

Public Art Fund's

Urban Paradise: Gardens in the City

August 28 - October 29, 1994

Artists' proposals for gardens in the urban environment

A multi-year project

Curated by James M. Clark and Tom Eccles

Vito Acconci

Roots & Wings
Working Drawings

BIRD
Whirly G, g

**Kristin Jones &
Andrew Ginzel**

ROOF
w/LEAF
PATTERN

Lorna Jordan

Justen Ladda

**Alison Saar &
Betye Saar**



Gary Simmons

Lehman College Art Gallery

This exhibition is organized by the Public Art Fund Inc. and sponsored by PaineWebber Group Inc.

The exhibition and education programs at the Lehman College Art Gallery are made possible by The National Endowment for the Arts, the Institute of Museum Services, a Federal agency, the New York State Council on the Arts, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in cooperation with The Bronx Borough President's Office, the Bronx Council on the Arts, the Herbert and Edith Lehman Foundation, the Robert Lehman Foundation, The Joe and Emily Lowe Foundation, IBM, the Greentree Foundation, AT&T, the Joyce Mertz-Gilmore Foundation, The Travelers Foundation, The New York Community Trust, Citibank, and Friends of Lehman College Art Gallery.

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Public Art Fund's

Urban Paradise: Gardens in the City

Events

September 21 - 3:30 - 5:00 p.m.
Panel Discussion with artist Lorna Jordan and environmental experts.
Reception for the exhibition from 5:00 - 7:00. Lehman College Art Gallery

September 22 - 4:30 - 8:30 p.m.
Symposium at Cooper Union
Gardens in the City—An Act of Affirmation, organized by the Public Art Fund. Featuring artists, urban planners, art critics and landscape professionals.
Symposium information: 212-980-3942

September 29 at 12:15 p.m.
Slide talk by Margaret Morton based on *Transitory Gardens, Uprooted Lives*, her recent book and current exhibition at Wave Hill. In cooperation with Wave Hill.
Lehman College Art Gallery

September 30 at 12:15 p.m.
Talk by Professor Andrew McLaughlin, author of *Regarding Nature: Industrialism and Deep Ecology*. In cooperation with The City and the Humanities Program. Carman B04

October 12 at 12:15 p.m.
Gallery talk by curators James M. Clark, Tom Eccles and artist Justen Ladda.
Lehman College Art Gallery

October 14 at 12:15 p.m.
Talk by Alan Banks, *Greensward: The City Parks of Frederick Law Olmsted*. In cooperation with The City and the Humanities Program. Carman B04

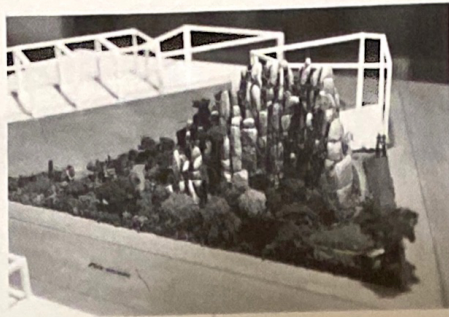
October 19 at 12:15 p.m.
Slide talk by Robert Carling, Director of International Programs, *Chinese Urban Gardens: Composing with Nature*. Lehman College Art Gallery

The Public Art Fund's **URBAN PARADISE: GARDENS IN THE CITY** marks the beginning of the Lehman College Art Gallery's tenth anniversary celebration and inaugurates the College's "Global Environmental Awareness Year." **URBAN PARADISE** examines a selection of artists' design proposals developed by the Public Art Fund for gardens in public sites which will be constructed over the next few years in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens. **URBAN PARADISE** also provides a look at the important work of the Public Art Fund, a non-profit organization that has championed public art since 1977 and has increased public awareness of artists' ability to enhance urban life.

The Urban Paradise Project explores the integration of art, nature and the city as it celebrates the spirit of collaboration—involving artists, landscape architects, city planners, community boards, city agencies, and funding sources in the process of creating gardens. It is designed to stimulate city-wide dialogue on urban ecology. The programs accompanying the exhibition at Lehman will provide a context in which to examine the theoretical issues as well as the mechanics of these collaborations. The construction of the first of these projects—Vito Acconci's Proposal for MetroTech Center in Brooklyn and Alison Saar and Betye Saar's Proposal for The Gwendoline N. Alleyne School (P.S. 152) in Queens—is soon to be underway. The models and drawings in this exhibition represent the beginning of this process and offer a preview as these projects are realized in neighborhoods throughout the city.

The Lehman College Art Gallery is pleased to present these proposals to the Bronx community and we wish to thank Susan K. Freedman, President of the Public Art Fund; James M. Clark, executive director and co-curator; and Tom Eccles, project director and co-curator, for their enthusiasm and assistance in bringing **URBAN PARADISE** to Lehman. In addition we would like to acknowledge PaineWebber Group Inc. and Suzanne Gyorgy, director, PaineWebber Art Gallery for their help in making this possible. We are also grateful to David Bady, director, The City and the Humanities Program, Lehman College, and Catha Grace Rambusch, director of exhibitions, Wave Hill, for their contribution to the program schedule for this exhibition.

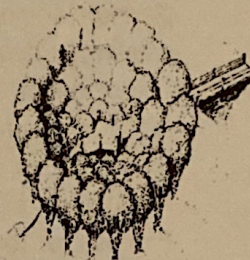
Susan Hoeltzel
Director
Lehman College Art Gallery



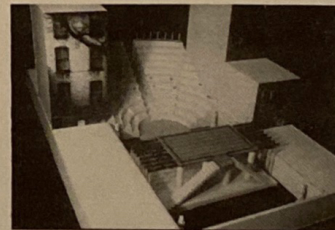
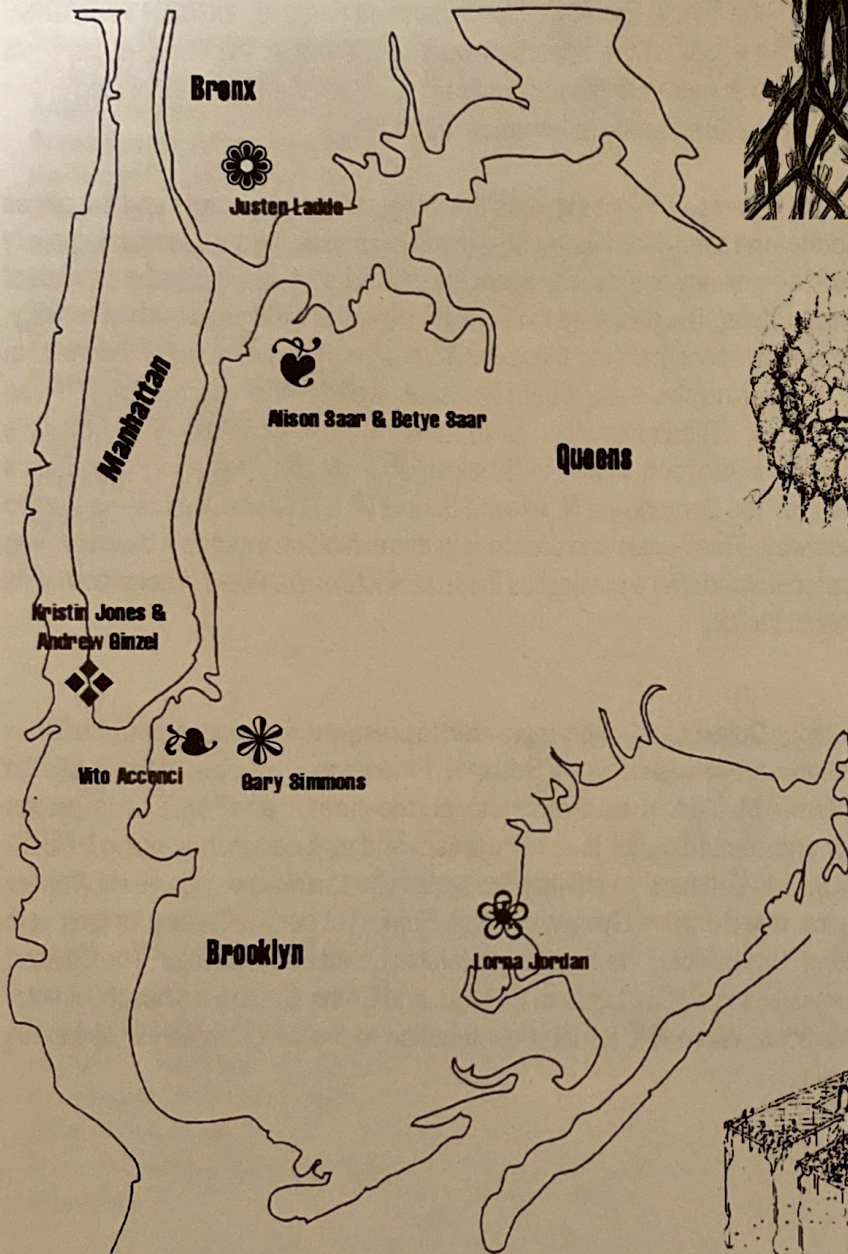
✿ **Justen Ladda**
Fox Street Garden Proposal, The Bronx



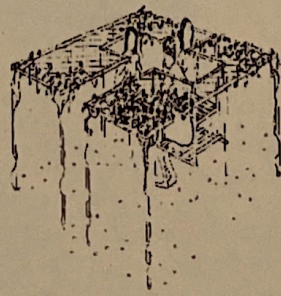
🍎 **Alison Saar & Betye Saar**
Roots and Wings
Proposal for the Gwendoline N. Alleyne School
(P.S. 152), Queens



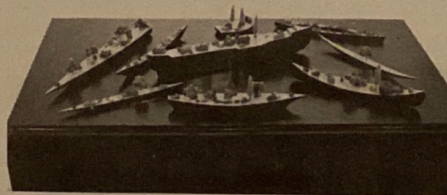
✿ **Lorna Jordan**
The Pull: Wild Gardens at Paerdegat
Proposal for Paerdegat Basin, Canarsie,
Brooklyn



✿ **Gary Simmons**
The Rosetta Garden Proposal,
Brooklyn



🍎 **Vito Acconci**
Proposal for MetroTech Center, Brooklyn



◆ **Kristin Jones & Andrew Ginzel**
Apotheosis
Proposal for Pier 32, Manhattan

Urban Paradise: Gardens in the City

URBAN PARADISE: Gardens in the City is a multi-site, multi-year program exploring the integration of art and urbanism through the much neglected medium of the garden. The project is a pro-active response to the needs of the urban and social environment, offering an alternative to the historical and current experience of green spaces within the city. The urban garden offers city dwellers an important pleasure currently lacking in our city while providing a new interactive experience between artist and community. As a program that predicated the artist as a potentially significant contributor to urban planning, URBAN PARADISE also recognizes the historically important role artists have played in our understanding of nature and landscape.

Building upon the experience of organizations such as Operation GreenThumb and the Green Guerrillas,* URBAN PARADISE is intended as both a practical and theoretical forum for artists to propose new visions and possibilities for the urban garden. Once the almost exclusive patrimony of the wealthy, the garden has become symbolic of successful community activism and the reclamation of degraded urban space.

As a construct, the "garden" is more than simply a limited space given over to vegetation; it is a spatial realm of color, shades, texture, scent, perspective and time. Urban gardens in particular offer a temporary escape from the linear, logical and planned "reality" that circumscribes the lives of most city dwellers. Not only is it this visceral quality of the garden which makes it a rich area for artistic exploration, but the complex nexus of cultural and urban issues which inform the process of design, implementation and maintenance of the public garden.

Urban gardens, which tend to be the result of community action, represent an unusual balance between labor and pleasure. The garden as an object to be viewed, walked through, or otherwise passively consumed generates varying degrees of pleasure. It is a product of sustained labor, generally—a labor of love. It is this intimate interaction that separates the garden from the formulaic "green" spaces and vest-pocket parks designed for the inner cities.

URBAN PARADISE offers a significant development for artistic practice in the public sphere. Rather than positing the artist as independent critical commentator or social catalyst, the organizers have identified an area of contemporary urban activism in which the artist can make a significant contribution. In contrast to community-based programs which privilege process over product and where the artist's creativity is often subsumed under the goal of community participation, URBAN PARADISE retains a realm in which the particular skills of the artist and the visionary potential for artistic intervention can find a meaningful role within the physical and spiritual development of the city. The particularity of an artist's sensibility, an ability to propose alternative ways of understanding and constituting the world, remain fundamental to the task of artistic practice. Exploring new venues for artists' interventions in public space that reflect that particularity and maintain the integrity of the artist's vision was an important element

in the formulation of the project. The project also aims to define new ways of working with communities and city agencies, where positive models emerge through the process of proposals, design development, and ultimately the implementation of the gardens.

URBAN PARADISE is also intended as an artistic forum, generating both practical and theoretical ideas related to urban space and the garden as a physical design element that has been overlooked in our inner cities. For this reason the commissioned artists were allowed the widest possible scope when developing their proposals. In selecting a potential site, the artists were asked to propose their own working method, both in consulting with the relevant community or city agency, and in considering implementation and maintenance of the proposed garden. Early in the design process, the artists met with their respective community representatives and city officials. The proposals are informed by the concerns needs and designs restrictions (official and unofficial) but are not necessarily restricted by them. The organizers felt it was important to give the artists great latitude at this stage of the project to formulate a response unencumbered by opinions of what will or will not work in public.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1993 discussions were held with a wide range of artists, no singular area of art-making practice being considered dominant. The response to these initial meetings confirmed a surprisingly widespread interest in gardens and gardening among contemporary artists. The organizers looked for a diversity in approach, inviting participants who have challenged our conceptions of art (particularly in the exploration of installation-based work), while recognizing those artists who have developed an intimate knowledge and experience of ecological and social issues through their artistic practice.

At the same time, the Public Art Fund contacted locally elected officials, community boards and city agencies seeking potential sites and community groups who would be interested in collaborating with artists. Sites in communities that have few or no green spaces were the highest priority in identifying potential garden sites. Through this process, an eclectic roster of potential collaborators and sites emerged. The selected artists were invited to visit the many sites identified and meet local representatives who welcomed the opportunity to collaborate on the design process. Through these early discussions each particular partnership was forged.

Geographically spread throughout the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn and Manhattan, the ten commissioned proposals illustrate the rich diversity of communities and sites where urban gardens can flourish. In the South Bronx, Justen Ladda is working with local residents to develop a dynamic "stage set" of mountainous outcroppings in a vacant lot. In Woodside, Queens, daughter and mother team, Alison Saar and Betye Saar are collaborating with a multi-ethnic public school, P.S. 152, on a garden for the kindergarten classes. In Brooklyn, Vito Acconci proposes a maze of ivy and chain-link fence within the corporate and academic environment of MetroTech Center. Nearby in Fort Greene, Gary Simmons is collaborating with students from Brooklyn Technical High School, reclaiming both ground and history. In Greenpoint, Haim Steinbach proposes a series of groves atop the wall of a water treatment plant. The restoration of Paerdegat Basin wetlands in Canarsie provided Lorna Jordan with a challenging opportunity to combine ecology and aesthetics. Her proposal metaphorically utilizes the natural, cultural and technological forces that have shaped southern Brooklyn. For Allen Street Malls in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, landscape architects Gary Leonard Strang and Michael Roche celebrate New York's vast underground infrastructure in a synthesis of nature and urban technology. Just North of Allen Street, in consultation with residents of Peretz Square, Gilbert Boyer weaves an intimate and poetic narrative, a "Garden of Babel," of leaves and lives. Rather than the traditional defining enclosure of the garden, Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel propose the garden as a removal from the orthogonal, planned grid of Manhattan; out along the tentacles of a Hudson River pier. With a series of theoretical proposals, Meg Webster explores the urban garden as a source of productivity, effecting both ecological and social change.

These ten proposals were first exhibited in the Spring of '94 at the PaineWebber Art Gallery in Mid-town Manhattan. Six of these proposals are now exhibited here at Lehman College Art Gallery. They represent the first phase of URBAN PARADISE, the proposal stage in which artists present their garden designs in the form of drawings, photographs and maquettes. The proposal stage is intended as the clearest articulation of the artist's vision. These proposals, then, illustrate the artists' concepts, developed in relation to specific communities and sites, and do not necessarily represent the final stage in the evolution of the garden designs. As design propositions, they should challenge our expectations and understanding of the garden within the urban environment.

During the second phase of URBAN PARADISE, the Public Art Fund will act as the umbrella organization, facilitating design development, community involvement and review processes, fund-raising, and ultimately the implementation of the artists' gardens. URBAN PARADISE will create a realm where an artist's vision, a community's commitment and the government's cooperation will yield a public amenity of an enduring nature.

*Operation GreenThumb (a division of NYC Department of General Services) and the Green Guerrillas are advocates and facilitators of community gardens in New York.

James M. Clark, Executive Director and Co-Curator and Tom Eccles, Project Director and Co-Curator, the Public Art Fund, Inc.

Bronx

Manhattan

Justen Ladda

Indoor island, 1992

mixed media, audio equipment, paint on wall, 58 x 45 x 45"
Courtesy Jay Gorney Modern Art, New York

Fox Street Garden, 1994

mixed media
Courtesy Jay Gorney Modern Art, New York

Fox Street Garden Proposal for a triangular lot between Fox Street, 167th & 169th Streets, the Bronx. In consultation with local residents & NYC Department of General Services Operation GreenThumb

Combining elements from familiar compositions into an illusory form, Justen Ladda's art often plays upon a contradictory space where our senses tell us one thing and our intellect refutes that sensory information. For Ladda "reality is a kind of agreement.... The difference between reality and fiction is only a matter of distance—a gap." Ladda's proposal is to be found in this gap between belief and believability, a mountainous outcropping rising from a vacant lot in the South Bronx.

The garden will look as if it were cut out of the foothills of a mountain. The vacant lot is in a residential area of the Bronx, where most of the houses are of the two-story bungalow-style. The garden will look somewhere between a detail of an alpine slope and an opera stage set. From the street, the garden will look as if a piece of rugged nature emerged from the earth below, providing a startling contrast to this neat, seemingly suburban area. From inside, the garden will be a place of refuge. Trails will meander through a series of tableaux of idealized nature—sunken spaces with views of only nature and sky, a grotto with a small fountain, rocky outcroppings. The garden will become an integral part of the community, providing a playground for children, open spaces for picnicking, and individual garden plots for people to grow their own produce.

J. L.

Queens

Alison Saar & Betye Saar

Alison Saar

Clean House, 1992

mixed media
Collection of the artist

Roots and Wings, 1994

mixed media
Collection of the artists

Roots and Wings Proposal for The Gwendoline N. Alleyne School (P.S. 152), Woodside, Queens. In consultation with the staff of P.S. 152

Daughter and mother team, Alison Saar and Betye Saar have collaborated on a proposed garden for P.S. 152 in Woodside, Queens. Focusing upon the needs of the kindergarten children, the garden will create a much-needed safe play area within the grounds of the school while providing a stimulating resource for the early-learning curriculum.

There is an old proverb that parents must give their children two things, roots and wings. This seemed an ideal theme for our collaborative garden for the kindergarten classes of P.S.152. The premise of this proposal is to recognize the wonderment of this stage in a child's development, and create a garden that at once nurtures a sense of belonging (roots) and exhilarates with the gift of knowledge (wings). The garden will be both a place for play as well as a place for learning. The plants growing will demonstrate various aspects of the curriculum. Through gardening the children will encounter the seasons, ethnic identity, issues of ecology, and literature. The proposed elements include seating, enhancement of the fencing, images and text in the pathways, birdhouses and whirligigs.

A.S. & B.S.

Kristin Jones & Andrew Ginzel

Apotheosis, 1994

mixed media
Collection of artists

Apotheosis Proposal for Pier 32, Manhattan. In consultation with Hudson River Park Conservancy

Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel bring to our attention what they term "the physics of existence." Fascinated by invisible forces that coexist in the natural world but which are seemingly extinct within the context of urban life, the artists weave a complex series of metaphors and symbols into their environmental constructions exploring ideas of tension and equilibrium. Pier 32, on the Hudson River, provided the ideal location for their proposal.

We are challenged by the possibility of transforming the derelict landscape of the once vital commercial waterfront and piers in the New York Harbor into a place of reflection and purity. The Hudson riverfront has infinite possibilities to be transformed from a wasteland into a paradise. The city experiences deprivation of nature. Within the city the horizontal is vertical. In the site we have chosen there is perspective. We want to create an environment where citizens can experience the ever-present mercurial forces of nature - the fluctuating tides, the dramatic forces of wind, the changing cycles of light. We want to look anew at the infinity of sky which New Yorkers are deprived of, to renew the wonder which nature inspires. In the caverns of the city street, sky and water are rarely seen or felt.

In our search for a site to work on, we particularly looked for places which were lost, wasted or forlorn. We discovered an old pier within the area to be reclaimed by the Hudson River Park Conservancy. This organization was created in 1992 by the City and the State of New York to assess, design and build a vital new park along the Hudson from Battery Park City to 59th Street. The Park will add over 550 acres of essential open space to Manhattan. Pier 32 is a legacy of earlier times when Manhattan's waterfront was a mecca for trade. Today the pier is a vacant concrete deck, barricaded and slated for removal. Under current legislation, if removed, nothing can be built on this site again.

Pier 32 presents dramatic potential: it projects directly into the Hudson River in one of the oldest parts of the city, in a portion of the new park designated as an area of ecological study and interpretation. Built on wooden pilings driven into the river bottom, this pier is an aquatic forest, a haven for life.

The pier should be saved. Respecting the original boundaries of the former pier, the site can be interpreted in multiple ways. Options include stripping the deck, leaving the piles above or below the waterline, or replacing some or most of them; detaching the pier from the shore and creating an island.

The Hudson River Park will serve a broad based community, as well as a host to plant and animal life. The process of transforming the total 4.5 mile waterfront into the new park will be gradual. The Conservancy is motivated and spirited, open and receptive to working even on the most abstract level. As the eventual fate of Pier 32 is unknown at this time, we have hereby chosen to consider a number of options.

Interpreting the pier generates many questions and considerations about the relationship of the natural to the man-made world. It is our hope to contribute a greater awareness of the natural to the urban. Ultimately we hope that this pier might be saved and become a natural resource to enhance life for the citizens of the City.

K.J. & A.G.

Vito Acconci

Proposal for MetroTech Center, Brooklyn, 1994
mixed media
Courtesy Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

Proposal for MetroTech Center, Brooklyn. In consultation with Forest City Ratner Companies

Through his artwork Vito Acconci addresses the psychological and political significance of public and private spaces in the city. With the cooperation of Forest City Ratner Companies (the real estate developers of MetroTech Center), Vito Acconci's proposal responds to a vacant lot that lies between two fenced-in viewing gardens. Acconci's proposed garden will lead off these existing green spaces—to make an open, temporary public garden in a site allocated for future building development.

This new garden is a garden for the body. When you use the garden, you become "used" up by the garden: you're wrapped up in the garden, surrounded by the garden.

The proposed garden is a horizontal plane of landscape, lifted up from the ground. Its support-structure comes from the edges of the existent gardens; from the vertical chain-link fence on each side, a horizontal layer of chain-link is stretched across the site. Ivy grows out of the existent gardens; the ivy climbs up the vertical chain-link and spreads out over the horizontal chain-link, covering the site.

The garden is a horizontal plane of ivy, four feet above the ground. The chain-link is cut into, to make pathways: inroads into the raised horizontal plane, inserts into the raised green field. The paths start large and end small; they narrow as they pierce further into the garden. The entrance is a central pathway eight feet wide; branching off from this, on each side, four-foot paths twist and turn, maze-like, through the planting. Branching off, from these, two-foot pathways function like vestibules to a room—they provide access to seating embedded inside the green plane.

When you walk into the garden, the garden is all around you, at chest-height. As you go inside, further and further, the garden comes closer and closer. When you sit down, the planting is at your head, over your head; you sink down inside the garden.

V.A.

Lorna Jordan

The Pull: Wild Gardens at Paerdegat, 1994
mixed media
Collection of the artist

The Pull: Wild Gardens at Paerdegat Proposal for Paerdegat Basin, Canarsie, Brooklyn. With assistance from the Portico Group and in consultation with NYC Department of Environmental Protection

The installations and public artworks of Seattle-based artist Lorna Jordan have explored the balancing point between nature and human control. The main focus of her work is to integrate nature, technology, and art while addressing the human tendency to order the natural world around us. Within the context of the Department of Environmental Protection's rehabilitation of Paerdegat Pumping Station and the restoration of the Basin wetland areas, Jordan proposes a series of gardens that allow for limited public access in a delicate ecological environment.

APPROACH: The garden has long served as a way of thinking about the interrelationships of nature and culture and is often

Gary Simmons

The Rosetta Garden, 1994
mixed media
Collection of the artist

Drawings by students of Brooklyn Technical High School:

Akbar Anderson; Skye Blue Davis; David Bailey; Stephanie Lui; A. Jason Haun; Gerwynn Thomas; Irvin Inglo; and Odvar Daley.

The Rosetta Garden Proposal for a vacant lot, Fort Greene, Brooklyn. In collaboration with Brooklyn Technical High School and Andrea Claire

Gary Simmons' proposal is both a reclamation of vacant land and the physical embodiment of philosophical purpose. Previous works erasing and reversing racial stereotypes on this occasion find a positive affirmation in Simmons' garden proposal. Simmons' project has been organized in collaboration with students from Brooklyn Technical High School who originally suggested the vacant lot as a site for a much-needed garden.

Inspired by the controversy surrounding Martin Bernal's breakthrough study *Black Athena*, the Rosetta Garden in Fort Greene, Brooklyn is an amphitheater designed in collaboration with students from Brooklyn Technical High School for use in the Fort Greene community. Named for the Rosetta Stone, the 1799 discovery in Rosetta,

Egypt of a tablet written in Greek, Egyptian hieroglyphics, and Demotic, (a version of hieroglyphics used by common Egyptians), the Rosetta Garden is intended as a place for the popular questioning of history and the expression of the arts. Like the Rosetta Stone itself, which provided the key to translating ancient hieroglyphics, this garden translates between our classical past and our cultural present. The garden's juxtaposing materials comment on our romantic relationship to antiquity: rose bushes and grape arbors conjure images of romance and hedonism; concrete seating and brick facing recall the austere materials of the city surrounding. Together, these materials question the calls for authoritarian control of our youth and instead promote the bacchanalian celebration of culture and identity-making. With its minimalist referencing of classical architecture, the Rosetta Garden is designed as a place of contemplation, a sanctuary within Fort Greene that is also sensitive to the community that surrounds it. The garden's small, semi-circular seating arena provides a view of a cast concrete stage through a courtyard containing two cast figurative sculptures and one single wall relief between them at either side. In the courtyard thrive grapes, roses, and other flowering plants selected for their seasonal bloom. The four original sculptures in classical poses made from artist's models embody the heroism of the everyday and refuse the empirical quest for legitimacy based on the identification of great historical figures descending from established racial lines. Formerly an abandoned lot, this project of land reclamation is simultaneously a reclaiming of the ground of history.

G.S.

Brooklyn

viewed philosophically as the balancing point between wild nature and human control. For the disturbed ecosystems of Paerdegat Basin, this idea is considered through human efforts to restore wild nature and expressed with a primary symbol enriched with intertwining stories.

SYMBOL: Since the hope is to pull life back to the basin, a horseshoe magnet symbolizes the desired forces of attraction. Nestled in the U-shape of the basin's head, a large scale sculptural steel "magnet" acts as an observation deck as well as an organizing element for the entire site. The planting, grading, shoreline, and garden spaces manifest the dynamic forces set in motion by the symbolic sweep of the magnet over the site. In the basin's waters, a series of tethered floating islands respond to the magnetism of the tides.

INTERTWINING STORIES:

NATURAL FORCES: The process of plant succession with its moving patterns of vegetation is observable in a progression of large-scale outdoor rooms framed by the magnet's lines of force. The shoreline of the tidal wetlands is made curvilinear, enhancing habitat and harboring waterside gardens for canoeists.

CULTURAL FORCES: Successive waves of peoples have historically passed through this area; this phenomenon is expressed as a series of five circular "garden folly" spaces conceived as metaphorical stepping stones.

TECHNOLOGICAL FORCES: The garden responds to the Department of Environmental Protection's efforts to reclaim degraded ecosystems by treating stormwater. Recalling the creek that once fed the basin before it was dredged in the early part of this century, stormwater from the surrounding neighborhood grid is: captured from the street ends; passed through an oil/water separator, purified in natural streams; and released into the basin.