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community property

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VAN ALEN REPORT

community property

What Drives Public Design?

Pier Pressure
West Side Competition
East River Project
Billboard Ban?
Public Access
Community Design

VAN ALEN
INSTITUTE

PROJECTS
IN PUBLIC
ARCHITECTURE

Van Alen Report focuses on fundamental challenges for improving the design of the public realm, combining visual and verbal essays, news, commentary and dialogue. We choose topics that cross the boundaries between design disciplines and broader public concerns. These challenges are at the core of the Institute's **Projects in Public Architecture**, integrating design competitions, workshops, websites, publications, exhibitions and forums.

Van Alen Report is a forum. As with our website, www.vanalen.org, our goal is to create a public realm, and appropriately, the first two issues of the reconceived and redesigned reports, VAR4 and VAR5, have been made possible by a public entity, the New York State Council on the Arts, a State Agency.

Van Alen Report is published seasonally with additional special issues. Subscriptions are a benefit of membership and are also independently available to libraries and universities. Individual issues can be purchased at our gallery and in bookstores.

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VAN ALEN REPORT 5

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Umemoto; and Paul Warchol.

Special thanks to Community
Board 2, Manhattan, the CB2
Waterfront Committee and all the
entrants and jurors in the Pier 40
Competition for their commitment
to design in the public realm.

Cover: Rooftop of Pier 40 (VAI)

ROBERT JAMES: PIER 40 COMPETITION

The driving question for **VAN ALLEN REPORT 5** is: How can a city get the best public architecture possible while fully engaging the community in the process? We have focused on New York, but conversations with our colleagues across time lines indicate that even though all architecture is local, the relationship between design and community is global.

We are aware that even by asking this question we are implicated in a kind of “skepticism of the professionals” about whether the best public architecture is generated through community involvement. But we would not have leapt at the chance to co-sponsor an ideas competition for Pier 40 with Community Board 2, Manhattan without the steady conviction that designers and the public must work together towards a contemporary practice of “community design.” RG

R5.4

KNDRR, KROEHLING, LIANG AND TRIEBSWETTER: PIER 40 COMPETITION ENTRY

PIER PRESSURE:

design by collage >

NEWSFRONT

Three and a half million square feet of Manhattan's West Side are the site for the **IFCCA PRIZE COMPETITION FOR THE DESIGN OF CITIES** sponsored by the International Foundation for the Canadian Centre for Architecture. This international competition calls for ideas to transform the isolated, half-urbanized area bound by 30th Street on the south, the Hudson River on the west, 34th Street on the north, and 8th Avenue on the east. Blocks from the heart of the city, the site is just south of the Jacob Javits Convention Center and includes residential buildings, railyards as well as other depots and service amenities.

After more than 100 nominations were received, five teams were selected as finalists: Ben van Berkel and Caroline Bos, Amsterdam; Peter Eisenman, New York; Thom Mayne, Santa Monica; Cedric Price, London; and Jesse Reiser and Nanako Umemoto, New York.

The competition will be the first of a series of IFCCA-sponsored competitions to be held every three years in cities around the world. New York gives IFCCA a seemingly intractable challenge – provoking change in a city which since the skyscraper era has never found an architectural identity to match its ambition.

The organizers of the competition, led by CCA Chair Phyllis Lambert and the director of the competition, Ralph Lerner, Dean, School of Architecture, Princeton University, have assiduously assembled a group of nine sponsors and eight jurors with strong New York ties and international reputations. The sponsorship includes developers and non-profits such as the William Randolph Hearst Foundation, as well as media and investment leaders including Barry Diller, and Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis.

For the jury, there is a worldwide roster of architects and designers: Elizabeth Diller, Frank O. Gehry,

Gary Hack, Arata Isozaki, Philip Johnson, Phyllis Lambert and José Rafael Moneo. In addition, the jury includes two public sector shapers of New York's built environment: Joseph B. Rose, Chairman, City Planning Commission, and Charles A. Gargano, Chairman and



Tangle of uses at the site of the IFCCA competition.

R5.5

Just south of West Houston Street, jutting into the Hudson River, lies one of the most tantalizing properties in the city. A recent proposal that the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum build a satellite there according to a design by Frank Gehry attests to the site's prominence. It is at the site of this hulking Pier 40 – completed as a marine terminal in 1962 – that community residents have long dreamed of a green park. The 15-acre pier is now used as parking for more than 2,000 cars and numerous freight trucks and buses. The current operators' permit will run another two years, and by that time the community and the now forming Hudson River Park Trust hope to have a plan under way for the pier's future use.

Many issues seem to challenge the realization of such a park. How can a park be economically self-sustainable as initially proposed by the Hudson River Park Conservancy? Where will the displaced vehicles go? Should the enormous pier structure – and its embodied energy – be discarded?

In hopes of resolving some of these issues by generating design alternatives, Manhattan's Community Board 2 and the Van Alen Institute co-sponsored a design competition. Last summer, 141 entries were submitted from designers around the world and, in January, three winners and two honorable mentions were announced at an awards ceremony and public forum where the community and the jury were able to discuss solutions. An exhibition opening at the Institute on March 30 will provide further opportunity to review these proposals for this critical waterside site.

"There are lots of conflicting ideas about what to do with the pier and what constitutes a park," said Alan Gerson, chair of Community Board 2. "We all know that Pier 40 is special. It's a chance to have a little Central Park in our downtown neighborhood." While a vocal group in the community have long been committed to a traditional green space on the pier, Gerson hopes that the competition results will expose them to a range of options and help them develop and refine their vision. >

Commissioner, Empire State Development Corporation.

This summer the finalists – who each will receive \$50,000 – will present their entries to the jury, which will award \$100,000 to a single winner. An exhibition of projects at Grand Central Terminal is scheduled for October 1999.

While "the public" is invoked several times in the competition brief, the booklet and jury composition do not emphasize "community" as it is often described. The required one-point perspective, calling for a view from about half-way across the Hudson, implies a big picture approach which often leads to designs at odds with community agendas. In fact, the program's scrupulously assembled chart of zoning and use shows there are many residents in these blocks, however empty they seem. It will be worth observing how the competition entrants manage to be both boldly speculative and simultaneously

grounded in the political realities of a time when governments are loathe to raze entire districts. RG

New York's "other river," the East River, is no weak sister anymore. The Institute's **EAST RIVER PROJECT** continues to provoke debate among those with a vested interest in the waterfront. In addition to a design competition, the project has included numerous public forums,

walking tours and a website. A book and an international conference are planned for next year.

Last fall, the final votes were tallied for the Van Alen-sponsored competition, "Design Ideas for New York's East River." First prize went to landscape architects Victoria Marshall and Steven Tupu of New York for their project, *Till*. Their entry illustrates how solid waste can be used to build new landscapes on the



Butterfly pier complex at South Street Seaport, site detail of East River Corridor, Reiser + Umemoto.

R5.6

DAVID HEALD/THE SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM FOUNDATION: GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, BILBAO SPAIN

waterfront, a timely idea on the cusp of the 2001 closure of the Fresh Kills landfill, the city's main dump.

Second Prize went to Michael Jacobs and Aaron Neubert of Brooklyn, NY for their entry, *Tidal Landscapes*, which proposed creating an occupiable path which would span the expanse of the river. Third Prize went to Dirk Bertuleit and the Dagmar Richter Studio in Berlin for their project which used a gabion-like stone construction to rebuild piers in Greenpoint, Brooklyn.

The two runners up were Michael Laviano of Berkeley, CA for his *Connecting the East River Waterfront* and the Brooklyn Architects Collective for their *Making Fabric*. Both entries tackled Brooklyn's very practical need for public access to the waterfront and the question of how communities that have been traditionally cut off from the river by an industrial zone can now be reintegrated. These winning entries will be on exhibition in the

Institute's gallery until March 13 and can also be seen on the website. All entries will be on view from March 1 through March 6 when there will be a presentation of selected entries.

East River Corridor, a design study developed by the Institute's first Van Alen Fellows in Public Architecture, Reiser + Umemoto, shares the gallery replete with a 25-foot model. The team was invited by the Institute to study a site of their choosing anywhere on the East River. In contrast to the majority of the competition entrants who elected to focus on Brooklyn and Queens where there are great swaths of land up for grabs, the team, led by firm principals Jesse Reiser and Nanako Umemoto, chose Manhattan.

R + U presents a mega-project which evokes Robert Moses. Their project calls for a continuous and highly-programmed park. Grappling with the complexities of the FDR Drive by submerging it in places and

Is New York a
"retrograde city"?
Is there little that
is daring or
imaginative?

R5.7

creating a secondary access road, the project allows for a significant increase in pedestrian public access.

In November, Jesse Reiser presented the project at a panel discussion opposite a competition finalist with a radically different vision for the waterfront, a project reflective of the move to consider the environmental concerns related to riparian design. On behalf of Bone/Levine Architects, Kevin Bone presented *Transfiguration*, a scheme which calls for the natural regrowth of wetlands on Brooklyn and Queens' post-industrial waterfront. BB

The New York City Council, led by Lower Manhattan representative Kathryn Freed, is seeking a **BILLBOARD BAN** to limit these large signs that have overtaken the city's skyline in recent years. Councilmember Freed – fearing a "nightmarish sci-fi cityscape right out of 'Blade Runner,'" – asked the Department of Buildings and the

In the end, while most of the entries were not reminiscent of a City Beautiful park, many provided the green space and open space that the community so vociferously wants. Rather than one-liners many entrants provided design solutions that attempted to tackle the divergent needs of the community, offering provocative mixed-use alternatives. Likewise, in addition to proposing hybrid solutions in terms of program, a number offered ways of preserving at least part of the extant pier, thus creating structural hybrids as well.

"There's a major building there and the community wants a park," said juror Glenn Smith, a Boston-based urban designer and landscape architect. "Some mediation is the solution."

"The two 'camps' were those who kept portions of the structure and those who proposed total demolition. None of them did a complete job of solving the problem," commented fellow juror and landscape architect Judith Heintz, seconding the notion that a middle ground should be found and lauding those entries that attempted this.

GREEN SPACE VERSUS BUILT SPACE

What makes a park – and if such a "park" is possible while saving any part of the pier's mammoth structure – was at the crux of the debate spurred by the competition. Juror Kevin Bone, also an architect, educator and editor of *The New York Waterfront* (The Monacelli Press, 1997), adamantly argued for many projects that proposed to use all or part of the existing structure.

"Environmentally speaking, the demolition of the structure would itself be a bold act," said Bone. "We would be ignoring the embodied energy of that structure. It was a monumental engineering undertaking."

Juror Hugh Hardy, principal, Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates, agrees. He finds the idea of

destroying the structure extremely wasteful. "Only in America could we imagine disposing of this! It was the largest pre-cast structure in the world when it was built," Hardy pointed out.

Structural engineer and juror Leroy Callendar believes the pier can be reduced to an elegant frame rather simply. "Leaving the frame as a pergola was a lovely – and doable – solution. We [the jury] were pleased with the effect you could get by leaving the frame up and the shadows that would be cast on a grassy area underneath," said Callendar. "And from a structural point of view, it is thoroughly sound."

The New York City architecture firm Deamer + Phillips created one of the winning entries, proposing a Hudson River Aquatic Park, providing a pool, ice rink, beach, boathouse as well as a "window" onto the river below. They chose to keep parts of the structure intact, in part because of the vast expense of demolition, but also to create a new experience. In an honorable mention winning scheme that also retained the structure, New York architect Robert James envisioned this existing structure as serving as an "icon of modern architecture" that could also accommodate many kinds of recreation.

But for juror John Edminster, longtime community resident and designer, none of the solutions served the community with what he believes it has always known it needs most – a traditional park. "Where are the playgrounds?" he asked.

While Edminster was initially a staunch advocate for removing the structure entirely and installing a traditional green park, he came to see some merit and variety in the schemes. "This process has opened my mind to some new ideas about the structure. The north wall of the structure, for instance, could have value as protection from the wind that would allow increased use of the park," he said.



MARSHALL AND TUPO: TILL, EAST RIVER COMPETITION ENTRY

Planning Commission to work with the City Council to help mixed-used manufacturing districts like SoHo, NoHo and TriBeCa escape excessive signage.

In 1987, when the Department of City Planning rewrote the zoning regulations for Times Square, they pinned their hopes on signage. In the first half of the century, the bright lights of advertising had made Times Square a landmark of 20th-century urban culture. The reformers, including architects and designers, hoped it could do so again – and it did. But the explosion of signage re-energizing Times Square has moved beyond Broadway and Seventh Avenue, spreading out across the city and down the avenues thanks to innovations in printing technology. Today large-scale signage can be run off quickly and inexpensively on enormous laser printers.

While advertisers and outdoor media companies aggressively seek out new territory, community resi-

dents and neighborhood groups are engaged in fighting their advances. Having spent much of the last year battling the red neon Travelers logo, residents downtown are eager to end the "selling" of their neighborhoods. Billboards and corporate logos, they argue, do little to improve the city's appearance and even less to foster a sense of community.

Houston Street has become the front line of the battle. Bordered for much of its length by blank walls and side lots, the street's southern edge has become a backdrop for an assortment of multi-story signs advertising nationally familiar brands. Since last fall, three applications have been filed for new billboards, adding still more signage to the street. While permits for two have been denied, one has been constructed. Rising five stories above the car wash at Houston and Crosby, the superstructure offers its advertiser 900-square-foot of flood-lit display space.

While no draft of the legislation



Signage energizing commercial Times Square.

has been released yet, Freed has presented her case to the Council's Subcommittee on Zoning.

"The sign regulations do not address the problems caused to residents from the bright lights and blocked sightlines, nor do they address how these billboards ruin the physical and architectural character of the neighborhoods," Freed testified. She hopes to extend the

Bone diagnoses the traditional green park urge as a distinct opposition to change of any sort. "We have become a kind of retrograde city in that way, and we are living in the past. We all welcome the Hudson River Park, but there's little there that's really daring or imaginative," he declared.

Focusing solely on a green park, Bone insists, is unworkable at this point in the city's history. "The idea of a pure park environment is for our time in this city unreasonable," he said. "We know, however, that diversity will always succeed. In Berlin, for example, there are harbors, marinas, restaurants, and wetlands restorations right next to each other."

BACK TO NATURE

A number of entries proposed the environmentally minded solutions that Bone alluded to. While some may be dismissed as far too radical for actual consideration, the ideas they present call for the community to dispense with assumptions and expand their understanding of what could happen on this pier. Sebastian Knorr, Liu Liang, Nicole Kroehling and Michael Triebswetter, a design team based in Germany, proposed a park where the structure would be demolished and replaced with a naturalistic scheme which would include a "rainforest."

"We decided to reinvent the space in an ecological way. Take everything down, add three feet of soil for plants, and then install basins of water, one to two feet deep, so that there is even more contact with water inside the pier," Knorr said. "New Yorkers want to get right up to the water."

Their vision was to create a new "lung" for the city; two glass winter gardens would generate solar power to warm a swimming pool located under a long, wing-shaped tensile structure. This very liquid approach also included an elevated jogging track through one greenhouse and floating deck.

signage protections already in place for residential districts to these mixed-use zones. cJ

Sited on one of the murkiest waterways in Greater New York, where just a few years ago it was said police divers couldn't see their hands in front of them, the unsightly and odoriferous **NEWTOWN CREEK WATER POLLUTION CONTROL PLANT** in Greenpoint, Brooklyn is getting a facelift and more. Redesigned by Polshek Partnership Architects this community's stinky albatross may become a model public amenity on a creek traditionally considered a bastion of toxins.

When completed its gleaming stainless-steel egg-shaped digesters will evoke the industrial glamour of the days of photographer Margaret Bourke-White and painter Charles Sheeler. In compliance with the Clean Water Act, the existing 25.4-acre sewage treatment plant is being upgraded at the cost of almost

\$2 billion to become a 53-acre state-of-the-art complex. The design attempts to ingratiate the plant to the community by using bold forms, continuing the surrounding street grid, but perhaps most fundamentally by accommodating public access into the compound.

To that end, the Department of Environmental Protection in collaboration with the Department of Cultural Affairs' Percent for Art Program has commissioned two public art installations that will give the visitors access to the plant, and in addition, will provide access to the waterfront at Newtown Creek, a vital issue in this waterfront community which remains landlocked.

"One way to make the plant more acceptable is to give the community something back by cleaning up the waterfront," said Charlotte Cohen, Director of Percent for Art.

At the confluence of Newtown Creek and Whale Creek, artist George Trakas was selected to design

a 735-foot waterfront walkway. According to Trakas, people will be able to enjoy the wildlife which is gradually returning to the creek with the decline of heavy industry and commercial shipping.

Artist Vito Acconci, known internationally for his provocative public art, nods to *architecture parlante* in his project at the plant. Acconci's scheme takes the business of the plant – water – and uses it as a theme throughout. A pond flows from outside into the visitors center, while the sinuous perimeter fence that will enclose the plant is itself filled with water.

Tony Snachkus, neighborhood activist and member of the Newtown Creek Monitoring Committee, notes that the plant may still face unsightly neighbors, including an operative car recycling plant, but he hopes the projects will spur others to clean up the rest of the creek. BB

During the selection process juror and environmental attorney Robert F. Kennedy Jr. championed the idea of access to the water. "We need to reconnect to the water in real ways," said Kennedy. "People who live in an island city such as this one should be able to watch boating and go fishing."

Architect and educator Saul Jabbawy, working with students Tom Wang and Tony Tai, won an honorable mention for another ecologically oriented entry, suggesting a restoration of the shifting edge of the river while still acknowledging the urban nature of the site and allowing for recreation.

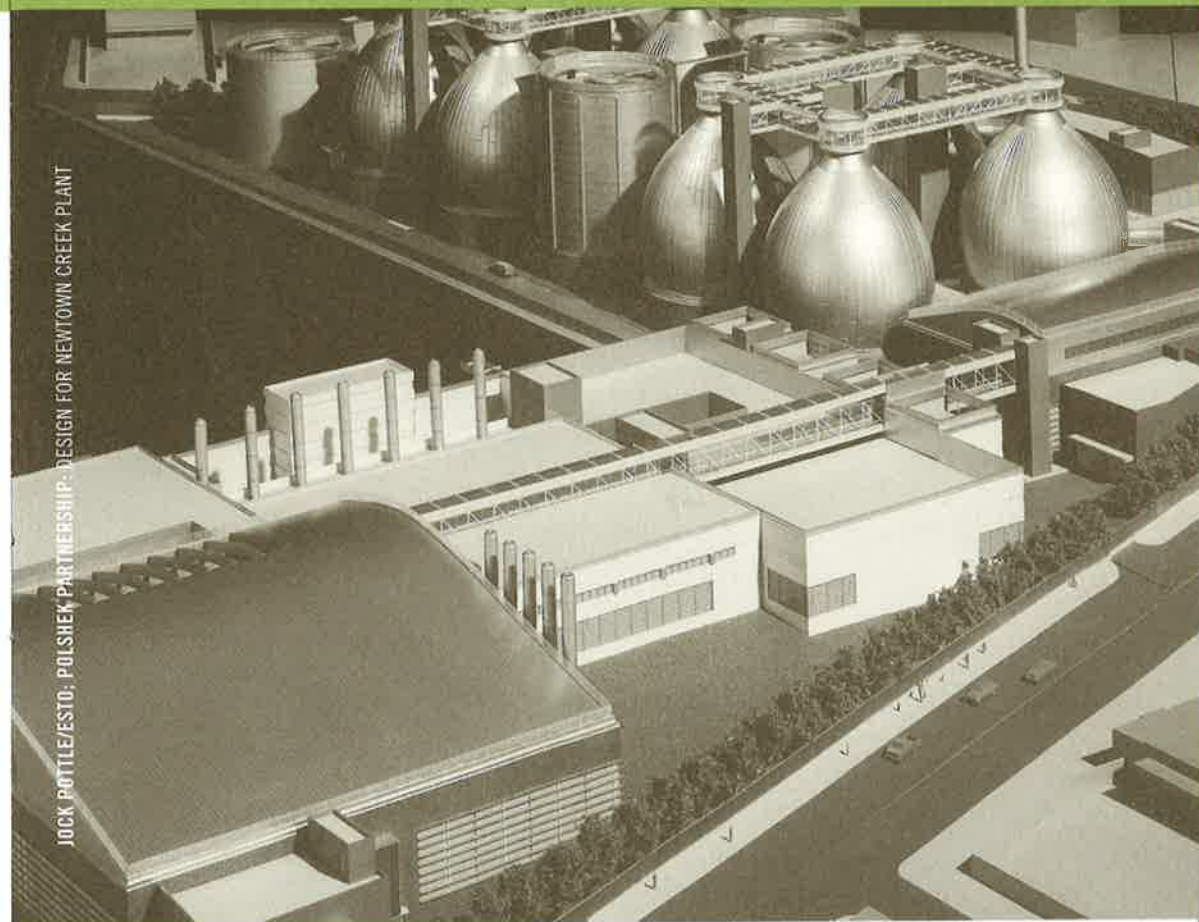
"The water's edge in most contemporary cities is a hard edge and a steep drop to the water itself. The whole richness and messiness of a watery edge disappears," he explained. "We wanted to bring in the tidal condition to this pier without creating a fake condition."

HYBRIDIZATION

By exploring structural alternatives for the pier both entrants and jurors were prompted to look at the pier's fundamental program, or use. The fact that the pier has historically had a number of functions and has just recently added indoor recreation spaces and a rooftop soccer field suggests that many uses could coexist in a park. But are the pier's temporary mixed uses desirable or simply strange bedfellows?

The majority of the competition jury felt that – given the diverse demands of the community, the legal need to accommodate displaced cars and the possibility that the pier may have to be an economically sustainable portion of the park – a hybrid solution seemed the only tenable one.

"There's enough space there that some kind of mixed use is actually possible," juror and New York architect Leslie Gill pointed out. >



JOCK POTTLE/ESTO; POLSHEK PARTNERSHIP: DESIGN FOR NEWTOWN CREEK PLANT



VAL: PARKING AT PIER 40

Majid Jelveh and Christian Joiris' winning entry proposes that the pier host several "bands of function," including an exhibition and administration area, sports, aquarium research, a man-made beach and a green buffer. This "collage of all that we are," as they call it, is an attempt to meet the community's numerous needs.

The community board will soon have to face the prickly issue of the pier's parking function. According to the Environmental Impact Statement, destruction of the 2,000 long-term parking spots would require significant mitigation. A new and nearby parking garage to park that many cars, if a site could be found, would likely cost at least \$50 million.

"The board's position for a long time has been to remove parking from the pier," Gerson said. "If we cannot find other space, then we will have to think more seriously about hybrid solutions." But even park purists admit that finding space and funds for such a large garage seems highly unlikely.

State Assemblymember Deborah Glick was a park purist until late October, when she herself submitted a written proposal for an intermediate solution that suggests eliminating all trucks and buses, the worst polluting vehicles now using the site. She further suggests removing the top two levels and creating a roof over the open courtyard in the middle. The first floor could be used for long-term car parking and the 14-acre roof would then become the "open green park for which this community has fought for so long," argued Glick.

As director of the Pier, Park and Playground Association, Tobi Bergman sees promise in such hybrid solutions as well. He has worked to get temporary athletic fields installed at the pier and spends a great deal of time on site, managing the batting cages and soccer fields.

"As long as people are not dogmatic, we can merge the interests and desires for the pier," he said. "Some people are fixated on the idea of an open green park and nothing else, but if you think

about this history of the waterfront, a passive commercial use blended with some recreational uses starts to sound like a really good mix," he said.

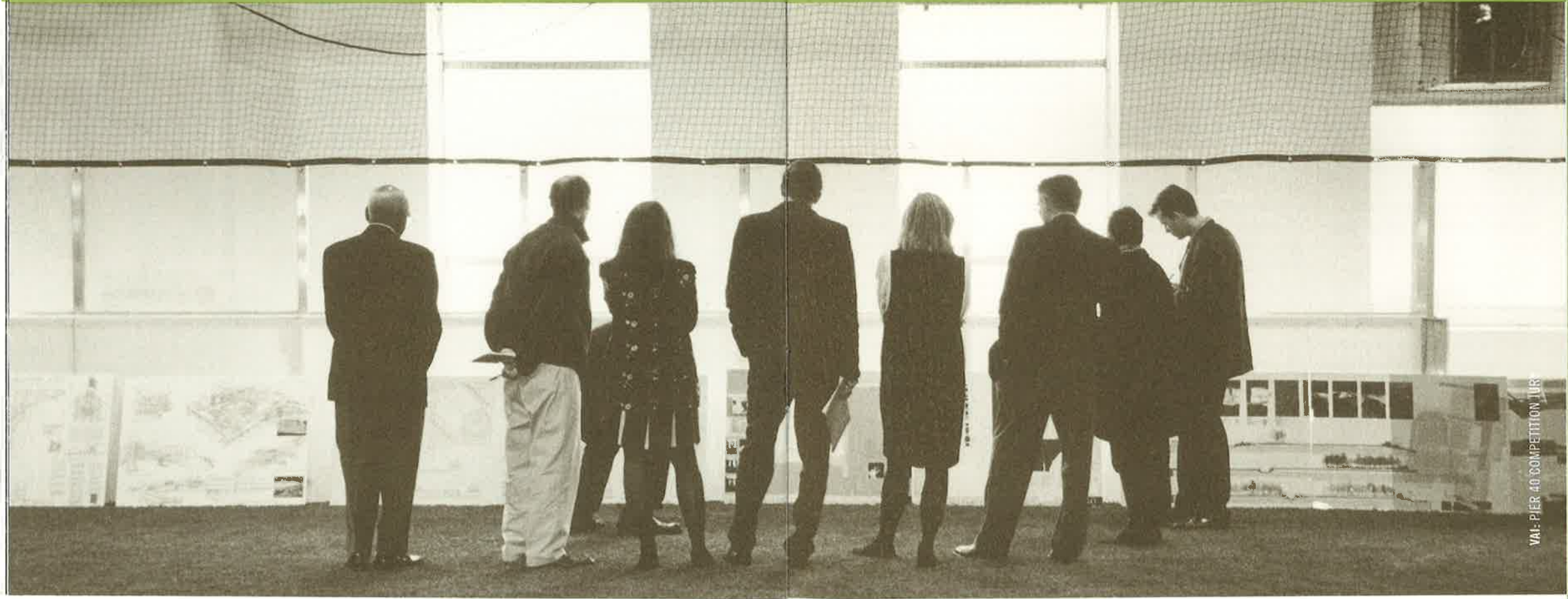
Elizabeth Meyer, competition juror and chair of the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Virginia, likewise feels the pier's own complex history should be a jumping off point for designers. "The Pier 40 site has so many associations and systems," explained Meyer. "By building on and re-interpreting those, a designer can guide the community to build a memorable and meaningful new civic space for Manhattan's waterfront."

One competition entry acknowledged the pier's diverse history by attempting to reconcile the need for parking while meeting the public needs for recreation space as well. On behalf of New York University, Polshek Partnership Architects offered an interesting solution that would save up to 700 long-term parking spaces on the site.

This scheme included a benefactor; NYU was offering to build a series of much needed sports and athletics facilities that they would use perhaps 30 percent of the time and which would be open to the public the rest of the time. They would build and maintain the entire facility, solving one of their own problems while giving something back to the community. "We couldn't just flood the neighborhood with 2,000 cars," explained Todd Schliemann, who designed the project for Polshek.

However the plan called for demolishing the existing structure. The environmental and financial costs of removing one structure and erecting another – and the idea that this facility would not have been 100 percent public – influenced the jurors' decision to pass on this scheme. But the notion that NYU was – at least on paper – willing to fund the project and that the designers had recognized the need for parking gave it a realistic appeal.

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VA1: PIER 40 COMPETITION JUR

DESIGN BY COLLAGE

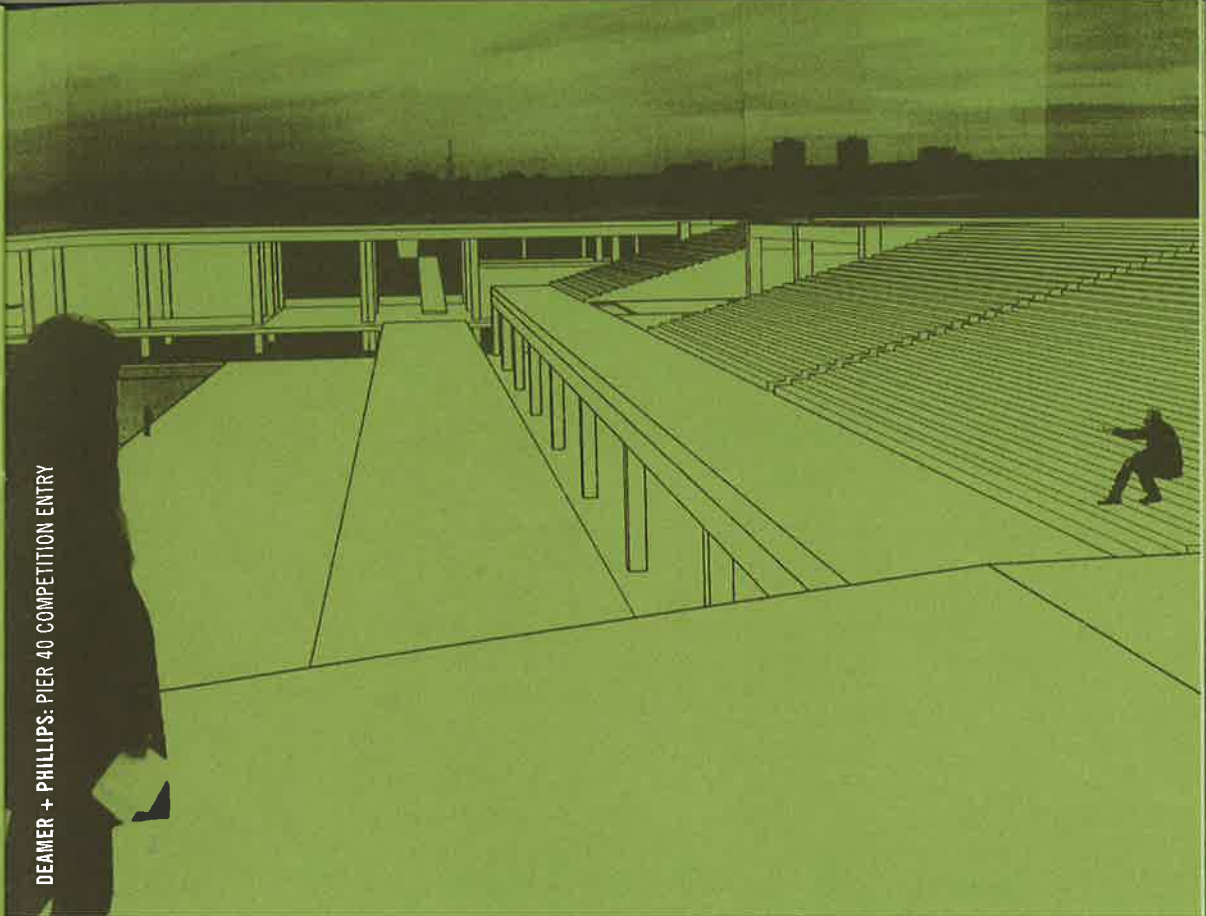
Both Gerson and Arthur Schwartz, chair of the Waterfront Committee, Community Board 2, continue to believe that even in a community that seems to know its own mind so firmly, expanding the options is an important step. Now those leaders and their neighbors may discover that what they initially desired most might not be environmentally, financially, programmatically, or historically appropriate – and that there may be preferable alternatives.

Schwartz hopes to build on the momentum of the competition. “My goal is to bring the process to the community board, take a position about the various issues by March or soon after, and then go to the Hudson River Park Trust, which could adopt guidelines, perhaps by the end of the year. If that happens, we could be sending out requests for proposals at this time next year,” said Schwartz.

But there’s a long way to go to find consensus. “I would imagine that we would wind up trying to combine ideas from various submissions,” Gerson said. “From my own viewing of it we will try to amalgamate a collective vision that matches the community sentiment,” he added.

Bone, however, warns of the danger of a collage approach “diluting the best of each idea.” Honorable mention winner Saul Jabbawy heeds this warning, but believes that a site this size and this contentious can succeed as a blend of ideas. “Eventually, it will become a collage, and that’s actually how we designed our entry. The life of the project is how the collage is choreographed. It shouldn’t be like confetti, but it can be a collage with a concept that allows for assembly.” **STOP**

Kira L. Gould is a freelance writer living in New York City.



DEAMER + PHILLIPS: PIER 40 COMPETITION ENTRY

SOUNDBYTES

Van Alen periodically poses questions to our listserve and posts responses on our website (www.vanalen.org). To join please send an e-mail to vanalen@vanalen.org. Here is a sampling of recent feedback.

WHERE DOES THE PRIVATE REALM END AND THE PUBLIC REALM BEGIN?

> In Zurich there is a good example of the ambiguity between the public and private realms. The park between the Hauptbahnhof and the Limat River was for a long time open to the heroin using public who made Zurich their home. One voyeuristically witnessed the activities of heroin use walking through this open area. The private act of injecting heroin – usually taking place in dark rooms – inverted the usual distinction between

public and private, happening in the light of day. Another inversion could be experienced in the stalls of the adjacent main train station. These immaculate bathrooms were being taken over by the heroin users, so rather than police them the Swiss came up with an ingenious solution: they used blue lights in the stalls so that one cannot see one’s own veins. In the most private of rooms one is placed within the public context of a social problem mediated in blue.
--Michael Laviiano
mlaviiano@polshek.com

WHAT IS THE GREATEST CHALLENGE FOR PUBLIC ARCHITECTURE - FROM SIDEWALKS TO SCHOOLS - IN THE NEXT 25 YEARS?

> The greatest challenge for public architecture will be for the City to take

responsibility for the quality of public spaces. The trend has been for the City to place responsibility for the creation and maintenance of public spaces (streets, parks, plazas, waterfronts) on the private sector. The results of this trend have been erratic. In some cases, the results are non-existent (e.g. what waterfront spaces of merit have been created as a result of the City’s waterfront zoning?)

Throughout history, the truly great public spaces and buildings have been the direct result of “public works.” The City has lost the ability to create great public works. The greatest challenge is for the City to take the initiative to produce great public works again.

--Ed Weinstein
THDGarch@aol.com

IN NEW YORK, 20-STORY ADS NOW TOWER OVER THE CITY. IN THE POST-WARHOL AGE, DO THESE SIGNS SUBTRACT FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PUBLIC REALM OR OFFER AN ADDITIONAL DIMENSION?

> While we pore over this question, do graphic designers of magazines equally worry about the effects of advertising on the experience of reading their publications, and television programming producers the same? On the other hand, why are there sign ordinances that allow new signs to be no larger than a peanut where the signs would have more urban and esthetic merit than their buildings?

Signs signify a presence of our common culture and a freedom to express. They are comforting, informative, invigorating. A city would feel naked without signs. Can you imagine a web

page without any graphics?
--Gregory Glaz
Gregglaz@aol.com

DO LANDMARKED BUILDINGS AND HISTORIC DISTRICTS HELP OR HINDER THE CREATION OF A CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC REALM?

> There is an intellectual struggle going on right now between those who see the future as a part of the past, and those who say the former are scared of the future. Disneyland v. Running Man.

Without getting into this debate (I personally would not want to live in either Seaside or a Rem Koolhaas building with sloping floors), I think that it is natural for a society to want to mark and remember its history. For example, most western German towns (where I currently live) have made efforts to preserve and

protect their Medieval sections. I suggest that this is because many older sections were blown to bits during WWII, so they know what they lost. In the former East, many of these bombed sections were rebuilt under the precepts of “modern” architectural planning. The differences are striking, especially when one is window shopping or sitting at an outdoor café on a narrow, winding street as opposed to a 10-lane boulevard no where.

As the past had a more pedestrian scale (read: livable) than what has been presented as a “modern” urban design of the last 50 years, preservation makes sense. To me it is not an intellectual question of style or fear of the future, it is about where one wants to drink one’s latte.
--Michael King
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How can a city like New York get the best public architecture possible while fully engaging the community in the process?

THE DESIGN PROFESSION must connect with the public. If it doesn't, then I think it is the profession's fault, because architects often use a private visual and verbal language containing rhetoric only they understand. This is inadmissible.

At the same time, the public is frequently guilty of assuming any change is for the worst. That outlook is a challenge to professionals, because it ultimately puts us out of business. When new projects are proposed communities often can't get beyond legitimate issues of increased garbage or congestion and they conclude any new construction will make the city less habitable. But to survive New York must be constantly renewed. I think professionals have the responsibility of making planning issues and procedures clear to the public, because I think communities always understand how it is possible to positively transform areas of the city – large or small.

The preservation movement did not begin with architects; it was the public that forced the professionals into preservation. Architects followed in the wake of public pressure. Although neighborhood groups can be criticized for their stodginess, the other side of the coin is that as a result of the public's advocacy of preservation architects today accept it as just another aspect of design.

I don't think design professionals should believe they can hoodwink the general population because it is uneducated and doesn't understand architecture or planning. On the contrary, the public's instincts about design are often accurate, if conservative.

Sadly, though, the word "public" has become pejorative in this society. In the 19th century the "public good" really meant something. Public schools offered first-rate education. Public transportation was amazingly efficient. Now, all facets of the public realm have been debased. That is a startling state of affairs in the history of American democracy. Obviously, architects and the public must work together to achieve improvement.

– HUGH HARDY

Hugh Hardy is principal of Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates.

IT IS A LONG WALK from Stuyvesant High School to Battery Park but most walkers don't find it a problem, they drop down to the esplanade and saunter through a continuous water's edge of lights, benches and consciously designed parks. Taking this walk from the point of view of what form this area will take in the next decade, there is an immediate visceral understanding of the problems facing the neighborhood.

It is a place being built out, with the buildings changing places with parks to become the dominant presence of Battery Park City. Clearly this is an informed, affluent community, a community where there has been considerable interest in design. But as of yet this image was created without the sustained input of the larger community, except in rare cases.

In my experience designing public spaces at The Battery and Battery Park City, this happened in two ways. One with and one without a direct link to the larger community planning process. In designing Pier A Plaza, the perseverance of a dynamic civic leader – Warrie Price – allowed us to engage the community in a fruitful dialogue. Alas, despite this happy union, the project was stopped as the cement trucks were rolling, because of lack of commitment on the part of the developer to using the plaza as a public space.

However, working nearby at the Museum of Jewish Heritage Visitors Center no public process was required, but because of our work with the community we were familiar with the site context and some of the concerns people had about accessing the park. Through previous analyses of the pedestrian flow, we could read how the pathways and vantage points would interact and this informed the design of this intersection of trapezoids that sits in the shadow of Wall St. If not for the fortuitousness of our previous experience with the Pier A Plaza, we would have been designing in a void.

– CLAIRE WEISZ

Claire Weisz Architect and Mark Yoes designed the 1,300-square-foot Museum of Jewish Heritage Visitors Center completed in 1998.

ROBERT MOSES' GENIUS was not his city planning vision but his ability to get things done. Fortunately, the days of top-down decision making are over. The dilemma that planners and politicians face today is how do we involve many diverse communities in a decision-making process for projects that often times will have a negative impact on the immediate neighborhood, but are needed for the rest of the city. Have we reached the point where development in the city is impossible without a Mosesesque process?

No, we haven't. The solution lies in the tools that we use to accomplish planning and development. These tools must establish a framework for development to occur in the context of a community plan.

Planning is no longer just zoning, and design is no longer just architecture. Yet, the City of New York has failed to fully create a process for community planning. The City's 197-a process begins to apply a "bottom-up" approach to planning. However, the tools of implementation are missing, and in the Moses legacy this is preferred. In Red Hook, which recently went through a highly debated 197-a process, the community plan included provisions to prevent new waste transfer stations. The City vetoed those provisions and now we may be forced to endure tractor-trailers full of putrescible waste barreling down local streets, idling on our corners, waiting to enter the waste transfer station. This is an example of community planning but with no means of implementation.

Likewise, just north, the Old Brooklyn Waterfront Alliance (a coalition of community groups concerned with the waterfront), has outlined planning principles for waterfront development in the neighborhood. Yet, in DUMBO (Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass), one developer is ignoring the community plan and is proposing a mall, a cineplex and a parking garage on the waterfront.

Communities need a pro-active, bottom-up program that yields, not necessarily a development plan, but an outline of a variety of development tools that guide development. Such tools include: design guidelines; linkage fees for projects that do have a negative impact on local neighborhoods; density bonuses for projects in underdeveloped areas; and progressive zoning.

– ASSEMBLYMEMBER JOAN MILLMAN

New York State Assemblymember Joan Millman represents the 52nd district, which stretches from Brooklyn Heights to Bay Ridge, Brooklyn.

I RECALL AN OLD TALE that suggests the answer to this question.

Once upon a time, there was a wise and much beloved King who, towards the end of his life, desirous of ensuring his reputation for future generations, asked advice of the wisest councilors in his realm.

The first was a city planner, who pointed to a neglected patch of land on the East River. "Imagine a grand 30-story hotel right on the riverfront," he said. "It will serve travelers arriving in the city by helicopter, and it will enrich the treasury for years to come." The King, frowning, turned to a specialist in economic development, who pointed to the nearby Queensboro Bridge. "You can cause a great market to be built in and around its piers," he told the King. "The people will enjoy all manner of fancy food and house fittings, and the public treasury will grow." The ruler scowled and put the matter to his expert in parks and public spaces, who pointed to yet another close-by parcel. "We can rent this to a tennis operator. Rich people will remember you, and the public coffers will swell." The old King – looking quite sick – asked his traffic engineer about the wisdom of such cumulative developments. Hardly reassured by the claim that a simple adjustment of traffic-light timing could resolve the ensuing congestion, noise and auto exhaust problems, the wise old monarch pondered the matter.

After some time had passed, the King asked a delegation of neighborhood people and do-good organizations to speak their minds. "Create an open-space plan that will link these publicly-owned parcels and others contiguous with them," they entreated him. "You could build an East River Waterfront Gateway having a destination park at the waterfront, a continuous pathway with greenery and amenities leading inland, new development at a scale and pace that we can accept, order and beauty in our neighborhood. The entire city will benefit." The King commanded that it be done.

A waterfront pavilion, adorned with visionary artwork, replaced the proposed hotel at 60th Street. The market was constructed with a lovely south-facing garden and tennis bubbles are up half of the year. But the King died before the Gateway plan could be made into law. And to this day, no one remembers his name.

– CAROLE RIFKIND

Carole Rifkind is president of the East River Waterfront Conservancy. Her most recent book is A Field Guide to Contemporary American Architecture.

COMING UP! The Institute is currently accepting submissions for the **DINKELOO FELLOWSHIP**, founded to honor architect John Dinkeloo's contribution to the field of architecture. As one of the founding partners of Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo & Associates, Dinkeloo (1918-1981) consistently expressed and applied his belief in the crucial link between architectural design and technology.

The fellowship competition calls for portfolio submissions that demonstrate an understanding that contemporary architectural design, in concert with technology, can be environmentally conscious. In addition, the competition challenges entrants to address how this "green" consciousness and conscience can improve the public realm.

The fellowship consists of a \$7,000 award to be applied to a two month stay at the American Academy in Rome and a month of additional travel. The award will be based on the competition jury's review of the entrant's portfolio, project proposal and letters of recommendation. The fellowship is open to U.S. citizens who are recent or prospective graduates of U.S. architecture and related degree programs from May 1990 to September 1999.

The jury for the competition is comprised of a diverse group of designers including Diana Balmori, Balmori Associates, Inc., Landscape and Urban Design; Keller Easterling, School of Architecture, Yale University; Michael Manfredi, Weiss/Manfredi Architects; Karen Van Lengen, Department of Architecture and Environmental Design, Parsons School of Design; and James Wines, SITE Environmental Design.

Potential entrants should call, write or e-mail Van Alen Institute for a detailed competition packet. The registration fee is \$30. The deadline for submissions is May 7 at 6 P.M.

As part of the East River Project, the Institute has held a number of public forums, providing a venue to discuss the issues that challenge this artery vital to four of the city's five boroughs. In November, Van Alen Fellow Jesse Reiser presented Reiser + Umemoto's *East River Corridor* and Cooper Union professor Kevin Bone discussed Bone/Levine Architects' *Transfiguration* at the forum **NEGOTIATING THE FUTURE OF THE EAST RIVER**. The panel was comprised of: Sylvia Lavin, Chair, Department of Architecture, UCLA; Wilbur Woods, Director of Waterfront Planning, New York City Department of City Planning; and Charles Reiss, The Trump Organization.

At a February forum entitled **INFRASTRUCTURAL URBANISM: TAKING ON THE LARGE SCALE** Jeffrey Kipnis, professor of architecture at Ohio State University moderated a discussion led off by Jesse Reiser's presentation of *East River Corridor*. Kipnis and panelists Gary Hack, Dean, Graduate School of Fine Arts, University of Pennsylvania and Harry Spence, Deputy Chancellor for Operations, NYC Board of Education debated whether it is possible today to construct large infrastructural projects on the scale of the Reiser + Umemoto proposal.

Also in February, the Institute planned **THE ART AND SCIENCE OF THE EDGE**, a forum focused on the ecology of the river.

Representing Community Board 6, Manhattan, Joy Garland presented her community's plan for an environmental center. Tom Paino discussed the Hunter's Point Community Coalition proposal for habitat restoration. An expert panel was comprised of: John Waldman, Hudson River Foundation; John St. John, engineer, Hydroqual, Inc.; and Mark A. Matsil, Chief, Natural Resources Group, NYC Parks Department.

COMING UP! Community forums have also presented a vital arena for those who live on the East River. On March 8, **GREENPOINT**, Brooklyn will discuss issues confronting their neighborhood at the Institute. Presenters will include: Keith Rodan, producer of the Greenpoint Video Project; Tony Snachkus, community activist; Vito Acconci, artist at Newtown Creek Water Pollution Control Plant. A representative from the Department of Environmental Protection has been invited to discuss public amenity projects on the waterfront. A community representative who worked on Greenpoint's pending 197-a plan – the community's own master plan – may speak. (6:30 to 8:30 PM)

In December, Van Alen hosted a forum devoted to the future of Greenpoint's Brooklyn neighbors, **WILLIAMSBURG** and **DUMBO** (Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass), two waterfront communities in the throes of transition. The Brooklyn Architects Collective presented *Making Fabric*, a Runner Up in the East River competition. Landscape architect Robert Perris presented

Williamsburg's newly proposed 197-a plan, which he co-authored. Doreen Gallo of the DUMBO Neighborhood Alliance voiced her group's opposition to the proposal to develop DUMBO as a regional retail and entertainment destination. Allen Swerdlowe, architect and professor at Pratt Institute, showed visuals that argued the merits of creating a waterfront park instead.

COMING UP! Ushering in the warm weather, on April 14 an evening devoted to **SWIMMING AND FLOATING** will give a voice to those who see the city's waterways as recreational venues. Cathy Drew, an avid swimmer and director of The River Project will defend her sport. Architect Lynette Widder will present *East River Shoreline Pool*, a project for a floating swimming pool, that her firm, AARDV Architecture, entered in the East River competition. David Gissen, architect and curator of "New York's Floating Bathhouses" on exhibition at the Tenement Museum through April 15, will tell how floating swimming pools have a history in New York that dates back to the turn-of-the-century. (6:30 to 8:30 PM)

Three new members have been elected to the Institute's **BOARD OF TRUSTEES**. Architect Marian Starr Imperatore joins the board with a considerable track record as an urban designer and community leader. Susan Rodriguez, a partner with Polshek Partnership Architects, will likewise lend her professional experience to the Institute. Andrew Ross, director of the Graduate Program in American Studies at New York University and author of a forthcoming book on Celebration, FL – Disney's master-planned community – also joins the board.

The Institute has received several **GRANTS AND AWARDS**. The Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts has awarded the Institute a grant of \$5,000 for the forthcoming book *Public By Design: Reclaiming the Waterfront* to be published as the culmination of the East River Project. The Stephen A. and Diana L. Goldberg Foundation has generously awarded the Institute a \$10,000 grant for this same publication, while the New York State Council on the Arts has given the Institute a grant of \$8,500 to make its website a greater resource for the design of the public realm.

The Institute's public programs are being recognized by institutions around the city. Last fall, Fordham College sponsored "Public Properties," an exhibition on the history of the Institute featuring selected competition entries. Executive Director Raymond Gastil was recently presented with two awards in recognition of the Institute's public programs. Gastil received the OTTY award from *Our Town* newspaper and the President's Award from the New York Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

The Institute is also proud to recognize the following recent **BENEFACTORS**: Gwathmey Siegel & Associates; Peter T. Joseph Foundation; Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates; Costas Kondylis & Associates; Landscape Forms, Inc.; PM Contracting Company; Pesce, Ltd.; Rice University School of Architecture; Elizabeth Barlow Rogers; Studio L'Image; and The Widder Foundation, Inc. **BB**

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