

Union Square Subway Station Now Boasts the World's Largest Linear Digital Zoetrope

By Jen Doll

published: Mon., Sep. 26 2011 @ 4:00PM

Tonight at 7 p.m. at the Union Square subway station, in a temporarily vacant retail space just down the stairs below the Food Emporium at 14th Street and 4th Avenue, Professor Joshua Spodek and his students will officially unveil "Union Square in Motion," an interactive art installation considered the world's largest digital linear zoetrope. What's a zoetrope? It's a series of still images that create the "appearance of animation" as you walk past them. Spodek told us, "A zoetrope is something that normally kids play with; it's an early animation device. You'd spin it around and see, maybe, a horse galloping inside. I make linear zoetropes. The main difference is that they're straight instead of round, as long as the space allows."

So, how does it work?

If you stand still in front of it, you see a vague images; as you move, you see lots of different images. They range from abstract shapes to scenes from nature and people dancing. We have the theme of growth running through. You can look at the videos, but you really have to see it in person.

I'm still not sure I understand how it works!

When I had the idea, I was getting a PhD in physics, and it took me 3 years to get it working really well! I'm still getting the nuances of it. I still walk away thinking I saw something moving when there wasn't.

How do people react to the images?

That's what this is about. You'll see random strangers walk up to each other and talk about it; kids go crazy over it. I wish adults had more children in them. You'll see nose prints all over it, because people look at it really closely. That's part of the reason we go for easy to get, less complex images; we're just trying to help people enjoy their day.

We assembled it off-site all summer long, and we started to install it last week. It's a unique experience to install something in a public environment. When people see us working on it, they

come up and talk to us, and ask questions...what the public isn't able to see is the back of it, how it works.

How long will the installation be there?

Hopefully for a while. The one in Bryant Park ("[Bryant Park in Motion](#)," in 2010) was up for 17 months. I think art and New York City go very well together. We're trying to be a part of the environment; we really like being in Union Square.

Spodek, who recently showed at [Crossing Art Gallery](#) in Queens has done a number of commercial displays over the years, including these, in the PATH, in 2002:

The current project came from a collaboration studio at Parsons, and was produced by Spodek and Anezka Sebek, with art from students Jeanne Kelly, Hilal Koyuncu, Rose Maison, Umut Ozover, Josefina Santos, and Jaqi Vigil. It's funded from outside sources. Following tonight's unveiling there will be a making-of screening at Parsons' Sheila C. Johnson Design Center, 66 Fifth Avenue, between 12th and 13th Streets.

Check out more [photos of the installation and Spodek's work at his website, here](#).

[[JDoll](#) / [@thisisjendoll](#)]

Go to [Runnin' Scared](#) for all our latest news coverage.