Tuesday, May 25, 2004

Doing time

Eastern State Penitentiary is a monster of a place with damp, crumbling walls and depressing information about human folly and lives wasted. By time I finished looking at the six art installations there, I felt as uplifted as I felt depressed.

The art work is excellent and thoughtful; and the space is as tame as it has ever been, cleaner, less dangerous (the hardhats were eliminated a year ago), but still imposing, and still a monument to wrong-headedness.

The art work, on the other hand, needs to take a different tack, speak to the human condition. Most of the artists spoke to the edurance of the human spirit in the face of all odds.

Music for the souls

Timothy Nohe's '142 Ways to Mark Time' was outstanding, a musical piece made up of recordings of rhythmic noises performed on parts of the prison--its rusting metal gates, wooden benches, fallen plaster, broken glass, locks. The recorded cadences are located in different cells, and each one is randomly timed in relationship to the other cadences.

The randomness has the influence of John Cage,