

GALLERY

Underground Party

Commuters making their way through the underground corridors of the sprawling Times Square subway station in Manhattan now have some extraordinary companions, with the completion in March of *New Year's Eve Revelers*, a permanent mosaic mural adorning the pedestrian passageways between the Port Authority Bus Terminal and Times Square.

New York City artist Jane Dickson '75 created *Revelers*, which consists of 70 life-size partygoers of all ages and backgrounds, each composed of hundreds of pieces of Venetian *smalti*. (Often used in mosaics, *smalti* comes from a glass paste or glaze of silica melted with sodium or potassium carbonate to produce brightly colored translucent glass that is then broken into small pieces.) Some of these figures, scattered along the walls of the walkways below 41st Street, make their way toward the celebration. In the lower Seventh Avenue mezzanine, multicolored merrymakers wearing party hats and waving blowers kiss, jump, and dance to cheer in the New Year. Up the stairs stands a stationary, solitary man—gray-haired Father Time, checking his watch.

Such festivity represents a departure from Dickson's previous work, examples of which belong to the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Many of her paintings depict the emptiness of the American landscape, from nighttime highways and deserted rest stops to the garishness of suburbia. Urban life also informs Dickson's art: throughout the 1980s, she painted nocturnal views of Times Square, where she lived between 1978 and 1993, and still keeps a studio. Her new *Revelers*, commissioned by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) Arts for Transit program, are cousins of a similar series she painted in the 1990s. "They were monochromatic," she says of the earlier work. "Much darker."

Too dark, she realized, for the Times Square setting. Dickson designed *Revelers* in the wake of the 2005 London subway bombings, and determined to imbue it with hope and humanity. To execute her sketches, she hired Miotto Mosaics, a Carmel, New York-based mosaic-building company that in turn hired artisans in Spilimbergo, a small town in the Friuli region north of Venice, to assemble the figures using techniques whose roots go



Jane Dickson's *New Year's Eve Revelers*—of all ages—now decorate the walls of the Times Square subway station in Manhattan.

back to Pompeii. Dickson describes the mural as "luminescent glass, often backed with silver and gold leaf."

The *Revelers* now inhabit the site beneath the world-famous New Year's Eve celebration that climaxes with the illuminated ball dropping at One Times Square. The figures appear "in a maze of passages where everyone is hurrying by, hoping to catch the next train," Dickson says. "The images are meant to be enjoyed at a glance—the figures' animation enhanced by the viewers' rush."

Dickson came to Harvard after a year at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. A graduate seminar with John Coolidge, former director of the Fogg Art Museum, "gave me an incredible insight into the professional art world," she says. She focused on painting at Harvard and later spent two years at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. "I paint to examine the uncanny," she wrote in 2001, "defined by Freud as 'the familiar grown strange.'"

The familiar grew enduringly strange on September 11, 2001; the attackers struck close to the Tribeca home where Dickson lives with her husband, the filmmaker Charlie Ahearn, and their two now-college-age children. Since then, "The whole world has become uncanny, especially the city," she says, "and even more so, the subway. We don't need to be reminded not to be complacent anymore. I feel the challenge now is to be as affirming as possible, to assert the continuity of life in this anxiety-charged locale."

~SUSAN HODARA

Susan Hodara '75 is a freelance journalist whose articles have appeared in the New York Times and other publications.

On May 22-24, at the Times Square subway station, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority celebrates the completion of Jane Dickson's mural.

