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take the ® train

Riding the Rails from Downtown to Long Island City
This issue of the Van Alen Report invites you to "Take the R Train." The nexus between Lower Manhattan and Long Island City, the R has by chance become the "arts" train. Projects such as SHoP's Rector Street Bridge (p6) are helping renew downtown, while Brian Tolle's Irish Hunger Memorial (p5) allows for a moment of contemplation. In Long Island City, new inhabitants such as MoMA QNS (p11), as well as longstanding residents such as Socrates Sculpture Park (p11), which has a festive summer of film and music, are transforming the industrial landscape.

Given VA's engagement in projects in Lower Manhattan, which include planning a center for information exchange and public participation (p4), and efforts in LIC, such as an ideas competition for Queens Plaza (p10), (entries are currently on view in an exhibition at the Institute), for this VAR we have taken the prerogative to celebrate these cultural districts. As in VAR 10 "Recreating The City," where we focused on one of Brooklyn's cultural centers, BAM, this issue looks at the arts as a generator of discussion and ideas helping us to move forward as well as look back and reflect.

Upcoming this fall, VA will publish "Renewing, Rebuilding, Remembering," a special VAR that forms the catalogue to VA's recent exhibit of the same name (www.vanalen.org), which will travel to The Lighthouse, Glasgow, in early 2003. In addition, a series of forums on internationally significant public spaces lead up to a major exhibition on the same theme organized by VA to open next spring, for which VA has received major support from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and the Stephen A. & Diana L. Goldberg Foundation.

At the recent "Berlin-Info Box-New York" VA forum, Alexander Garvin from the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation noted that we already have a vehicle for information exchange about downtown, "it's called your computer." We agree, but also believe that models, drawings, maps, and even Van Alen Reports are a critical way to exchange information about how cities change. E-mail us your ideas: zryan@vanalen.org ZOE RYAN
IN 1994, the Berlin City Administration asked investors engaged in construction on Potsdamer Platz to organize and send an invited, international design competition for a temporary information and exhibition center, an Info-Box, to engage residents and visitors in the rebuidling of Potsdamer Platz.

On June 5, 2002, Van Alen Institute hosted a forum to ask, “How can New York design and distribute information on the changing future of Lower Manhattan?” Cognizant that downtown New York faces not just a challenge for the future design and realization of its built environment, but an information challenge, the Institute invited Till Schneider, Principal of Schneider+Schumacher Architekten, designers of the Info-Box; landscape architect Diana Balmori, head of New York New Visions’ Temporary Memorial Committee; Alexander Garvin, Vice President for Planning, Design and Development, Lower Manhattan Development Corporation; and architects Laurie Hawkinson and Hugh Hardy, co-chairs of NYVV’s Cultural & Historical Resources Team to consider how residents, workers, and visitors to Downtown can gain comprehensive information to learn, understand, and participate in the rebuidling process.

“Information sharing is probably the most important theme and objective to be achieved over the next six months.” 

ANNA KERSHEN, CHAIR, CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

“The current design guidelines are a blight on the city, as there is no forthright way to deal with the problem of congestion. The new guidelines are a major step forward in addressing this issue.”

“WTC construction fence becomes a ‘viewing wall’”

BY SUZI SANCHEZ

Recognizing that a construction fence at the World Trade Center site would inevitably be built, New York New Visions’ Temporary Memorials Committee (NYVV) saw the opportunity to make it function on many levels, and combine it with a “temporary memorial site it would always receive people,” says Committee member and Van Tuitse Diana Balmori. Following the announce- ment of a 30-foot opaque fence in The New York Times in March, a multi-disciplinary team of NYVV members organized a Saturday design charrette at WTC to propose something in lieu of the proposed fence. Alex Garvin, of the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC), who invited NYVV to prepare design concepts, noted that “It is inspir- ing that talented design professionals are providing effective leadership and thinking when New York needs it most.” The group’s recommendations included lowering the fence’s height and constructing it of a material that would allow people to visit the site’s development. The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PATH) and the LMDC are working cooperatively to adopt these and other proposed features, such as mes- sage panels, shelves for offerings, and niches for individ- uals to rest from the sidewalk, in a revised design called “The Viewing Wall,” to be underway this August. At street intersections, PATH is designing “luminaries,” which will serve as markers to approaching visitors, as well as an elaborate system of lighting.

“Mourning has historically served to make permanent the connection between the commemorat- ed event and the moment of commemoration,” asserts artist Brian Tolle, designer of the Irish Hunger Memorial in Battery Park City. “My goal was to break with tradition by making the monument responsive to changing events and circumstances.”

“My goal was to break with tradition by making the monument responsive to changing events and circumstances.”

BY ZOE RYAN

The design for a memorial to the hundreds of thousands who died during the Irish famine of 1845-50 opened in July. Covering a half-acre site, the memorial rises 25-feet on its western end, symbolically overlooking the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island where many Irish immigrants escaping persecution entered America. “Our attention was drawn to the deep, complex connec- tion between the soil and the people who live on it,” notes Jurgen Rittm, Principal, 1100 Architect who was part of the design team chosen by Tolle that included landscape architect Gail Lehan Wittner. “Literally lifting earth above the ground was way to make the memorial evoke that relationship.” Tolle’s design is strikingly in contrast to other memorials in Battery Park City, which include the cur- rent temporary memorial in the World Financial Center Plaza dedicated to the uniformed officers killed on September 11th, as well as the Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust (1997). Entered through a passage in the base, visitors can read about the history of the Irish famine on wall texts displayed behind alternating bands of frosted glass and frosted glass. An opening in the passage directs vis- itors up into a raised redstone cottage (shaped from Ireland) and out onto the inclined landscape.
BRIDGING THE GAP
by ZOE RYAN

The myriad challenges that faced SHoP architects when they were approached by Battery Park City Authority (BPSCA) to design a bridge to cross West Street have thankfully not deterred them from creating a new piece of infrastructure that breaks up the otherwise linear, southern-most stretch of West Street with an interesting, yet practical, reconnection to Battery Park City with Rector Street and the World Financial Center (WFC). This bridge is crucial for pedestrians, who would otherwise have to negotiate the heavy traffic on the former southern World Trade Center pedestrian bridge that was demolished on September 11, and a second, the WFC South Bridge, which survived at Liberty Street was only reconnected in April. The Sam Schwartz Company, inspired by the idea of the bridge, by showing it was much needed and would be traffic-friendly by approximately 4,000 people a week. However, the opening of the $3.5 million project scheduled for November, was delayed until July in part by lengthy negotiations between the numerous private factions involved, including the WTC. The WFC, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. Project manager, Heather Sporn, from the New York State Department of Transportation, says "It required a large amount of cooperation from many different groups in a short amount of time. Despite this, the bridge is exemplary. It has provided a vital service and is aesthetically distinct." Even so, the temporary structure, planned to be in use for two years, has not provided controversy. "The local community did not want the bridge to be a viewing platform so we made a conscious effort to conceal any openings," says Bill Sharples, a partner at SHoP. Instead, it provided light, design, which was around a heavy-duty, pretreated steel construction made by the industrial manufacturers in New York, incorporates five-fifths of "light planes" that are inserted between the steel framework emitting fluorescent light. "The lighting helps make the bridge feel like part of a construction site," explains Sharples.

DOWNTOWN ART
by ZOE RYAN

"Looking in is designed to enliven the streetscapes of lower Manhattan and offer both artists and the public an opportunity to explore the transitional nature of the area."

Michael Kozach, LMCC's Director of Visual and Media Arts

With approximately 15 semi-permanent installations, and several rotating performance projects, the LMCC hopes to attract people downtown and 'highlight the survival of small businesses, cultural groups and the residential and business community in Lower Manhattan.'

Similarly, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's ongoing venture, MTA Arts for Transit has also recently requested reflective proposals from artists. Seeking photography-based work, the MTA will reproduce the work as reproductions, or large color transparencies, for display on light boxes at selected subway stations including Bowling Green in Lower Manhattan. The installations will relate to some facet of traveling on the MTA, or some character of the neighborhood in which they are located.

"The important message generated by these art projects is that New York is about moving forward, but at the same time allows for contemplation."

Anne Petrynak
Executive Director, LMCC

"The project is very much a part of the streetscape. It's a very litmus test for that environment. By using the materials, the lighting, and the design, we've tried to create something that is a part of the streetscape, a part of the environment rather than an interruption."

Jim Campbell
Artistic Director, LMCC

VIEW FROM THE RISE
by CLAIRE H. NELSON

From a plush club chair on the 14th floor of the new Four Seasons Hotel, one has a sweeping panorama of the whole gamut of New York development stories — from dreams deferred to hopes reinvented. And this is the view from the World Trade Center site. As I scan the harbor, I look away from the ruins of the former World Trade Center, as if to imagine what might have been. I see Lady Liberty presiding over it all, from the industrial heart of Southwest Brooklyn, to the slumbering-clad Whitehall Ferry Terminal (opening late fall 2003) and Pier A at the tip of the Battery, to the rising towers of New Jersey. At the center of the scene sits the iconic Governor's Island, patiently awaiting its fate. With President Bush's April decision to transfer the island back to the State of New York (with the National Monument to remain under the auspices of the feds), and the city's commitment to a new campus for the City University of New York, the Island's future no longer hangs in the balance. Now, for dedicated activists like Rob Flaherty of the Governors Island Alliance, the next chapter is about making sure the deal is consummated and the island is opened to the public — as soon as possible.

"We are pleased that CUNY will be the anchor tenant rather than the only tenant — that it won't be 'CUNY Island' where one must have an ID card to get in," says Flaherty. "We are supportive of CUNY as they sort out their options."

In the meantime New Yorkers will be watching from across the harbor.
Connecting Battery Park City to Long Island City, the R train takes you from temporary and permanent projects that are helping revive Lower Manhattan to institutions that are transforming Queens.
MoMA MARCHES TO QUEENS
by MARCUS WOOLLEN

At 10am on Sunday, June 23, the band began to play, rose petals were thrown ceremoniously on the streets and a ragged, track-clad Kiki Smith was hoisted high into the air on a wooden throne and carried off along West 33rd Street. The Modern Procession had begun. Borrowing from the tradition of a Smith Day procession, MoMA paraded replicas of its most famous works through the streets of Midtown Manhattan, across the Queensboro Bridge, down Queens Boulevard, and through Queens Plaza to the museum's new 33rd Street home in Long Island City. While no one mistook the stately Kiki Smith for an empress, more than one boisterous group, believing the replicas of Marcel Duchamp's Bicycle Wheel, seemingly precariously balanced atop a wooden stool, as well as Picasso's Dancer's and Giacometti's Tall Woman, to be real. Bystanders along the route joined in the celebration, following the procession across the bridge and throwing red roses into the East River.

Public Art Fund in collaboration with MoMA commissioned Rehan-Brown, Mexico City-based artist Francis Alÿs to organize the formal procession to signal this significant chapter in MoMA's history. The unique event is the first public event to be held at the new building. A live broadcast of the event will be shown at MoMA QNS through September 16.

While no one mistook the stately Kiki Smith for an empress, more than one tourist gasped, believing the replica of Marcel Duchamp's Bicycle Wheel, seemingly precariously balanced atop a wooden stool... to be real.

Socrates Sculpture Park, one of the few spaces where you can watch artists working on the site where their pieces will eventually be displayed, is a 4.5 acre waterfront park that was founded in 1986 by the collaborative efforts of art Mark di Suvero, Enrico Martorana, and local residents. In 1998, Socrates officially became part of the NYC Dept. of Parks & Recreation giving it permanent status in Queens. The lengthy wait from the NYC plan is worth the program's periscope for the Steichen Alÿs project. This summer's event, for the fourth year running, Socrates hosts their popular Wednesday-night festival of international film, music, dance and food in collaboration with the American Museum of the Moving Image and Partnerships for Parks. On The Waterfront: Celebrating the Cultural Diversity of Queens will feature films screened on the side of a 60 foot tractor-trailer truck. On first sight, Vickie Knouse and Troy Richards’ artwork, On Temporary Permanence, allows you in to the park until October 6, seems hardly worth exploring. Yet a closer inspection of the incomparable pre fab building, reminiscent of a mobile home, begins to echo with the sound of water. Peeking through one of the closest windows, viewers are struck by the interior, which is half full of water, pumped from the East River. This project includes a new program, "We want to expand the notion of what a sculpture park can be and hope that collaborative projects between artists working in various media and scale can help foster this notion," says Ayson Baker, the Park's Executive Director. "We want to expand the notion of what a sculpture park can be and hope that collaborative projects between artists working in various media and scale can help foster this notion."
Why is the Museum for African Art moving forward, as its new motto goes. The Isamu Noguchi Museum has undertaken an upgrade and renovation of its own. For this project, which is scheduled to be completed in 2023, the museum is introducing a new concept: "Noguchi's Garden," a new outdoor exhibition space that will incorporate elements of Noguchi's garden design philosophy and his love for nature and the natural world. The museum will feature a series of interactive installations and educational programs that will engage visitors of all ages. The project is expected to enhance the museum's educational programs and provide a new venue for the presentation of Noguchi's garden art.
ART ON THE BEACH

This "outdoor" issue of the Van Alen Report focuses on Lower Manhattan, especially at its extremes, and Long Island City, underscoring how important Downtown is to creating new art, architecture, and design, and how important Long Island City, Queens has become to that endeavor. The connection between them is not just the R train; it is also historical. Creative Time's Art on the Beach program started in the late 1970s at the north end of Battery Park City, and then, as that huge development moved from plan to implementation, decamped for Hunters Point at the East River edge of LIC, in the late 1980s, where the Port Authority lent their property at what would become Queens West.

It may be too soon for an oral history of Art on the Beach, but it is high time to start the memory work. The projects were propulsively temporary, yet their ideas and ideals of collaboration and the necessary relationship of art, architecture, performance, the city, and the waterfront form a prominent chapter in the permanent record of New York's public art in the twentieth century. So many dedicated talents experimented on the ten acres the BPCA lent them, from artists Alice Aycock and Tom Owens to architects Diane Lewis, BIDDLESCAFFID, and Edie Toles, to performers like percussionist David Van Tieghem and choreographer Yoshiko Chuma. In memory, dancers seem to have understood better than anyone to harness the sandy site's charge of urban drama.

Many of the photographs of AOTB have a terrible poignancy now, with the World Trade Centers' towers as a backdrop presented as two ineluctable forces of nature as imposing in scale as the harbor itself. The waterfront figures prominently in the record, too, revealing a river still dominated by relics of once-working docks, today's watery playground almost unimaginable. Yet for all the change, both within the arts and within the city, there is every reason in this century to muster the same respect for the temporary, the same intelligence and drive, whether in a bridge over West Street, or in an Information Exchange Center for downtown, or in recapturing Governors Island with public purpose. It was an inspired move in the 1970s and 1980s for public authorities to allow arts-related uses of their property. Every generation needs proving grounds for urban culture, and there is nothing to match the power and occasional beauty of being right there in a changing place, while ideas are tested against its horizon.

RAYMOND W. GASTL

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