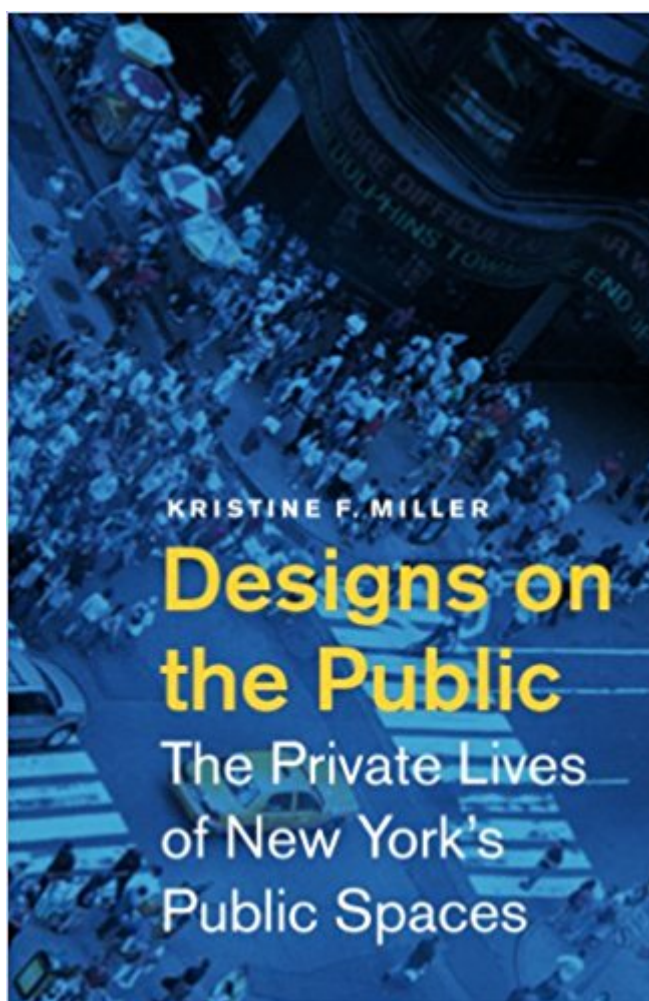


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Designs On The Public: The Private Lives Of New York's Public Spaces



Synopsis

New York City is home to some of the most recognizable places in the world. As familiar as the sight of New Year's Eve in Times Square or a protest in front of City Hall may be to us, do we understand who controls what happens there? Kristine Miller delves into six of New York's most important public spaces to trace how design influences their complicated lives. Miller chronicles controversies in the histories of New York locations including Times Square, Trump Tower, the IBM Atrium, and Sony Plaza. The story of each location reveals that public space is not a concrete or fixed reality, but rather a constantly changing situation open to the forces of law, corporations, bureaucracy, and government. The qualities of public spaces we consider essential, including accessibility, public ownership, and ties to democratic life, are, at best, temporary conditions and often completely absent. Design is, in Miller's view, complicit in regulation of public spaces in New York City to exclude undesirables, restrict activities, and privilege commercial interests, and in this work she shows how design can reactivate public space and public life. Kristine F. Miller is associate professor of landscape architecture at the University of Minnesota.

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Customer Reviews

Kristine Miller's new book is the clearest, most concise and concrete discussion of issues around the definition of public space that I've encountered. Among the issues Miller explores are:- What constitutes a public?- How are law, regulation, rhetoric and design used to control who gets to use a space, and what they're allowed to do there?- Just how is eminent domain - the state's prerogative

to claim private property, for the ostensible benefit of the public - constructed?- How can aesthetics be deployed to muddy the fact that an apparently private domain like the atrium at Trump Tower has in fact been paid for (and continues to be subsidized) by you and me, the public? Each of these issues is brought to vivid life through well-chosen examples from the recent history of New York City, from the controversy over Richard Serra's "Tilted Arc" to the design-abetted, megacorp-friendly "renewal" of Times Square. Even though these conflicts are far from obscure, Miller's careful explication reveals facets of each that have hitherto not been well aired - for example, I was unaware of the bowdlerization and betrayal of photographer Neil Selkirk's "Faces of 42nd Street" series until Miller reported on it. (Apparently, neither was Selkirk.) In its distillation of some important ideas from Habermas and Lefebvre, "Designs on the Public" reminds us that the seemingly self-explanatory notion of "public space" is something continually in the process of being constructed, renegotiated, and challenged. It's a bracing, not always happy but absolutely crucial read: those of us who believe that democracy is something that happens in public are best served by understanding how very contingent access and the right to use can be. I've added it as required reading for the course I teach at NYU's Interactive Telecommunications Program, and recommend it wholeheartedly to anyone concerned about the life of cities.

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