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Making an Entrance

Gateway National Recreation Area gets makeover via Van Alen

In an effort to invigorate one of New York City's most neglected parks, the Van Alen Institute (VAI) yesterday unveiled the winning designs of a competition to redesign Gateway National Recreation Area, the 26,607-acre park spanning Jamaica Bay, Staten Island, and Sandy Hook, New Jersey. "Gateway is the most needful park in the entire National Parks system," said Alexander Brash, Northeast regional director of the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), which co-sponsored the competition with Van Alen and Columbia University.

Starting in 2009, the National Parks Service (NPS) will revise Gateway's General Management Plan, which guides the development and management of the park. VAI hopes Parks administrators will take the six designs the jury selected into consideration when it formulates its plan, though the NPS is under no obligation to do so. "The most important thing now is to make them as visible as possible," VAI executive director Adi Shamir said.

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COURTESY VAN ALEN INSTITUTE
Ashley Scott Kelly and Rikako Wakabayashi

Though VAI intends to present all six winners as a package to the NPS next year; there was also a podium to recognize the best submissions. "One project kept coming up because it was a moving image—moving in the sense it made an impact," Shamir said. She was referring to "Mapping the Ecotone," the first-place entry by Ashley Scott Kelly and Rikako Wakabayashi, a Brooklyn duo barely old enough to drink, who met at the University of Michigan's Taubman College of Architecture Urban Planning. "It has such a draw with how the profession is moving," Kelly said of the park. "Everyone is moving to LEED certification and this and that. It gave us a chance to deal with something that is happening globally on a local scale." Wakabayashi added that the park's massive scale provided both the competition's appeal and challenge.





COURTESY VAN ALEN INSTITUTE
Archipelago (top), Virginia Tech (bottom)

North Design Office of Toronto took second place and a team from Virginia Tech took third. Honorable mentions went to loop8 of Larchmont, New York and two New York City entrants: Archipelago Architecture and Landscape Architecture, and Frank Gesualdi and Hayley Eber. The designs will be posted on www.vanalen.org starting this summer and exhibitions are planned for the fall to raise public support for revitalizing the park. The program was underwritten with a \$500,000 gift from the Tiffany & Co. Foundation.

The Gateway National Recreation Area was created in 1972. "It was meant to be a destination park, a park you'd want to go to," Brash explained, "but also the first major urban park for those who couldn't afford to travel somewhere like Yellowstone or immigrants who just arrived." Brash said Congress authorized \$92 million for Gateway—approximately \$1.2 billion today—but it was never appropriated. "If you invested \$1.2 billion today, you'd have great boardwalks bridging the land and airplane hangers full of jets from World War One and Two and Korea and Vietnam," Brash said, referring to a proposed air museum on the site of the old Ebbets Field airport. "One million school kids alone could visit, receiving a fantastic ecological and historical education." The money may be gone, at least for now, but Brash and company can only hope their vision will become reality soon enough.

MATT CHABAN

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