



FRAMING A MODERN MASTERPIECE

THE CITY+ THE ARCH+
THE RIVER | 2015

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DESIGN INTENT

Our work is based on the belief that architecture and landscape urbanism continue to have a fundamental and potent role in shaping and representing the aspirations of our time. Our practices, Michael Maltzan Architecture, Stoss Landscape Urbanism, Richard Sommer / B.L.U. Urban Design, Buro Happold Engineering, and the artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, are dedicated to conceptualizing and realizing the complexity and possibility inherent in this civic realm.

Within this context, the challenge posed by this project is an extraordinary opportunity: To engage the Arch's status as a democratic monument, renewing it for today, and enabling this national symbol to represent and catalyze a new life for St. Louis and its citizenry. We believe that the solution to this challenge can be found precisely within the context of the project, its site, its program, and its contingencies. We must confront the problem of its physical disconnection from the city as well as its social and cultural life. We must also address the incomplete, industrial character of the river's east side, where plans have remained largely unrealized. This approach should be necessarily distinct from those implemented in other American metropolises, given the unique status of the site, the iconic character of the Arch, and the importance of the project to the city core. In sum, the project must continue the trajectory begun by Saarinen and Kiley, creating a living memorial that cultivates social, civic, and ecological life.

Critical to this approach is a team which brings a specific ability to engage the project at its most conceptual and abstract, and to extend the promise of the monument into this new century. It is a fundamentally collaborative project, not a collection of diverse elements and disciplinary interventions, but a singular transformation where landscape, infrastructure, and urbanism are woven into a unified whole.

MOVEMENT & CONNECTIVITY

The challenge confronting the project is as much in its relationship to the city beyond as within the site itself. Our approach begins with the reconnection of the city, river, and Arch through an infrastructure that is simultaneously performative and iconic. This approach distinguishes between the Arch grounds, where a more judicious approach focuses on edges and seams, breaking down infrastructural barriers and subtly threading new narratives through the existing memorial, and the eastern bank, where the singular view as program and site strategy can expand programmatically and spatially, enabling visitors to experience the Arch in a new context.

Three distinct opportunities emerge. First, to link the grid of the city to the Arch and riverfront, creating a surrounding landscape of rooms, gardens, and activities, which then could expand and extend across the river. Its edge could be more porous, extending into the surrounding city, or thickened, creating a new occupied ground along its perimeter. Second, to engage typologies such as the forest or field, evoking the unrealized Kiley scheme, forming a loose network of trees within the Arch grounds which grows to become a renewable, robust forest on the east bank, with rooms cleared for activity and views toward the Arch, creating an ecological and economic platform for growth. Third, recognizing both the importance of the Mississippi to the city and its history and the pragmatic challenges of flood control, hydrology, and infrastructure, bringing the river to the city, using water for recreating and relaxation, and creating a new network of activity across the site. Culminating in the image of the Arch doubled through reflection, such an approach extends the palpable reach of the Arch grounds and domesticates the infrastructure which currently isolates the Arch from the Mississippi and city alike.

ACTIVITY & PRODUCTIVITY

We realize that it is not enough to connect these isolated elements of city, river, and Arch. Our approach must also create a new nexus of activity and productivity which will invigorate the site, catalyzing subsequent development in the surrounding city and along the Mississippi. Programmatic elements must physically engage the site and its specific, unique characteristics; in contrast to a collection of indifferent programmatic activities, as characterized by the "bento box" of Millennium Park, the project must instead create a more haptic relationship between infrastructure and the existing iconography of the Arch.

Given the massive scale of the site, especially as it extends across the Mississippi, such an approach must also cultivate an emergent landscape and urban fabric that can unfold over a period of years and decades. On the eastern shore, this approach could include the transformation of the site into a productive habitat, in ecological terms, or as a landscape for active remediation or energy generation, redirecting its potential, both ecological and cultural, to more productive and civilizing ends.

Distinct from a picturesque, narrative understanding of landscape, this approach would not create a mimetic representation of nature; it is instead defined by activity, utility, and performance. Rather than creating a series of static scenes in relationship to a fixed, linear narrative, this approach encourages a multiplicity of simultaneous itineraries and activities. Such a new landscape must necessarily incorporate specific programs which engage social and cultural production, creating programmatic inputs to draw new visitors and promote growth, encouraging use as much as contemplation. In this way, the project reflects the essence of western expansion and the Jeffersonian Grid which underpins it, a democratic tradition of landscape defined by seriality, abstraction, and productivity.

ABSTRACTION & INTERPRETATION

A final, important challenge is the relationship between abstraction and interpretation. Monuments are, both in conception and construction, abstract. They must not only signify shared values and qualities, they also create their own qualities and context, something that the Arch certainly succeeds in doing. Working in relationship to the Arch, its immediate grounds and its larger symbolic context, one must be extremely careful. If an approach were to lose or disregard this larger, conceptual framework, the Arch and its larger meaning would become incidental.

We support an alternative approach, sensitive to these aims, creating a democratic monument with a more contemporary iconography of abstraction and monumentality. Key to this effort is an emphasis on interpretation, specifically the ways in which art, architecture, and landscape can not only represent, but manifest, the story of a democracy rooted in daily life. The project can and should construct its identity from these concurrent motivations. It must not only evoke the metaphoric character of connection and growth which have informed our history; it must foster these qualities.

The Arch is an integral part of the iconography of the city. This new project can make it part of the life of the city. It can catalyze future development and connection at scales both intimate and monumental, personal and collective, making St. Louis newly visible. In this way, the project can tell a story that does not end with the Arch and the events it memorializes. It can include multiple voices, broadening the story of Manifest Destiny and western expansion to include other cultural narratives, referencing nearby sites including Native American sites including those at Laclède's Landing. It extends them forward, tracing these cultural, social, and ecological trajectories into the present. These stories can be told at many scales, simultaneously. They can re-situate the Arch, cultivating multiple voices and histories and allowing for future histories to be inscribed in the decades to come.

COMMITMENT TO THE PROJECT

The five principals and five firms which comprise our team are all committed to bringing our collective focus and energies to this deeply compelling project. It is an extraordinary project, for both the city of St. Louis and our nation, and one that if selected we would engage with all our focus, passion, and creative abilities.