

THE NEW YORKER

OCTOBER 22, 1990

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

STRATA



In a small plaza hemmed in by Franklin, Leonard, Centre, and Lafayette Streets, around the corner from the Men's House of Detention, a tiny Stonehenge has risen: forty cement blocks in a circle, each about the size and shape of a typewriter. Artist Alan Michelson set them there in late September as a tribute to the Collect, a lake that stretched from Franklin to Duane Streets until the city drained it around 1810, because the refuse-spewing tanneries along its shores had turned it into a health hazard. Michelson's blocks reflect a multitude of human and natural activities that have taken place on the site. Molded on their surfaces are bas-relief tin cans and cardboard flaps that evoke the modern-day homeless, antique ice skates and anchors that recall the Colonial era, and, representing a more pastoral time, reeds, elm bark, and cattails, as well as reminders of deer, ducks, turtles, raccoons, and muskrats. The piece, entitled "Earth's Eye," will remain on view until Christmas, and its goal, Michelson says, is "to remind people that there's more than pipes and pavement under our feet. We always forget: there's history down there."
