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Inside Art

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Simultaneous Shows, One Indoors, One Out

Still without a permanent home in Manhattan and with spring fast approaching, the Dia Art Foundation has cooked up a way to lure audiences to its museum on the Hudson River in Beacon, N.Y., while also paying homage to its past.

It has teamed up with Montclair State University in New Jersey, which presents the Peak Performances series, and has commissioned the 75-year-old artist Robert Whitman to create a theater piece that will be shown simultaneously outdoors at Riverfront Park near Dia: Beacon and indoors at the university's Alexander Kasser Theater in Montclair, N.J. Mr. Whitman, a multimedia experimenter who has enjoyed a long relationship with Dia, made a reputation for himself in the early 1960s, along with Claes Oldenburg, Allan Kaprow, Jim Dine, Red Grooms and Robert Watts, by staging happenings, those fleeting performances that are considered classics of the genre today.

The new work, "Passport," will be shown on April 16 and 17. (Tickets are available through diabeacon.org.) Mr. Whitman described the piece in a statement as "nonverbal theater, using a vocabulary of space, rhythm, scale and formal plastic elements that communicate the image without words."

As in the past, Mr. Whitman has collaborated with engineers and scientists to create images that use live action, props, sound and video. Each location will show something different. In Beacon he will incorporate the surrounding environment. A burning boat will float down the Hudson, and the sound of a passing Metro-North train will be heard. In Montclair colored liquid will spew from a volcano. The images will be transmitted live from one location to the other via video, so all together, about 600 people can see the work.

"Bob Whitman is part of our DNA," said Philippe Vergne, Dia's director. "Performance has been a long part of Dia's history." And while veterans might be familiar with Mr. Whitman's work, Mr. Vergne said that by presenting this new performance he hoped that "young people will understand his history too."