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**SPECIAL VAN ALEN REPORT JANUARY 2002**

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# designing queens plaza

A Design Ideas Competition



**VAN ALEN  
INSTITUTE**

PROJECTS  
IN PUBLIC  
ARCHITECTURE

## JURY REPORT

On Saturday October 27th, 2001 a distinguished group of architects, designers and planners, who comprised the Queens Plaza Design Ideas Competition Jury, met in an all-day session at the Clocktower Building in Long Island City to review all 191 entries submitted to the competition.

The Jury awarded one first prize of \$10,000, one second prize of \$5,000, one third prize of \$2,500 and six honorable mentions with a \$500 prize each.

## JURY

### JAMES CORNER

FIELD OPERATIONS PA

### FREDERICK FISHER

FREDERICK FISHER AND PARTNERS  
ARCHITECTS

### J.JABER

NYC DEPARTMENT OF  
TRANSPORTATION

### PETER MAGNANI

OFFICE OF THE QUEENS BOROUGH  
PRESIDENT

### TERENCE RILEY

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

### MARILYN JORDAN TAYLOR

SKIDMORE OWINGS & MERRILL

### MICHAEL WEIL

NYC DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING

Technical Advisor:

### BARBARA MORGENBESSER

NYC DEPARTMENT OF  
TRANSPORTATION

Van Alen Institute would like to thank the following organizations.

Competition Co-sponsor:  
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**THE GREATER ASTORIA  
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**P.S.1, AN AFFILIATE OF MoMA**

## REMARKS

Queens Plaza, in Long Island City, is on the verge of major change. An essential part of New York City's infrastructure, with its intersection of roadway, subway, and elevated trains, it is now becoming a critical part of its urban experience, with a mix of commercial, civic, and cultural programs. How it finally achieves this, and what identity this renewed place will ultimately have, is still an open question, one that Van Alen Institute was very pleased to be asked to contribute to by the Office of the Queens Borough President, which co-sponsored this competition. There is one fundamental purpose for design ideas competitions: to help envision a new place, a new urban character, a new design — often against great challenges — and to offer new possibilities for implemented change. With almost two hundred entries and a range of ideas as varied as the Borough of Queens, the competition has already started a valuable dialogue on the future of one of New York's most important new centers.

This competition could only have happened in the context of a changed Queens, which faces a very different future than anyone could have imagined fifteen years ago. Then, in 1986, Claire Shulman became Borough President, and together with Deputy Borough President Peter Magnani has consistently paved the way for better public environments for the people of Queens. As Susan Rodriguez, Partner, Polshek Partnership and Van Alen Institute Trustee puts it: "The Queens Borough President's office has been instrumental in establishing higher expectations and standards for public architecture in the borough."

The planning efforts of the New York City Department of City Planning, the ongoing work of the Department of Transportation, the boldness of community boards, cultural organizations, civic alliances, and commercial investors have all changed the perception and potential of Queens Plaza. Leadership at many levels has made a competition like this even conceivable. Many changes were already underway when the competition was announced in June 2001, and even in the past six months, new zoning, new commercial enterprises, and new cultural organizations have all come to the fore.

Since the tragedy of 9.11, it is sometimes difficult to imagine that we can still have districts brimming with ideas and opportunities, yet Queens Plaza is one of them. There is a new administration, both in the Mayor's Office and with Borough President Elect Helen M. Marshall, and we are confident that under their leadership New York will continue to be a dynamic, open-minded city, ready for both change and continuity, in Queens Plaza and beyond.

**RAYMOND W. GASTIL** VAN ALEN INSTITUTE

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## VAN ALEN REPORT 11 SPECIAL ISSUE

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*Graphic Design*

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Cover: Queens Plaza  
Photograph by Nathaniel H. Brooks

The Institute is engaged in many programs throughout New York City, including the recent Creative Cities: Renewing New York conference in Long Island City, Queens, co-sponsored by The Port Authority of New York & New Jersey and The British Council.

## FIRST PRIZE

### SURACHAI AKEKAPBYOTIN, JUTHATHIP TECHACHUMREON (NEW YORK, NY)

"This design, alone among the entries, uses a highly architectural approach that boldly 'swallows' the track structures at the eastern terminus of the plaza and introduces billboard forms to give definition to the public space within an asphalt sea. It provides a terminus, that responds to the Queensboro Bridge to the west, and a portal, that addresses the future commuter rail terminal to the east." **MARILYN TAYLOR**

"This project was convincingly developed architecturally as a powerful gateway, marker and space — a big sign really, but a sign that also shapes a center and a space." **JAMES CORNER**

"The lightweight structure imposed in the plaza both embraces and masks the elevated subway in a way that imposes order and frames a successful and totally different plaza space. More structure becomes less. The idea for many diverse functions that are connected and move through the structure would be a lot of fun." **MICHAEL WEIL**

R11.4

## FIRST PRIZE

"Queens Plaza, as the gateway between Manhattan and Queens, is the most significant commercial district and focus for cultural activity in the area. Our project attempts to develop the area and further the potential of the site as a transit hub by connecting the different modes of transportation, in combination with various communication technologies, for all types of users. The media corridor, the main construct in our design, is partly a connecting device and partly an attempt to create a focus point for the program.

The media corridor will serve as the connection between disparate elements: major subway stations, pedestrian ways, medians and public spaces. Walking through this corridor, a variety of users can interact with different programs embedded inside and wrapped around the skin of this passageway. The corridor will also link to traffic medians making them much more accessible and to the plaza at the JFK Commuter Triangle, which can become the main center of the area.

Our design encourages a wide range of possibilities. It can accommodate everyday uses such as parking and also, through simple manipulation, can be turned into an exhibition or installation site, market or fair, and can accommodate multiple activities at the same time."

SURACHAI AKEKAPBYOTIN WORKS AT MELTZER/MANDL ARCHITECTS IN NEW YORK CITY AND ALSO WORKS AS A FREELANCE ARCHITECT IN BANGKOK. JUTHATHIP TECHACHUMREON WORKS AT MERIDIAN DESIGN ASSOCIATES ARCHITECTS IN NEW YORK CITY AND ALSO WORKS AS A FREELANCE ARCHITECT IN BANGKOK.

FIRST PRIZE: ENTRY #090, SURACHAI AKEKAPBYOTIN & JUTHATHIP TECHACHUMREON, (NEW YORK, NY).



FIRST PRIZE: ENTRY #090, DETAIL, SURACHAI AKEKAPBYOTIN & JUTHATHIP TECHACHUMREON, (NEW YORK, NY).



2ND PRIZE

AMOEBE ARCHITECTURE (NEW YORK, NY): GISELA BAURMANN, BIRGIT SCHOENBRODT, JONAS COERSMEIER, MICHAEL BIERMER

R11.6

"At first, this entry is surely one of the most sentimental and emphatically 'green' proposals, and yet after reviewing nearly 200 excessively architecturally engineered projects, it begins to surface as a most compelling idea: a verdant forest strip set as both contrast and complement to the bustle of the adjacent elevated tracks and roads.

Moreover, this forest strip acknowledges its artificiality through surrealist lighting, synthetic materials and digital scrim. It is fresh, fun and engaging. While unresolved in terms of construction and urban design, it is simply fantastic in terms of an idea." JAMES CORNER

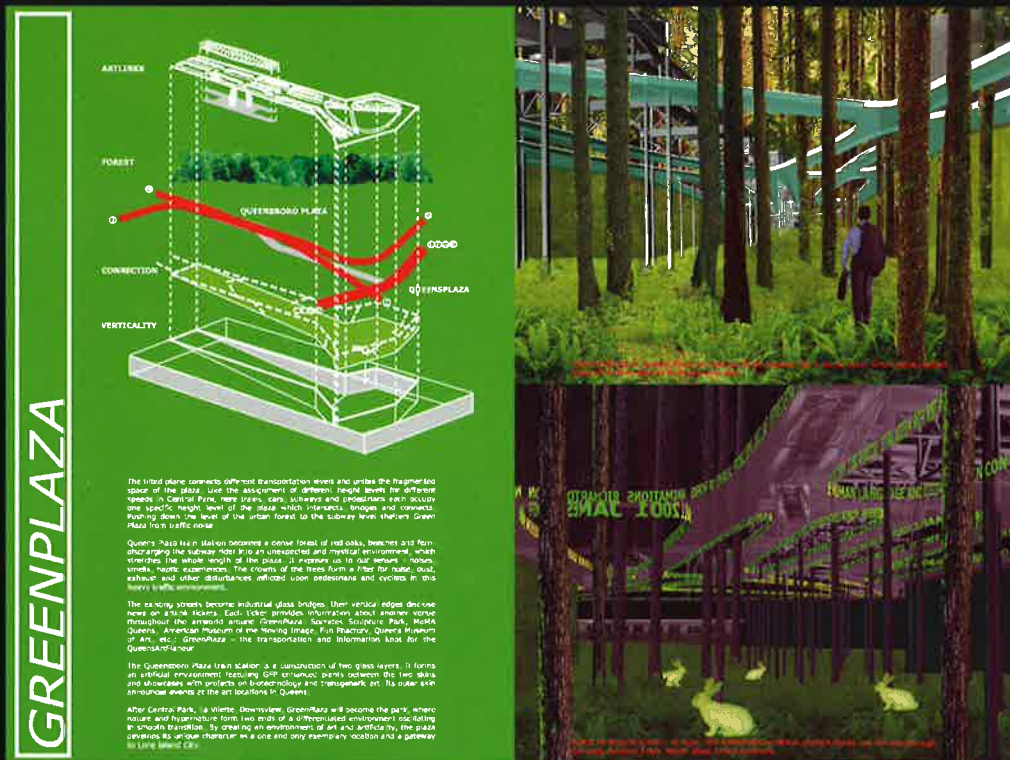
"Being someone who regularly leaves the city on weekends for the woods of upstate New York and particularly loving the smell of ferns after it rains, I find this a particularly pleasing image and especially like the different day and night environments it creates. It is an extremely creative solution." MICHAEL WEIL

2ND PRIZE

"What interested us was the verticality of the transportation network. In our project we sink the ground level from Queensboro Bridge to Queens Plaza subway station so that it goes under the road. This sunken area would be used by pedestrians and cyclists to get them easily across the plaza and would have direct connections to the subway station and street level above. The roads would be broken up into a series of bridges over this sunken plaza for cars and buses. We would like to make this sunken level a forest of trees and make it a 'GreenPlaza' that is open in part to the sky. Passengers alighting the train would first enter an artificial forest made from genetically engineered plants. This was inspired by the Australian artist Patricia Piccinini's project 'Plasticology.' Once passengers have gone down to the lower level below the subway they would enter a real forest. Another art project by the Brazilian artist Eduardo Kac, 'GFP bunny,' gave us the idea for the bio-engineered bunnies that would live in this forest. GFP stands for 'Green Fluorescent Protein,' which Kac transfers to the genes of a rabbit to create these uniquely colored animals. Our project is a constant play on wild versus artificial nature. Another feature of our project is the eleven 'artlink tickers' or LED media signage systems that are connected to the vertical parts of the elevated subway structure. These announce exhibitions and activities at the art venues around 'GreenPlaza.'"

FRENCH ARCHITECT GISELA BAURMANN AND GERMAN ARCHITECTS BIRGIT SCHOENBRODT AND JONAS COERSMEIER ALL WORK AT AMOEBE ARCHITECTURE, NEW YORK. MICHAEL BIERMER IS THE MANAGING DIRECTOR OF AMOEBE ARCHITECTURE AND AN ADVISOR FOR THE PROJECT.

SECOND PRIZE: ENTRY #085, AMOEBE ARCHITECTURE (NEW YORK, NY).



SECOND PRIZE: ENTRY #085, AMOEBE ARCHITECTURE (NEW YORK, NY).



### 3RD PRIZE

LYNN HSU, BRADLEY SHANKS (CAMBRIDGE, MA)

"This entry presents the best solution for dealing with the elevated subway structure as an urban element. It is modest but is a concept that can be carried further. It has connectivity to the Sunnyside Yards to the east and creates a sense of place at Queens Plaza (at the intersection of Northern Boulevard and Queens Boulevard).

It does not, however, provide for pedestrian circulation in the north-south direction. The green living walls create a sense of closure while at the same time have a translucency to them. This is a good start. The next steps would be to use this urban element and create a more pedestrian environment in the area to the north and south of the subway structure." **PETER MAGNANI**

"This is a nice, simple, doable scheme which would make the plaza more tranquil. It would have been interesting to incorporate a painting scheme for the elevated subway to work with the living panels." **MICHAEL WEIL**

R11.8

### 3RD PRIZE

"A lot of our ideas came from analyzing the qualities of the site. Queens Plaza is a complex intersection of events, movements and transportation. We integrated our scheme into this complex system. Instead of doing something overtly dramatic we wanted to work with the existing structures and introduce new elements on the street and at the entrance to the plaza. Horizontal and vertical surfaces built over the plaza allow for a new pedestrian infrastructure. When we visited the site we were told about its nickname *Death Boulevard*. It appears that it got this name because it is so difficult to cross: the signs are unclear and it is noisy and confusing.

We are hoping these surfaces would clarify where pedestrians could cross the street and congregate. We started with a palette of materials that are in contrast with the hard landscape of the street and elevated subway line. We chose wood and granulated recycled rubber to build an overpass across the road that had acoustic and environmental benefits. The horizontal surface serves to reclaim the ground plane for pedestrian use. Using the existing vertical surfaces of the subway structure we decided to hang panels that reflected different aspects of the landscape: grass, vines, wood, etc. These would be hung at various intervals and heights following the geometry of the subway structure to form a backdrop for the activities on the plaza and define the shape of the plaza."

LYNN I. HSU IS A DESIGNER WORKING FOR KYU SUNG WOO ARCHITECT, INC. IN CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS. BRADLEY SHANKS IS A DESIGNER AT CHERMAYEFF, SOLLOGUB AND POOLE INC. IN BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS.

THIRD PRIZE: ENTRY #124, LYNN HSU & BRADLEY SHANKS, (CAMBRIDGE, MA).



THIRD PRIZE: ENTRY #124, LYNN HSU & BRADLEY SHANKS, (CAMBRIDGE, MA).



## HONORABLE MENTION

**ROGERS MARVEL ARCHITECTS, PLLC (NEW YORK, NY):  
JONATHAN MARVEL, GUIDO HARTRAY, IRINA VERONA, MARK NYE, GUSTAVO GONZALEZ.  
ARUP ACOUSTICS (NEW YORK, NY): NEILL WOODGER**

"Most of the schemes submitted primarily concerned themselves with the pedestrian's experience within the space. What I particularly like about this scheme is its focus on the motorists' and transit riders' experience as they use the space. Moving through the structures in a car or the train would be great fun." MICHAEL WEIL

"The key to creating a public space in Queens Plaza is to make it inhabitable by people living and working there by balancing the dynamic presence of passing cars, trucks and trains. The existing plaza is dominated by different layers of transportation systems, which divide the space into a series of traffic islands. In response to this spatial overloading, our proposal looks at the three dimensional volume of the plaza.

We propose building bands onto the cross-sections of the elevated subway line that incorporate various programs. The bands provide an opportunity to occupy the vertical space around the infrastructure and provide a frame for pedestrian occupation of the plaza at ground level. The new structures support the use of the plaza and create a sheltered area where sound from the elevated trains is attenuated. Trees and new paving can weave together new and existing site structures. Existing ways of occupying the site are reinforced. Within the reconstructed frame of the plaza a cultural infrastructure can be overlaid onto the transportation infrastructure and movement and static occupation are brought together in a coherent manner."

ROGERS MARVEL ARCHITECTS WAS FOUNDED IN 1992 IN NEW YORK CITY BY PRINCIPALS ROBERT ROGERS AND JONATHAN MARVEL.

RT11.10

## HONORABLE MENTION

**JOSEPH KARADIN (QUEENS, NY)**

"The strategy here is to take the existing patterns of use and make them more visible by inserting the flow of information into the process. I find it very well considered." TERENCE RILEY

"This project was conceived to function on many levels (spatially, culturally, functionally, etc.). One of the main objectives was to create a spatial boundary defined by a series of object architectures (the beacon towers) within the fabric of Queens Plaza, with as little physical intervention as possible. At night the towers fulfill their role as beacons. The glass columns illuminate internally and provide a series of reference points by which to navigate through the plaza and project information into the surrounding environment.

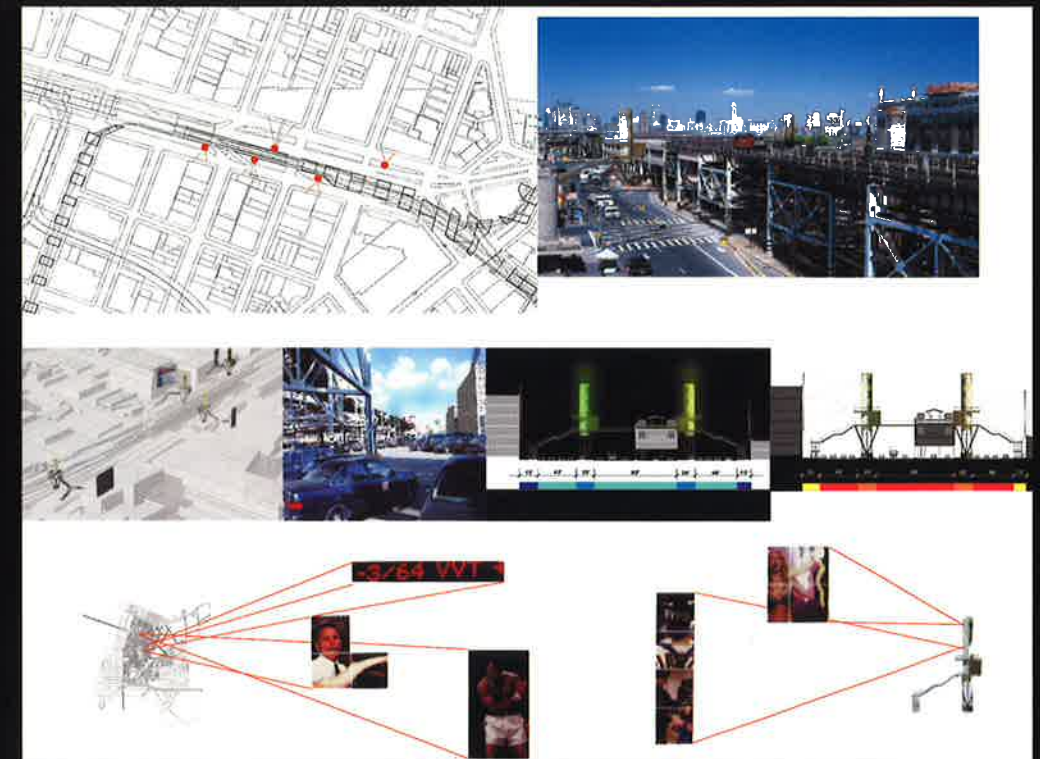
The resulting design solution was a means of disseminating information via a wireless network on a massive scale into the public space. The information is in the form of a continuous stream of projected images and sounds, which can be consumed while driving, walking or even riding the train. Physically, the Queensboro Bridge was a strong influence on the design of the beacon tower network. Its industrial and functional design language was an obvious starting point that influenced the placement of the towers, which are clustered as a sort of armature to the bridge, connecting the bridge to the plaza. By mimicking the context of the bridge the network of towers blends into the overall scene and the information projected onto and into the space of Queens Plaza is distilled. This characteristic 'blending' is however reversed at night when the towers are illuminated."

JOSEPH KARADIN IS A FREELANCE DESIGNER LIVING IN FOREST HILLS, QUEENS. HE IS CURRENTLY WORKING WITH SEVERAL DESIGN GROUPS FOCUSING ON CONCEPTUAL DESIGN.

HONORABLE MENTION: ENTRY #155, ROGERS MARVEL ARCHITECTS PLLC (NEW YORK, NY).



HONORABLE MENTION: ENTRY #063, JOSEPH KARADIN (QUEENS, NY).



**HONORABLE MENTION**

**NA-MA (AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS): MAARTEN VAN TUIJL, NAKO HIKAMI**

“The proposal links all the uses surrounding the plazas. It can be expanded and separates pedestrian movements from the traffic. When the both sides of the plaza are developed as a result of the new zoning, there will be more of a rationale for the concept: there will be destination uses that need connecting.” **PETER MAGNANI**

“What first struck me about Queens Plaza was the raw energy of the place. The cars going through the plaza and the expressive subway system overhead make it a very dynamic site. Instead of forcing an artificial identity for the area we wanted to use the qualities already present but solve the conflicts between the traffic flows and the layer that is missing; pedestrian and cycle paths.

We concentrated the flow of traffic in the center of the plaza so the sidewalks could be widened around the edge for use by pedestrians and cyclists. A platform or mezzanine level made from steel and built over the 12 lanes of traffic could also be used by pedestrians and cyclists and in addition constitutes an entrance to the Queensboro Bridge. By building this mezzanine level over the street but under the subway lines we have created a recreational path that extends onto the Queensboro Bridge in a similar way to the area around the Brooklyn Bridge. This bridge also links Queens Plaza with sites in the vicinity.”

ARCHITECTS NAKO HIKAMI AND MAARTEN VAN TUIJL FOUNDED NA-MA, AN OFFICE FOR ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM, IN THE NETHERLANDS, IN SEPTEMBER 2001.

RT1.12

**HONORABLE MENTION**

**WORKSHOP: KEN SMITH LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT (NEW YORK, NY): KEN SMITH, ELIZABETH ASAWA, ALEX FELSON, DAN WILLMER, JUDITH WONG**

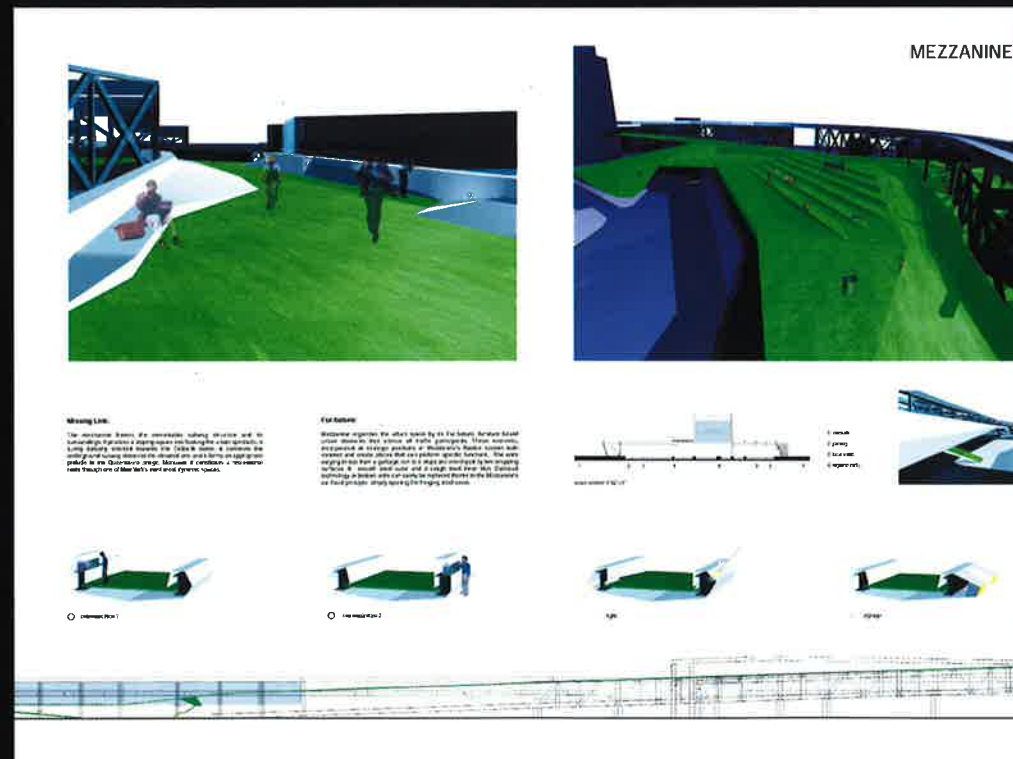
“Dumpster Gardens is a provocative and possibly facetious concept for guerrilla landscape elements. This seems more like an intriguing temporary art installation than an urban design proposal.” **FREDERICK FISHER**

“The site appealed to me because it is a marginal landscape in an urban area. It is one of the toughest places to work. In my practice I am interested in exploring ways to make a landscape in unconventional areas of the city. Walking around the Queens Plaza site my team came across a lot of dumpsters. Looking at them they seemed perfect for planting trees in. They are a simple prop that can be transported on dumpster trucks and could occupy areas around and on the supporting structure of the subway line.

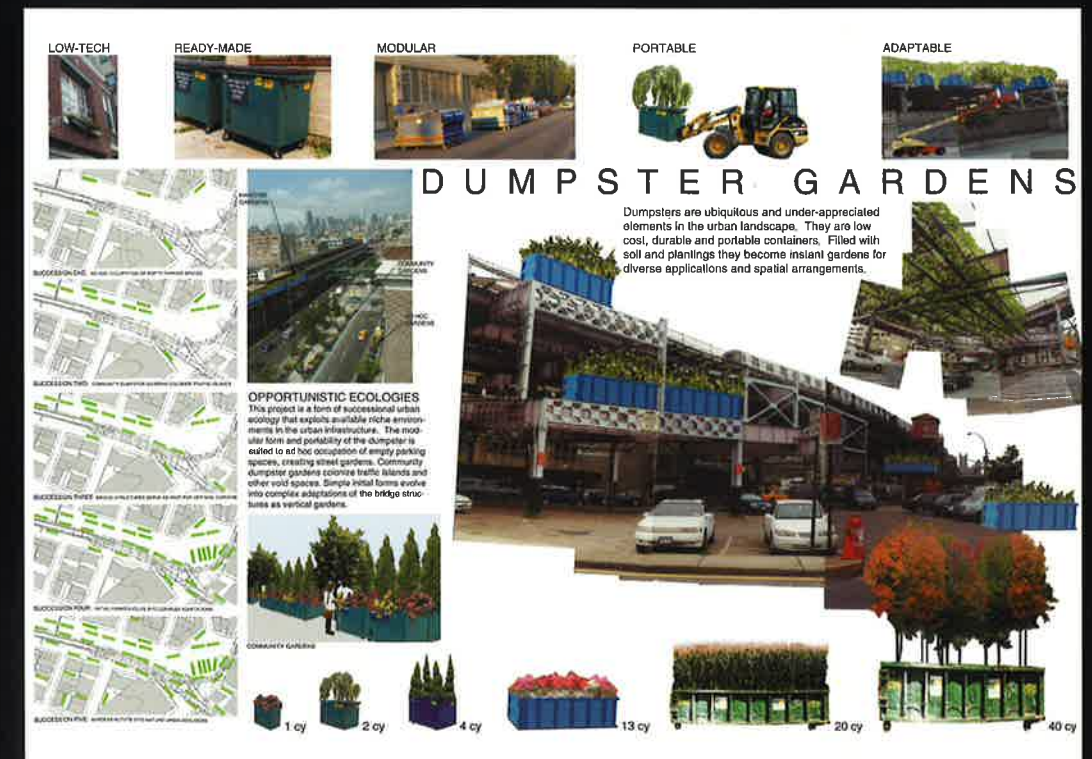
I am also interested in the way ecology can work in situations where there is a disturbance and the type of ecologies that exploit these circumstances. In nature, fires and farmers clearing fields cause disturbances. In urban areas the disturbance is the infrastructure. We have taken a transgressive leap between the natural and urban ecology. On a basic level we thought that local community groups could place the dumpsters randomly around the plaza to create urban gardens. From there they could be placed on traffic medians and the elevated subway structure. This simple activity could get quite complex.”

KEN SMITH IS A NEW YORK CITY BASED LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT. HIS BACKGROUND AND TRAINING IS IN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE AND PUBLIC ART. HIS WORK EXPLORES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART, CONTEMPORARY CULTURE AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN.

HONORABLE MENTION: ENTRY #044, NA-MA (AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS).



HONORABLE MENTION: ENTRY #076, WORKSHOP: KEN SMITH LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT (NEW YORK, NY).



## HONORABLE MENTION

MARTHA MERZIG, JOHN RIKER (TROY, NEW YORK)

"This design makes good use of the existing infrastructure, turning the mundane facts of the plaza into events." TERENCE RILEY

"Queens Plaza is a densely populated, densely layered system of exchange. It is a topology of networks in which communication and correspondence become essential to its operation. It functions primarily as an intensely regulated transportation hub, mediating between wildly differing modes, speeds, and scales. Mutable and scale-less, each surface contains, absorbs, and disseminates information.

Together, these surfaces become both a landscape of interrelated movements and a complex matrix of the connective potentials of structural, programmatic, and topological qualities. These connections and overlaps between different parties, functions, locations and topologies enable a new, vital communication system. They are interwoven to create both effective flux and effective interaction. Holes and gaps in these surfaces, such as elevators and escalators, enable a system of short circuits to take place, enabling high-velocity informational junctures."

MARTHA MERZIG AND JOHN RIKER ARE CURRENTLY FIFTH-YEAR BARCH THESIS STUDENTS IN THE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AT RENSSELAER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE. THEIR ENTRY WAS PART OF A COMPETITION STUDIO ADVISED BY GALIA SOLOMONOFF OF OPENOFFICE.

RT1.14

## HONORABLE MENTION

CHRISTIAN HENKE, ELISABETH LESCHE (MUNICH, GERMANY)

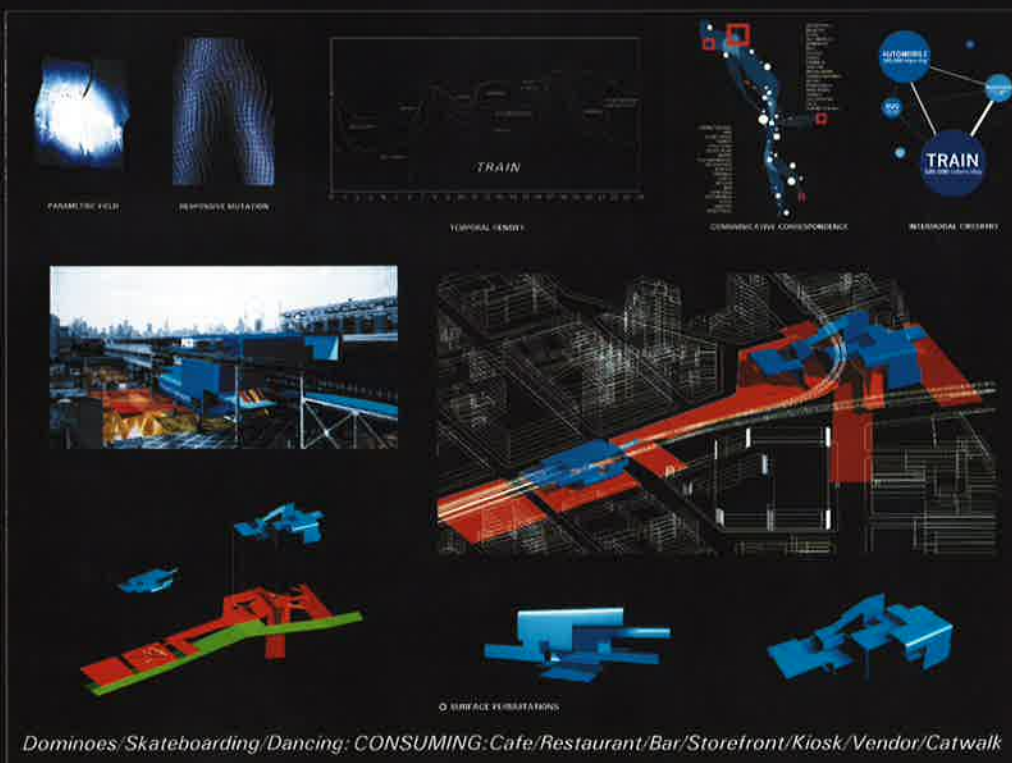
"Library Boxes is one of the more interesting light touch proposals. It suggests the activation of the neighborhood with small public facilities that could be achieved quite quickly. This strategy could be used as an early phase in concert with some of the more ambitious proposals." FREDERICK FISHER

"The existing traffic structures of Queens Plaza are principally left untouched. However, a second pedestrian level is built above the ground. This second level is situated at an elevated height so it does not collide with the traffic and does not impede the vehicular flow of the plaza but carries a variety of new functions. The pedestrian level is made up of three components: bridges, boxes and 'park decks.' The bridges are predominantly dedicated to all kinds of motorized traffic. However, broad pedestrian walkways to both sides of the lanes allow for safe movement across the Plaza.

In addition, existing medians are being reduced to a minimum size and the excess space is added to the walkways to widen them. Secondly, a series of pedestrian bridges structure the space and make crossing the plaza safer. All bridges are paired with brightly colored and illuminated boxes that are hung onto the elevated subway structure. These nodal points fulfill several functions; they mark ground level pedestrian crossings, give Queens Plaza a recognizable identity and can be used as three-dimensional billboards. In the area of the JFK Commuter Triangle two 'park decks' are removed from the turmoil of the plaza. An elevated park deck above the parking lot affords views of Queens Plaza and a sunken water pool creates a quiet refuge."

CHRISTIAN HENKE AND ELISABETH LESCHE ARE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS WORKING AT SCHMIDT LANDSCHAFTS-ARCHITEKTEN IN MUNICH, GERMANY.

HONORABLE MENTION: ENTRY #007, JOHN RIKER & MARTHA MERZIG, (TROY, NY).



HONORABLE MENTION: ENTRY #183, CHRISTIAN HENKE & ELISABETH LESCHE, (MUNICH, GERMANY).

