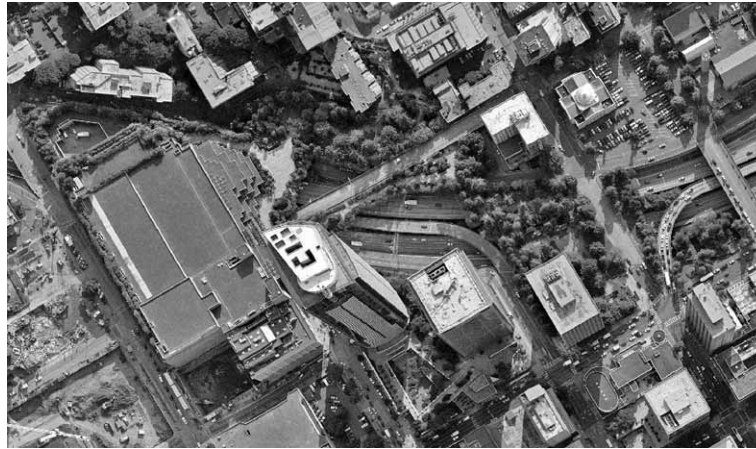


Changes to Halprin's Landmark Freeway Park in Seattle

Originally designed by Lawrence Halprin and Associates, the plantings at Seattle's Freeway Park are currently being updated by Seattle landscape architect and University of Washington professor Iain Robertson, who aims to "not change the character of the park, but to recharge the design." Executed by Mr. Halprin's office under the design direction of Angela Danadjieva, Freeway Park is one of the best preserved masterworks of post-war landscape architecture, yet the horticultural requirements of the plants necessitate renewed attention to the original design intent. However, its fate may also be a bellwether for the future of modernist architecture, landscapes and engineering feats associated with the interstate highway system across the country. After the publication of Halprin's book *Freeways* in 1966 and his work with the



Aerial view of the park over Interstate 5 in downtown Seattle circa 1999. Freeway Park, Seattle, WA (Photo courtesy of the City of Seattle)

Administration's Urban Advisors group, the Seattle Parks Commission sought his assistance in designing a park along the edge of the new interstate gorge. Rather than confining himself to the proposed plot of land, Halprin pushed the ideas in his book into the cityscape by proposing an extensive landscape that scaled down the impact of the freeway for both driver and pedestrian by building right over it. Rather than balking at this audacious plan, the city bundled the proposal into the county-wide open space bond measure

cont'd on pg. 11

NATIONAL NEWS | winter 2008

ARTICLES

- 1 **Changes to Halprin's Landmark Freeway Park in Seattle**
by Brice Maryman
- 2 **Urban Renewal Renewed: A Makeover for Baltimore's Center Plaza**
by Olivia Klose
- 3 **Boston City Hall Plaza: A Modern Space for the City Upon a Hill**
by Gary Wolf
- 4 **Landscapes of Industrial Archeology Sites: Preservation Projects for Social Spaces**
by Maristella Casciato
- 5 **Parkmerced, a Modern Landscape Masterpiece under Assault**
by Chandler McCoy
- 6 **The Temporality of Being: Conservation Through Subtraction**
by Nadya K. Nenadich & Enrique Vivoni-Farage
- 7 **Boston's Christian Science Center**
by David Fixler
- 8 **UC Irvine Strips Off Pereira Façades**
by Deirdre Gould

ARTICLES (cont'd)

- 9 **Louisiana Supreme Court Building Faces Demolition**
by Toni DiMaggio
- 10 **Rehabilitation of Bunshaft Designed LBJ Library in Austin**
by Catherine Gavin

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 13 **D.C.'s Only Brutalist Church Designated a Landmark**
by Olivia Klose
- 13 **Bell Labs Update**
by Hélène Lipstadt
- 13 **NY/Tri-State Chapter Spotlights the O'Toole Building and its Architect, Albert Ledner**
by Kathleen Randall
- 14 **Modern Talk: Northwest Mid-Century Architect's Oral History Project**
by Eugenia Woo
- 14 **Book Review: Louis I. Kahn: Beyond Time and Style, A Life in Architecture**
by Olivia Klose

ANNOUNCEMENTS (cont'd)

- 14 **New Resources at the Environmental Design Archives**
by Marc Treib
- 15 **Glass House Maintenance**
by Deirdre Gould
- 15 **Protecting Beijing's Modern Architecture**
by Deirdre Gould
- 15 **Albert Ledner House Tour**
by Toni DiMaggio

DOCOMOMO NEWS

- 2 **Welcome**
- 3 **Chapter News**
Tri-State/New York
NOCA
Texas
WEWA
New England
- 9 **Winter Shows and Exhibits**

DOCOMOMO US

Email: info@docomomo-us.org
 Mail: PO Box 230977
 New York, NY 10023
www.docomomo-us.org

Changes to Halprin's Landmark Freeway Park in Seattle

(cont'd from page 1)

called Forward Thrust, and in 1969 approved local funds were combined with state, federal and private monies to allow the park plan to move forward.

Perched above Interstate 5 in downtown Seattle and using 5.5 acres of interstate air rights, the linked spaces of the park evocatively and imaginatively engage the three major preoccupations of post-war landscape design as described by Elizabeth K. Meyer: the car, the garden and the growing awareness of ecology. The space is defined by a series of linked plazas that are intertwined and enclosed by rough, board-formed concrete planting containers and walls. Major spaces known as the Central Plaza, East Plaza, and West Plaza develop a consistency and cohesion through a shared materials palette of concrete, broadleaf evergreen plantings and site furnishings. The spaces are differentiated through the dynamism of the water features that occupy the spaces and the attendant differentiation of moods.

A roiling precipice of water dominates the Central Plaza, where 28,000 gallons per minute of water tumble over 30-foot tall formed concrete blocks. The effect is at once rugged and decidedly urban, creating a space that is consciously of the city yet inspired by the lithography of the Cascade and Olympic Mountains. By placing the water feature over the freeway, the "natural" cascade was able to drown out or at least mitigate the roaring sound of the artificial, automotive canyon below.

Like an idyllic mountain stream, the fountain was filled with children and parents when it opened on July 4, 1976 as part of Seattle's bicentennial celebrations. Though there were no guardrails protecting visitors from the water, the design intent heightens an explicit sense of danger so that people are confronted by risk *prima facie* and are therefore cautious. This place is not soft, safe or "feminine." Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than near the base of the canyon where a heavy-gauge glass window allows visitors to see cars driving by, creating a dynamic visual dialogue between nature (water) and the city (the cars of the freeway).

The framework for these original elements still exists, but the experience of the canyon today is significantly degraded. A steel screen now covers the canyon's window, obscuring the connection to the freeway, and the falls themselves are tragically underserved. While there were three pumps that originally fed water to the canyon (using two at a time, cycling through the third), today only two pumps remain, with only one pumping water at a time. The capacity of this one pump has since been reduced by 30 percent such that the 28,000 gallons per minute

of the original design is now reduced to a relative trickle near 9,500 gallons per minute when running. Most of the time, however, the canyon water feature is not even active. Again, due to increased safety standards and reduced maintenance budgets, parks officials are not easily able to access all of the basins and traps within the fountain to clean out debris before starting the pumps.

Throughout the park, the role of vegetation is not limited to aesthetic or architectural purposes, rather plants were also chosen for their ability to reduce pollution and baffle sound coming from the freeway below. As in Halprin's open space sequence at Lovejoy and Ira Keller fountains in Portland, the original planting plans reveal a placement strategy



The shadows of the liriodendron trees overhead play against the high relief of the board formed concrete. Freeway Park, Seattle, WA.

(photo: Brice Maryman)

that develops an analog to the larger landscape surrounding Seattle. Lower levels are heavy with azaleas and birch; higher levels are dominated by dogwood and other upland tree species. Although the park appeared sparsely planted at its onset, the vegetation has grown dense and has required limbing up for maintenance and security reasons. Despite its overall integrity, the park has also seen the continual, creeping erosion of other original design elements. The jagged paving pattern has been filled in with small, inconsistent concrete pads that have been poured to dissuade large gatherings of transients. Many of the original lighting elements have been replaced with smaller standards. Entire planter boxes have been denuded of vegetation due to drainage problems in some of the beds. Other plantings have been replaced with species that tried, with varying success, to echo the spirit of the original design, including witch hazel, ornamental raspberry and snowbell.

Other additions have occurred with the construction of the Washington State Convention Center and the intrusion of the

Lester Piggott Memorial Corridor. Though the Convention Center's formal vocabularies and plantings echo the original palette of Freeway Park—which is not surprising since they were primarily designed by Ms. Danadjieva—the Convention Center's landscape necessitated demolition of some of the walls and plantings of Halprin's original design.

In 2004, the City of Seattle allocated funds to conduct a study on how to revitalize Freeway Park. Working with the New York City-based Project for Public Spaces (PPS), the City of Seattle staff unveiled draft recommendations that included some strong programmatic recommendations, but that also recommended a significant reworking of the original Halprin plan. Of particular concern are



The current view into the canyon fountain shows the leaping concrete forms that became the hallmark of Freeway Park's hardscape vocabulary.

Freeway Park, Seattle, WA.

(photo: Brice Maryman)

plans for demolishing some of the concrete retaining walls, redesigning or removing at least two of the original fountains, and installing a series of exercise stations.

Since that time, most of the radical proposals have been moved off of the table and a more modest and sensitive revitalization has occurred. Ms. Danadjieva was commissioned to re-design the original planting scheme, which is in obvious need of rehabilitation. However, the Seattle Parks Department found the plan unworkable and commissioned Mr. Robertson to provide

cont'd on next page

Changes to Halprin's Freeway Park

(cont'd from previous page)

another vision for the park. Mr. Robertson understands the gravity of his position as a link between the past and future of the park, and it was his appreciation for this responsibility that sent him to Marin County in the early fall to speak with Mr. Halprin. In addition to speaking with Mr. Halprin, Mr. Robertson discussed his ideas with himself and two of Halprin's previous collaborators and employees: Stephen Koch and Dai Williams. Together, the four men discussed the various design and horticultural constraints of the current state of Freeway Park. Mr. Halprin confirmed that the plants were subservient to the other elements of the design, like the water features in the foreground and the city in the background, and also talked about how the revised planting palette—including larch, pine, oxydendron, japanese maple and hemlock—should be, as Robertson phrased it, "robust and masculine," to reflect the original design intent.

While the future of Halprin and Danadjieva's design legacy continues to improve with increased awareness of the import of this design and urban planning landmark, permanent protections remain elusive. A Seattle landmarks nomination submitted in 2005 continues to remain in limbo despite the desire of the Landmarks Preservation Board to formally embrace this unique legacy. The central sticking point is also what makes Freeway Park so unique. The Washington State Department of Transportation and the City of Seattle have been trying to establish who has jurisdiction over landmarking property that is within the leased air rights over Interstate 5. With so many historic properties associated with the Interstate Highway system, the resolution of this cross-boundary dispute may prove fateful for the modernist objects, landscapes and buildings across the country.

—Brice Maryman

Portions of this article were previously published on The Cultural Landscape Foundation's website written by Brice Maryman and Liz Birkholz.

Urban Renewal Renewed

(cont'd from page 2)



Hopkins Plaza after renovation, April 2007. Charles Center, Baltimore, MD. (photo: Olivia Klose)

several of the Charles Center office buildings offered subsidized cafeterias, thus keeping office workers inside for lunch. Ultimately, the sheer scale of Charles Center, the fact of separate building ownership, and the overall decline in downtown retail activity were major factors working against the visual and spatial cohesion of the entire site, and likely prevented the plazas from assuming the status of clearly defined destinations within the city, regardless of the aesthetic merit of their individual design schemes.

In many ways, the emphasis on movement and variety as a visual theme has stayed the same from the original design to the new one; it is perhaps only in the execution of this theme that Brown & Craig's design seeks to differentiate itself from the original and announce Center Plaza as a 21st century urban destination. Bryce Turner of Brown & Craig describes Center Plaza's intended transformation, saying that "As [designers] developed their version of plazas in the 1950s and 1960s, there was a 'Jetsonian' view that incorporated lots of hardscape. Now we have found it is important to have more soft spaces". Their design incorporates the ten key principles that made Bryant Park a resounding success, most notably monumental sculpture as a focal point, movable seating and outdoor cafes, greenscaping (as opposed to hardscaping), and ambient nighttime lighting.

There is undoubtedly increased attention to the urban spaces of Charles Center, with the opening in 2001 of Johns Hopkins University's Downtown Center at the southeast corner of the site, and with the imminent redevelopment of the 1967 Morris Mechanic Theater, located on Hopkins Plaza. With enough retail investment—an important prescription in Brown & Craig's plan and the focus of the Mechanic's redevelopment—Center Plaza will benefit from the most important ingredient of any public space: people.

—Olivia Klose

Landscapes of Industrial Archeology

(cont'd from page 4)

In 2001 UNESCO had inscribed the whole colliery and coking plant ensemble of Zollverein into the World Heritage List, because "it constitutes remarkable material evidence of the evolution and decline of the coal industry over the past 150 years." The whole area has been converted into an anchor point along the European route of industrial heritage. The last completed conversion of an industrial plant is the transformation of the coal refinery building into a museum and visitors center, designed by the joint venture OMA/Heinrich Böll. The project was awarded the Deutscher Architekturpreis 2007.



Utilization of recreational space. Landschaftspark, North-Duisburg, Germany. (photo: Franco Panzini)

After the German results of creative conversion of decommissioned plants, brownfields and mine sites in order to establish new post-industrial landscapes, similar experiments have found a certain diffusion all around Europe. One of the most amazing new proposals comes from France. In 2003, the Louvre announced a competition to create a regional branch of the museum in Lens (northern region of Pas de Calais), on a site of over twenty hectares that was a former mine yard. The decision to build the new museum in the former mine yard is highly symbolic for a region that has suffered much in the past, from both war and from intensive coal-mining followed by the closing of the last pit in 1986. The international architecture competition to design the future Musée du Louvre-Lens was launched in early 2005. The winning team was the Japanese architectural practice Sanaa (Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa), together with the American museum architects Celia Imrey and Tim Culbert, and the French landscape designer Catherine Mosbach. The design of the museum and the new public spaces that will be opened in 2010 consists of nine pavilions in glass and steel, partly set into the ground with roof glazing. The group of buildings blends in with the surrounding post-industrial environment, creating a totally new perspective for a future based on the binomial culture-open spaces, without losing sight of the glorious industrial heritage.

—Maristella Casciato