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News From Freedman's Town

Getting and assessing the news about the Fourth Ward, or Freedman's Town, is not always easy. Given the number of differing political stances taken on the area, multiplied by the variety of actors, concerned citizens can only hope to obtain episodic readings of the situation. The dynamics are as follows: groups like the city government, the Housing Authority of the City of Houston, and the Fourth Ward Property Owners Association proceed on a slow but steady course toward redevelopment; on the other side, community groups initiate numerous, small-scale projects directed at revitalization. Inevitably, there is more news from community groups, not only because their activities are more plentiful, but also because they seek public attention for these activities. This is not the case for the municipal and landowners' agencies, who seem to spurn publicity.

Within this framework, a number of events have occurred and are being planned that together may be interpreted as an overview of the present state of affairs in Freedman's Town. The city has not come forth with a specific plan to finance the installation of new utilities which is intended to attract developers to the area. However, water, sewer, and paving improvements in progress along West Dallas Avenue are part of the overall plan. In the meantime, rumors fly among residents in Freedman's Town regarding the quiet activities of the property owners. Many of these rumors indicate that cohesion among landholders is something less than has been indicated in public statements. General maintenance and repairs to some individual properties are taking place. Although a number of landowners see the historic district as a threat to redevelopment plans, there appears to be interest among others in the financial benefits of an historic district. A meeting was called for this purpose on 25 April, where information about the economic incentives of working within historic districts was provided to landowners and residents.

In September, Diverse Works, the alternative gallery near Market Square, will open an exhibition on Freedman's Town and Allen Parkway Village. The multimedia exhibition will include photographs, drawings, videos, oral histories, gospel singing, and lectures portraying the neighborhood's social and physical qualities. The exhibition will focus on contemporary Freedman's Town, its history, as well as new possibilities for neighborhood revitalization that have been developed by Rice University architecture students.

Across West Dallas at Allen Parkway Village, more apartments are boarded up each week. Contrary to popular belief, demolition has not been granted the necessary approval by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Those opposing demolition have the right to express their opinion prior to HUD's final decision on the matter. Within the month, concerned citizens, residents, Gulf Coast Legal Services, and the American Civil Liberties Union will meet with HUD officers from the Fort Worth regional office, and then with officers from Washington, D.C. The case will be made that the economic arguments of the Houston housing authority are no longer valid. Lack of interest on the part of developers in today's soft real-estate market make dubious a transaction of the magnitude anticipated by the city. Demolition was justified by the housing authority on the rationale that proceeds from the sale of the land could be used for replacement housing and improvements to other public-housing developments in Houston.

The meeting with HUD officers also will reveal some astonishing new estimates for the cost of rehabilitating Allen Parkway Village. Jim Bridenstine, who specializes in the rehabilitation of distressed properties, calculated that the housing authority's estimates may be double or triple the actual cost. Instead of approximately \$36,000 per unit for full rehabilitation, Bridenstine estimates it can be done for \$17,000. If resident labor can be used (as it has in other public-housing projects), then the per-unit cost might be as low as \$12,000.

Finally, a court case continues on the fate of five Indochinese families residing at Allen Parkway Village. The families say they followed the instructions of the only housing authority employee who spoke their language. He was found to be accepting rent illegally, and was fired for his actions. Now the housing authority wants to evict the families because they are not legal tenants of public housing. On 21 March, a district judge disregarded undisputed evidence and decided against the Indochinese families. This ruling is now being appealed, and the families have been granted an injunction allowing them to remain in their apartments until a final decision has been reached. All legal work up to this point has been donated by lawyer Michol O'Connor.

The future of the Fourth Ward is far from resolution. Whether the steady path of the city, the housing authority, and property owners will be deflected by community actions remains to be seen.

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Allen Parkway Village street scene (Photo by Paul Hester)

Austin's New Laguna Gloria Museum

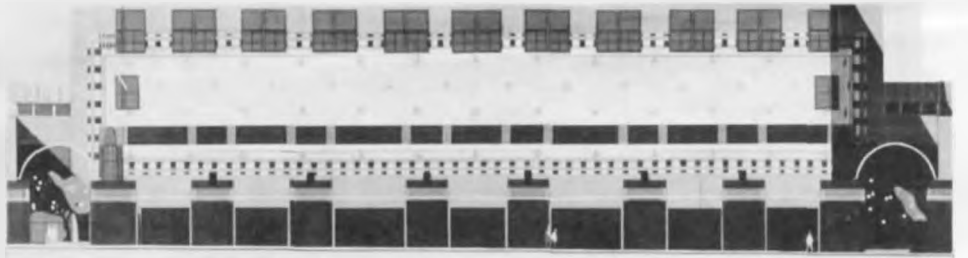
This January, Austin voters approved passage of \$14.7 million in bonds for the construction of a new downtown building for the Laguna Gloria Art Museum. The museum will be built on a long, narrow site, 66 feet by 263 feet, on Fourth Street facing Republic Square. The land and funds for preliminary project expenses, valued together at \$3 million, were donated by Watson-Casey, investment builders, whose downtown holdings include nine blocks adjoining the museum's site. The museum selected as architects the Philadelphia firm of Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown, which designed the expansion of the Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College (1974) and are architects for the newly announced, \$50 million Seattle Art Museum, also planned for a downtown site. The schematic design of the Laguna Gloria Museum, now nearing completion in anticipation of a November groundbreaking, was the subject of an exhibition at the Farish Gallery, Rice University, 8-24 April, and an introductory talk by Robert Venturi and Laurence Miller, director of the museum and guest curator of the exhibition.

The Laguna Gloria Museum presently occupies a large house on the grounds of a

Figure 2: Fourth Street elevation, February 1985, Laguna Gloria Art Museum

lakeside estate in northwest Austin, where it maintains a small gallery for changing exhibitions (3,500 square feet), an art school, and a sculpture garden. The new building, estimated to cost \$16.6 million, will contain 77,000 square feet, including 18,000 square feet of exhibition space to accommodate changing exhibitions and a modest permanent collection of American art of the 20th century. It will also contain a 300-seat auditorium and performance space; offices, storage, preparation, and conservation areas and, at ground level, a museum store and cafe both of which can be kept open independent of gallery hours. The museum school and outdoor sculpture will remain at the present location in northwest Austin.

The new museum building, which is not intended for subsequent expansion, is almost identical in area to The Museum of Modern Art of 1939 by Philip L. Goodwin and Edward Durell Stone and is approximately two-thirds the size of the Kimbell Museum (1972) by Louis I. Kahn. In section and plan, it resembles Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown's somewhat larger project of 1979 for the Museum of Decorative Arts in Frankfurt. Both consist of four above-ground levels and a basement with two long expanses of galleries separated by a narrow longitudinal core which contains a stairway connecting the main public and gallery floors, levels one and two. Libraries and secondary galleries occupy a third level and offices and other work



areas the fourth. But Laguna Gloria, by virtue of its program, site, and surroundings has assumed a tighter, almost ship-like arrangement and produced a more extroverted series of proposals for its principal elevation.

Although numerous sketches and drawings for the Republic Square elevation are included in the exhibition, two themes have received fuller development than the others. The first (represented by figure 1) is dominated by a colossal arcade with arches of alternating width, suggesting a syncopated Bibliotheque Ste-Genevieve (Henri Labrouste, 1850) or closer at hand, Cass Gilbert's gentler, Mediterranean design for the library of the University of Texas (1910). Much of the arcade is blind with actual fenestration limited to arrangements that suggest framing elements - keystones and lintels - rather than actual window areas. The scheme is engaging yet unassuming, sharing a subliminal affinity with Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown's Wu Hall at Princeton (1981) absent the emphatic, sign-like entrance bay.

The second line of development (represented by figure 2) is more arresting and opaque than the first. Its most prominent feature is a large, tablet-like expanse that satisfies both the need to limit fenestration in the galleries (as a function of conservation and hanging space) and to establish a more assertive civic presence. In doing so, it recalls such Mannerist buildings as the Casino of Pius IV by Pirro Ligorio (1563) and the Aqua Paola by Flaminio Ponzio (1611). At present, this elevational approach relies chiefly on a pattern of stars to occupy the tablet. The stars also appeared in studies for the previous arcaded scheme as did, at various stages of development, lists of great

artists arranged vertically (as at Ste-Genevieve) and a frieze of large, continuous lettering (ART MUSEUM LAGUNA GLORIA ART MUSEUM) ranged across the entire expanse of the façade just above street level. The overlaying of such multiple devices on the field of stars in the manner of Jasper Jones may ultimately provide the intensity needed to sustain the now considerable expanse of unfenestrated surface and to advertise the special nature of the buildings and its contents.

Although the site of the museum facing onto Republic Square affords a degree of immediate civic visibility, the museum must also contend with the much larger, inherently more conventional faces of office and commercial structures planned nearby. As a general strategy, the architects have sought to use large- rather than medium-scale elements for the elevations and a perceptibly civic palette of materials and allusive imagery. The civic character of the museum and square eventually may be extended by means of a six-block *rambla* or promenade proposed by Denise Scott Brown in a separate planning study for Watson-Casey's holdings in the area.

The Laguna Gloria project demonstrates for the first time in Texas the merit of using residual parts of commercial-development sites to accommodate civic and cultural buildings, particularly as an alternative to the continued proliferation of corporate plazas. Also apparent, even at this preliminary stage, is the intelligence of the building's design - both as a working museum and as a larger civic artifact. In this instance, Austin not only gains a building by a preeminent American architect, but a monument that works on a variety of levels.

Drexel Turner



Figure 1: Fourth Street elevation, December 1984, Laguna Gloria Art Museum, Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown, architects

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Throwing MUD At Taft

Partially hidden among the East Texas pines in a corner of what will be the civic sector of The Woodlands's downtown, a new building has just opened that is not of reflective glass, or of brown-stained wood, or of buff concrete. Rather, this structure, the Water Resources Building, designed by Taft Architects, is faced with red-brown brick, gray-concrete columns, and green-aluminum mullions. One is struck immediately by the aesthetic differences between this building and typical Woodlands architecture. To paraphrase the client's representative, "We wanted something unique to The Woodlands, something with identity. A place our customers could find and remember. A place where Municipal Utility District (MUD) boards could meet in comfort and style." The client got just what was asked for.

The escalating costs of leasing space in a plain-vanilla office building and uncertainty about the ability to expand within such quarters persuaded the eight Municipal Utility Districts operating in The Woodlands to build a structure of their own to provide permanent space, as well as a distinct identity within the community. Located just off Grogan's Mill Road, one of the main thoroughfares of The Woodlands, and lying alongside what will be The Woodlands Riverwalk, the building achieves a notable presence and sets a high standard for future public buildings.

How does exceptional architecture happen in a place like The Woodlands which, besides being "almost to Dallas" and considered "country" by inner-city Houstonians, also imposes tough design criteria through its Development Standards Committee? Although intended, in the words of Robert Heineman, vice president for advanced planning of The Woodlands Corporation, "to prevent bad design and encourage good" there is a tendency for design review committees (or architectural review boards as they are entitled in many other places) to be conservative, sometimes even hostile, to innovation.

Established by the covenants of The Woodlands, the Development Standards Committee (DSC) consists of a group of employees of The Woodlands Corporation appointed by the developer. Its responsibility is to review all new construction within The Woodlands for appropriate site planning through control of access, parking, land use, lot coverage, height, and preservation of natural amenities. Of secondary concern is the appropriateness of the design, which often leads to questions based upon taste, style, and the aesthetic values of the individuals on the committee. So far, as may be seen from a quick drive through the community, the DSC has done a commendable job with most of the buildings. The general lack of distinguishing architecture is more the responsibility of architects and clients than of the DSC, for it cannot design buildings. Responsibility for the few errors that might be found must be placed with the marketing contingent of The Woodlands Corporation, which can bring pressure on the members of the DSC.

The normal process encountered when working with the DSC in The Woodlands is at least a three-stage activity. First, there is an initial conference with the architects at the pre-design stage. At this time restrictions for the particular site are discussed and questions regarding the project answered. This meeting is followed by a review of the schematic design when the DSC checks to make sure everything is going according to plan. This also is the time when the architect may appeal some rulings or make some alternative suggestions for use of the site. After this, there is a third meeting to grant final design approval. Taft's MUD Building made it through this process, although there were comments and criticism concerning the passing fancies of Postmodern architecture.

What might be learned from this process is that within the constraints of strong and enforced development criteria a good client and a good idea can exert enormous positive force on the taste-makers and aesthetic controllers of a community not heretofore known for its architectural savvy. Design review activities in The Woodlands should continue to encourage innovation and excellence that will pave the way for further successes.

Peter Wood



The Water Resources Building, The Woodlands, 1985, Taft Architects, architects (Photo by Paul Warchol)

Greenway Plaza Scenic District

Houston's municipal sign-control ordinance adopted in May 1980 provides not only for a system of city-wide sign regulation but also permits more stringent controls to be adopted for special scenic thoroughfares and scenic districts. The first such scenic district was created in December 1983, encompassing an area of approximately three square miles bounded by Woodway (north), the West Loop (east), the Southwest Freeway (south), and Chimney Rock (west). Instigated by the City Post Oak Association, it imposes limits on the size of on-premise signs that are twice as stringent as the city-wide

standard. Full compliance will not be required until six years following creation of the scenic district, in this case, 1989.

The Houston City Council may take final action in June on plans to create a second scenic district, this time in the Greenway Plaza area. The district will encompass approximately 1.25 square miles and be bounded by West Alabama (north), Lake (east), the Southwest Freeway (south), and the West Loop (west) with a smaller area south of the Southwest Freeway and north of Westpark between Buffalo Speedway and Wesleyan. Creation of the proposed scenic district is supported by Century Development Corporation, the largest landholder in the area, and Christin Hartung, the councilmember who represents the area affected. Its restrictive provisions are identical to those of the Galleria area scenic district; full compliance will not be required until six years following enactment.



Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden

A proper space for the display of outdoor sculpture has long been a goal of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The dream came closer to reality in 1978 when the museum commissioned Isamu Noguchi to design the Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden. On 14 April 1985, Noguchi, Isaac Arnold, Jr., chairman of the board of trustees of the museum, and Mayor Kathryn J. Whitmire broke ground for the garden in a ceremony on the now-empty one-acre lot between the museum and The Glassell School of Art. Completion of the garden is set for spring 1986 - Texas's Sesquicentennial year.

The garden will be a landscaped plaza featuring red Carnelian granite paths interspersed with curving islands of grass and trees. Some of the islands will be elevated to provide focal points for the sculpture. The organic shapes of the plaza spaces will echo the biomorphic forms often found in Noguchi's sculpture. Vine-covered walls ranging between two and fourteen feet in height will shield the garden from traffic and noise, without isolating it from its surroundings. Further freestanding concrete walls of varying heights will form backdrops for the sculpture.

In addition, Noguchi has designed furniture specifically for the Cullen Sculpture Garden to complement the overall design. This furniture, which will accommodate about 100 people, is fundamental to the intended use of the garden. Waste cans and drinking fountains also will be installed. The resulting space will be attractive to both lunch-time visitors and pedestrians who stroll through the garden. The garden will also have special places for student sculpture and for temporary displays. The garden also may be used for outdoor exhibition openings and performing-arts events.

According to Peter C. Marzio, the museum's director, "The Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden will provide the ideal outdoor setting for the public to enjoy the museum's finest examples of

Model showing view looking southwest of the Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden, 1983 (Photo by Paul Hester, courtesy The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston)

19th- and 20th-century sculpture. The garden will be one of Houston's most beautiful sites."

The Cullen Sculpture Garden will not be a static exhibition space; rather, it will change through the years. George Shackelford, assistant curator of European sculpture and painting, explains that "The museum's present collection of 19th- and 20th-century sculpture will be added to so that the garden will continue to evolve. Already in the last few years the museum has been fortunate to acquire such significant examples of European sculpture as the Bourdelle *Adam* (1889) and the Maillol *Flore Nue* (1910)." Alison de Lima Greene, assistant curator of 20th-century art, adds, "Many of our acquisition priorities for 20th-century art now lie in augmenting the sculpture collection. Our goal is not to create an encyclopedic survey, but to concentrate on certain themes which will lend a certain unity and wholeness to the Sculpture Garden. We hope to concentrate on artists' interpretations of the human form, both figurative and abstract, as seen in the three Robert Graham pieces (*Fountain Figure 1, 2, and 3*; 1983) and the David Smith (*Two Circle Sentinel*, 1961), as well as on other forms borrowed from nature."


Isamu Noguchi is himself one of America's foremost living sculptors. Born in California in 1904 and raised in Japan, Noguchi has always embraced both a Western and Asian aesthetic in his sculpture, combining a wide range of materials and purposes. In addition to his sculpture, Noguchi has designed a garden for the UNESCO Building in Paris (1956-1958), a plaza for the Chase Manhattan Bank Building in New York (1961-1964), the Billy Rose Sculpture Garden in Jerusalem (1960), and most recently, a sculpture garden in Costa Mesa, California (1982).

The cost of the overall project is estimated at \$3.2 million. Funding for the land has been provided by the Brown Foundation and the City of Houston. Funding for the design and construction has been provided by the Cullen Foundation in memory of Lillie Cranz and Hugh Roy Cullen.

Peter J. Holliday



Isamu Noguchi addresses guests during the groundbreaking ceremony for the Cullen Sculpture Garden (Photo by Chris Crane)



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