

Artists and Designers on Collaboration

Once again, artists and designer's are collaborating. From the designer's side, many professionals realize that they create most effectively working together, without insisting on rigid distinctions between their disciplines. From the visual artist's perspective, involvement early in the design process, particularly in the making of public art, is not only desirable but necessary.

At the Endowment, the Visual Arts Program and the Design Arts Program each arrived at this conclusion in their separate attempts to help create better public places and public art projects. When we recently came to the Endowment as new program directors, we were each keenly aware of the collaborations that were beginning of their own accord in cities across America. We recognized that a joint initiative could work, an unusual teaming-up of two of the Endowment's 12 program areas. And now it has become a "collaboration" in support of the idea of collaboration.

Within a discipline or across disciplines, collaboration requires greater communication between design professionals, artists, and the public, and requires all parties to view their work in a larger context. Beginning in 1986, the Endowment will specifically support collaboration to allow designers and visual artists to know that we recognize and encourage their efforts. A collaborative design process will, we hope, create the possibility for new models of aesthetic public places and greater awareness of their importance in everyone's life.

Richard Andrews
Director, Visual Arts Program

Adele Chatfield-Taylor
Director, Design Arts Program

(The following were asked to talk about collaboration.)

MARY MISS ARTIST

I'm very interested in seeing visual artists and architects collaborate and I've taken steps to try to get collaborations started—inviting architects to work with me on different projects or trying to get some interest going in this area in my teaching or lecturing. Whether it will work or not is something that is still to be seen.

In 1981 or the late 1970's, a regional urban design assistance team—RUDAT organized by the AIA (American Institute of Architects)—met in New Orleans and I was invited as the participating artist. They were making recommendations for a plaza in front of the city municipal buildings and they wanted to include sculpture. I suggested that they set up a competition to choose an artist to collaborate with an architect or landscape architect. Since sculpture was to be the focus of the plaza, it seemed appropriate for the sculptor to be the team leader—the one to set the tone. They did follow through with this and finally selected a proposal by Robert Irwin. Unfortunately, for various reasons, the whole thing was not carried out. However, I thought it was a very important precedent and one of the earliest situations where a major public space was going to be dealt with by an artist.

I didn't actually participate in any collaboration in a complete way until the Battery Park project. I was selected by an art committee in conjunction with the Battery Park City Authority to work with an architect to create a 2 1/2-acre urban park on the waterfront in lower Manhattan. Shortly after I was selected they announced that Cooper, Eckstut & Associates, who had done the overall plan for

Battery Park City and the existing esplanade, would be the architects. Stan Eckstut is the partner who I've worked with on this project. From the beginning, it was really a collaboration. We sat down and worked out ideas together, came up with a concept, developed it, and it was a very successful interaction for me. We came up with a project that I wouldn't have done by myself and I'm sure that Stan wouldn't have done it this way if he were working on it alone either.

This was my first large scale project. The budget was very large, the ground covered was extensive, the complexities of the site and the needs of the site were tremendous. There was just a great mass of complex technical information to deal with. Stan's background as an urban planner and his view of the project within the context of the whole area affected me. I had ideas about something that I thought would be interesting and together we were able to develop those ideas. So he was giving me information, I was giving him information, and we were coming up with something.

How would I define collaboration? I don't think I can define it yet. I'd rather not see it defined. What I'm looking toward in the eighties is coming up with new possibilities for what collaboration could be. I feel that public art in general is at a very early stage, and we're just beginning to touch on a lot of very interesting areas. It's like laboratory experiments all of a sudden being taken out into an open arena and testing those ideas in real life. This is going to really be the interesting part, to see what can come out of collaboration. Is it possible? I might turn around in five years and say this is totally impossible. But I don't think so.

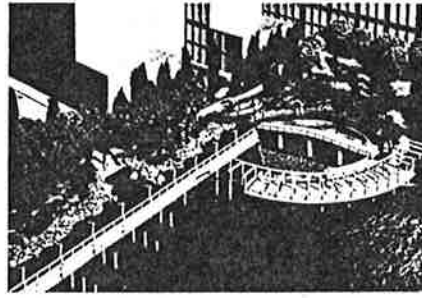
My main reason for coming to public art was a feeling that our environment—especially an urban environment—was so harsh and inhuman. As an artist, I felt

I could affect that situation, change the situation—that I could go in and add another dimension that wasn't existing there because of budgets or the orientation of architects or the needs of the people who were building the spaces. Somehow something major had been left out—places that reflected human scale or allowed direct experience.

A number of artists have been investigating the idea of collaboration in public spaces, of stepping outside the confines of the art world. These investigations over the past 15 years are finally being recognized and met by people on the other side of the situation—the architects, developers, designers. People are beginning to realize that there is something we have to offer and they're beginning to come to artists more often. For instance, I'm working on a project with landscape architects Peter Walker and Martha Schwartz and architect Mark Goldstein, for a developer in Los Angeles; this is not a public project with a mandatory percent-for-art program. Rather, the developer and architects think that we can create something much more interesting working together from the beginning. So we're beginning to go beyond that—that you're required to have art included in a budget. It's becoming something that's not so much about forced-feeding, but is seen as a very desirable element.

In general, I notice that the response of designers and architects is changing. A few years ago, the attitude was "don't come into my territory. As the architect, I'm the ultimate artist and I don't need you as an artist coming in and messing up what I'm doing." A lot of people are much more open to and feel less threatened by this interaction.

So there are artists who have been interested in investigating an interaction with the public, with taking art outside of an art context—Nancy Holt, Siah Armanjani, George Trakas, Alice Adams. We have been spearheading this development, pushing the barriers down and trying to integrate ourselves into this



Aerial view of South Cove at Battery Park City.

Pierre-Francois Limbosch

broader context.

Artists who are going to be working in public situations have to start thinking differently—about themselves, their work, the context, the people who are going to see the work. When you put something in a public place, you've only done half of the work, half of the piece. The situation or the piece is really completed by the public when it comes to see that work and interacts with it. You don't have the kind of complete control, like putting a painting up on a wall in the studio. You're only half of the framework here. The other half is completely unknown.

The Battery Park project was a very positive experience; it gave me a sense of what collaboration can add to my work. Artists are always trying to keep themselves out of any kind of rut, or at least I am. I am always reading, observing, and looking at other art or the world around me, trying to let the ideas that I'm dealing with expand. But the thing I've really enjoyed about collaboration is bumping up against other people and their ideas. It gets you out of that trough that you might be in—it keeps ideas continually growing. Whether it was the landscape architect or the architect, bumping up next to other viewpoints was very stimulating to me rather than being threatening. It didn't make the situation less, it made it much more. It allowed things to develop more quickly than I might have been able to do on my own and in ways that were very interesting to me. The main point for me is that it really is a dialogue, that it is a collaboration.

I don't like the idea of people going off in their corners and developing things and then coming back together and "duking" it out to see who's going to get their ideas through.

There have always been collaborations until recently. A great example is the Alhambra—the integration of decorative work on the interiors of the buildings, the buildings themselves, and the exterior or open spaces. I have no idea who the creators were or how many different craftspeople or types of designers or artists were involved, but that's a very beautiful example of all of these areas coming together. That represents the span I would like to have available to me as an artist. I'm interested in doing interior things—windows or doorways. Or I'm interested in the other extreme, in ideas about urban planning and how a whole area might be developed. As an artist, I would like to have the flexibility to move from the small scale to the overview and to interact with people, whether they're gardeners, designers, interior decorators, architects, or urban planners. I'm really interested in moving in and out of those areas.

I don't think collaboration is easy. We don't have immediate models. We can look at historical situations but we don't really know what the relationship was between the people who were involved. It's going to be an extended period of developing some way of working. It has a lot to do with developing personal relationships. To arbitrarily assign people to a design team is not necessarily going to come up with any kind of reasonable situation for a collaboration. It's a process of finding people whose ideas and work are interesting to you and trying to establish a working relationship with them and to build on that over a period of time.

Those are all difficult things to deal with, or they are for me as a working artist. What happens in those collaborations seems to be worth the trouble. But you can ask me again in five years. □