

# Art in America

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Mary Miss

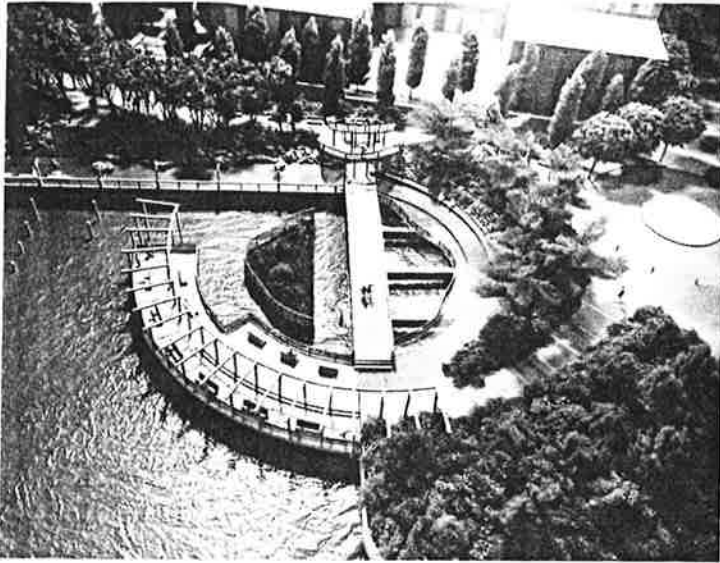
*On the Lookout by Nancy Princenthal*



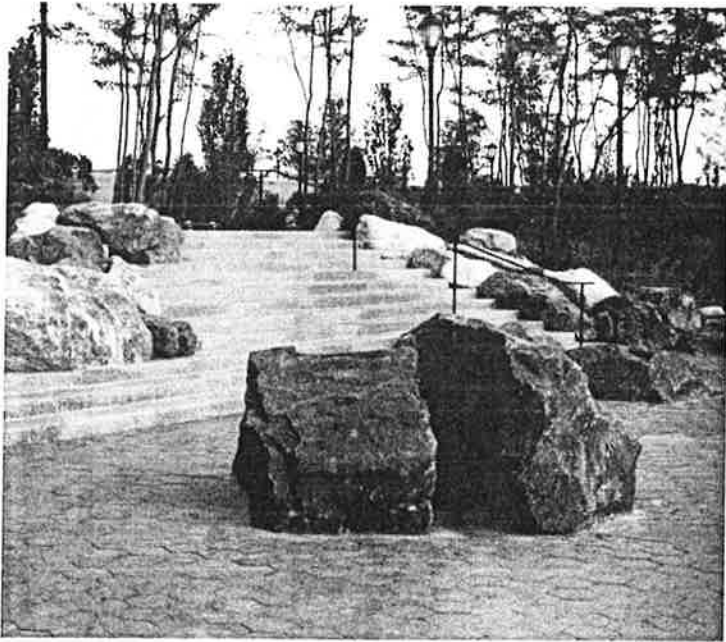
# On the Lookout



*Mary Miss, Stanton Eckstut and Susan Child: South Cove, 1988, the second Battery Park City art project to be completed. Photo © Don Penny.*



Above, Mary Miss: Model for South Cove Project, 1985. Photo Pierre François Limbosch. Below and opposite, details of South Cove. Photos Mary Miss.



**Entering the three-acre *South Cove*, the viewer sweeps past stands of honey locust and a soaring steel lookout tower, then out to sea on a grand, circular jetty.**

esplanade's traditional hexagonal pavers to boardwalk-style wood, and at one point give way to a metal grating that makes it inescapably clear you are walking on water.

There are subtle changes of grade throughout—a few steps up and down between pavement and boardwalk, a gently arched bridge spanning jetty and shore, a split-level deck on the jetty—which echo Lower Manhattan's rather dramatic tides. The tides themselves are carefully marked by the pilings and square arches that poke up from the river and, especially, by the gridded wooden detailing on the seawall, which is covered or revealed in increments as the water rises and falls.

Miss has extended her nuanced sense of surface layering even to the alignment between dockside lampposts, inland stands of honey locusts and the concrete beams that, here as elsewhere, support the esplanade, which is cantilevered over the water (the beams are visible only at the points where they connect the bridge to the walkway). The most exhilarating changes in elevation are provided by the steel lookout tower, in which a soaring pair of curved metal staircases leads to a platform shaded by a Statue of Liberty-inspired crown. There are other lyrical flourishes to *South Cove*: nearest the water, the lights are a nautical and very beautiful sapphire blue; flanking the steps connecting two levels of the walkway are rock outcroppings deposited almost casually, as if by a retreating glacier.

In these details, as in others, oppositions—between land and water, romantic and functional, nature and commerce, old and new—are resolutely harmonized. To some extent, these oppositions reflect the different attitudes and strengths of *South Cove's* collaborators. Eckstut was, not surprisingly, most protective of preexisting structures in the area; he was also, of the three, the one most interested in taking a historicist position vis-à-vis the paving, railing and lighting of the esplanade, and in asserting the necessity of responding to the more general architectural and social history of Lower Manhattan. Child made signal contributions to the choice of trees and grasses, which were chosen to reflect the ecology of an Atlantic seaboard cove. She had an effect on the ultimate—literal—shape of the project as well, sharing with Miss and Eckstut her knowledge of how coves are actually created and of their characteristic forms.

To attempt to specify Miss's exact role is to acknowledge the folly of teasing apart the contributions to a successful collaboration. Her signature is everywhere and yet, she says, "If left to my own devices I never would have come up with exactly what's there." But neither, she concludes, would she rather have done anything else.

The \$7-million *South Cove* follows by more than a year the completion of Ned Smyth's *The Upper Room* (see *A.i.a.*, Apr. '87). Next in line are Richard Artschwager's oversized outdoor furniture and R.M. Fischer's 50-foot-high metal arch, equal parts Samurai swordsman and Buck Rogers. The World Financial Center Plaza, designed by Scott Burton, Siah Armajani, Cesar Pelli and Paul Friedberg, is under construction; Jennifer Bartlett's collaboration with architect Alexander Cooper for a seaside formal garden at Battery Park City's southernmost tip is still on the drawing board. □

the motivation and organizing principle of *South Cove*, the second component of the Battery Park City art program to be completed. This collaboration between Mary Miss, architect Stanton Eckstut (of the recently dissolved Cooper & Eckstut firm, master planners of Battery Park City) and the Boston-based landscape architect Susan Child is a triumph of urban landscape design and of interdisciplinary cooperation.

Miss has long been interested in vertically layered space, in overlaid screens framing shifting perspectives and, most broadly, in sculptural form that, like architecture, unfolds sequentially and yet is never fully revealed. In this most ambitious of her undertakings, these interests find ample expression. The three-acre *South Cove*, at the southern terminus of Battery Park City's distinguished riverfront esplanade, leads the pedestrian down paths that deviate, double up and sweep out to sea in a grand, circular jetty that finally hooks back toward the shore. Walkway surfaces shift from the

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