In the most ambitious of the ten projects, environmental sculptor George Trakas will increase public access along the waterfront in Beacon as part of a larger, mixed-use development. When Trakas's boardwalk, tiered decks and docks open in 2004, the work will become part of Dia's permanent holdings.

Partnership is at the heart of "Watershed," one of whose goals is to reconnect local communities with the history of the region. In addition to



EARTH WORK Hudson Valley locals help assemble Christian Philipp Müller's 100-foot-long, soil-filled sculpture.

gathering a small advisory board of curators and critics, Shamash has assembled a 40-person steering committee whose members range from presidents of area colleges such as Vassar and Bard to representatives of the environmental organization, Scenic Hudson. In addition, most of the artists have adopted a collaborative approach. Müller will arrange tastings of food grown by local producers, and tours by botanists and farmers. De Jong interviewed Beacon residents as research for her *Speaking of the River* (an audio work that will sound from hidden speakers installed in park benches along Hessian Lake and Fishkill Creek, and will also be distributed as a CD).

"Watershed" has just begun, but it's already a hit with the

Hudson Valley. Shamash, who ran a government-sponsored public-art program in Seattle before moving to New York, says, "All the institutions we worked with, from state parks and municipal governments to environmental organizations and local colleges, were unbelievably open and receptive. Not only was there a surprising lack of controversy, but many new cities in the region have expressed a strong interest in doing something, which is pretty surprising even for me. Often there's a wariness when it comes to contemporary public art, but people are beginning to understand the benefits."

"Watershed" will be on view at various locations in the Hudson Valley through December 31, 2005 (see Elsewhere).