

AROUND TOWN

Preview

## Leap of faith

It's a bird! It's a plane! It's a video project? **By Billie Cohen**

Chris Doyle is turning ordinary New Yorkers into Supermen—they are literally leaping tall buildings in a single bound. Or anyway, one tall building. His new public artwork, *Leap*, which screens Thursday 27 through April 30, is a video projection that uses the side of 2 Columbus Circle as a 60-foot screen. The video shows people making slow-motion leaps up the side of the building and disappearing into the night sky.

When asked about the apparent reference to Superman's powers, Doyle insists that he didn't have the Man of Steel in mind; he was thinking about monuments. "The traditional notion of a monument is something gilded or carved in stone, which represents something culture has deemed to be important," says Doyle, a 39-year-old Brooklynite. "I'm interested in taking a slice of everyday life and holding it up and saying, 'This, too, is important.'"

In order to drive home his point, Doyle chose the project's viewing location strategically. "Columbus Circle is a central hub of activity above and below ground; it's a real crossing point," he explains. The subway became a conduit to involve people from all five boroughs in the project.

His crew included members of the nonprofit arts organization Creative Time and extreme-sports photographer Charlie Samuels. Together, they lugged video- and still-camera equip-

ment to the endpoints of all the subway lines that travel through Columbus Circle and persuaded passersby to jump so Doyle could capture the images he would later project. He further expanded the subway theme by mounting a poster exhibit (on view through May) on various subway lines. The posters depict jumpers' elated faces and include text from brief interviews about their personal desires.

Although Doyle eventually collected 420 jumpers, he admits that people weren't always so quick to dive in. "In the beginning, people were, of course a little skeptical; they didn't know what they were getting into. So they would stand and watch other people who were more adventurous," Doyle recalls. But in the end he collected a diverse cast of jumpers: kids, adults, men, women—and even one suit, iTurf founder Stephen Kahn.

Thinking back to Kahn's jump—he was the only corporate-executive type to participate—Creative Time's executive director Anne Pasternak posits, "This is based on appearance, so it could be misleading, but people who appeared to be of economic affluence were less willing to jump than people who weren't. And people were convinced, no matter how many times we told them it was *not* a Gap commercial, that maybe it would be." Doyle was also surprised by the assumption that his project must have some commercial link, but it actually meshed with another of

his goals for *Leap*, one that particularly appealed to Creative Time. "Chris was very interested in how city architecture in the past two or three years has been dramatically taken over by corporate advertising," says Pasternak. "And I think that presenting something that has nothing to do with commercial advertising on an urban building in this city and in this context will make people more aware of how our architecture is being used." Doyle concurs. "It's almost impossible to have a public space without some privatization going on," he says. But his optimistic hope is that *Leap* and its leapers will at least temporarily reclaim the public space in Columbus Circle.

Doyle's appealing idealism comes directly from his experience working "out in the world," as he calls it, on a 1996 artwork for which he gold-leafed stairs to the Williamsburg Bridge. "When I was working on the steps, we had to keep the staircase open because bike messengers and commuters used it to get across the bridge. And so instead of working in my studio, which is what I was used to, I was working out in the world, and I spent a tremendous amount of time just talking to people and answering their questions," Doyle recalls. "People are much more engaged in stuff—if you let them be—than I had thought. So after that, I wanted to do a project where people could be *in* it rather than just watch it happen."

The result is an inspiring 28-minute stream of people lifting off from the pavement as the audio from interviews about their hopes and dreams broadcasts simultaneously. To achieve the project's positive feeling, Doyle edited out the downward part of the jumps—but he purposely shows the instant just before the leapers leave the ground. "That's the part where the humanity leaks out," he says. "That's the part where each person is funny. There are those little moments of waiting or preparing to jump that are so poignant and so funny, and that's the part I can't stop smiling about."

**Leap will be on view at 2 Columbus Circle Thursday 27 through April 30, from dusk until 10pm each night, rain or shine. Call 212-206-6674, ext 263, or go to [www.creativetime.org](http://www.creativetime.org) for more information.**