



Installation view: Rudolf Stingel, *Plan B*, Grand Central Terminal, 2004. Commissioned by the Art Production Fund. Courtesy: Creative Time, Art Production Fund and the MTA Arts for Transit, New York. Photo: charliesamuels.com

## NEW YORK: GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL

RUDOLF STINGEL: PLAN B

1 July – 29 July

[www.grandcentralpartnership.org](http://www.grandcentralpartnership.org)

Train stations are not normally cosy places in which commuters take pleasure in hanging out, yet surprisingly it takes little more than wall-to-wall shag pile to soften a hard environment. The plush rose-decorated carpet designed by Rudolf Stingel, which now lies underfoot in Vanderbilt Hall at Grand Central Terminal in Manhattan, is not the most practical application for a passageway that gets trampled on by 120,000 city-goers everyday, but it definitely makes the transition from platform to asphalt pavement a lot more pleasurable. The carpet was commissioned by Art Production Fund and organised in collaboration with Creative Time and the Arts for Transit division of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in New York.

Stingel refers to the field of blue flowers on an electric pink background as a giant painting, which animates the beaux-art architecture of the station. Titled *Plan B* (after *Plan A* was rejected), this project is neither a viable long-term antidote to the uncomfortable nature of waiting areas or a grand public art statement in the vein of other projects that have animated the hall, such as Takashi Murakami's attention-grabbing giant balloon eyeballs installed in summer 2000. However, its presence is significant. Reminiscent of the gaudy decorated floor coverings in ailing seaside hotels or glitzy casinos, it is surprising to come across it in this unfamiliar setting, offering a level of comfort that is unexpected. The carpet also provides an armature for investigating the nature of monumental public spaces and the public's relationship to them. The tactile surface and vibrant colours catch the eye and draw attention to the thoroughfare which thousands of commuters experience every day without thinking twice. Anne Pasternak, Creative Time's Executive Director, notes that 'While Rudi Stingel's *Plan B* may seem to be a beautiful and obvious gesture at first glance (after all, it's just a big floral carpet!), the truth is his work is actually quite complex. I love that it is in many ways about process – the process of seeing a space differently once a modest intervention is made.'

A twin installation of 7,500 square feet of carpet has also been laid at the entrance to the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis as part of their 'Walker Without Walls' series of projects in sites outside the museum galleries, which are undergoing a renovation designed by Herzog and de Meuron.

However, back in New York, the carpet is creating more than just an interesting entranceway. Pasternak concludes that her primary hope is that 'people will pause and think about a space they move through regularly a bit differently, taking note of what was there before, what has changed, and what might be in the future. Maybe they will take a moment to pause and delight in a personal fantasy of the space inspired by its transformation.' I witnessed the effects of the carpet as a businessman speaking on his mobile phone subconsciously came to rest on the carpet rather than on the marble floor, another guy chose one corner in which to fall asleep and a group of kids sitting around playing with their video games seemed as comfortable as if they were in their own home. If nothing else, the carpet is providing a service that will surely be missed once it is removed.

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