

NEW YORKER JIM HODGES

— By Blake Gopnik

NEW YORKER JIM HODGES is most famous for a kind of decorative scatter art. For stringing together the petals from plastic flowers, for instance, and turning them into a kind of veil or waterfall that fills one corner of a room. A new, billboard-size work that the artist has given to the Hirshhorn Museum, and that is now hanging on the building's south facade, seems typical Hodges and also a surprise. A sheet of white vinyl, 35 by 70 feet, is covered with a filigree of delicate markings. Lines squiggle across the surface in fluorescent green, cherry red, Creamsicle orange, sky blue and black. This time, however, instead of feel-good petals, Hodges's "decoration" is made up of words: He got more than 90 U.N. delegates to write "Don't be afraid" in their native languages and scripts, then blew their scrawls up to fill a wall. It's a perfect Washington work, asking art to keep our spirits armed against prophets of doom.

"Don't Be Afraid" will be on public view at the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum, Seventh Street and Independence Avenue SW, through spring 2006. Call 202.633.1000 or visit www.hirshhorn.si.edu