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TILTED ARC: SETBACK FOR PUBLIC ART?

New York—Finally, *Tilted Arc* was taken down. The country's most notorious piece of public art was carted off in the dead of night on the Ides of March.

Richard Serra's sculpture, a 120-foot-long, 12-foot-high, curved piece of rusting steel that sliced across a plaza outside the Jacob Javits Federal Building, had been controversial ever since it was installed in 1981 as part of the federal government's Art-in-Architecture program.

By challenging the landscape of the plaza and the architecture of the buildings around it, *Tilted Arc* attempted to bully people into an awareness of their built environment. But the sculpture eventually took on a more profound meaning: it became a lightning rod for the debate about the role of art in the public realm. (Unlike the recent debate over the Robert Mapplethorpe photography exhibit, the debate focused not on the question of public funding for art, but on the implications of putting art in a public place.)

For years arguments resonated in public hearings, court briefs, op-ed articles and impromptu discussions at the sculpture itself: How to strike a balance between moral imperative of the artist to exercise his or her creativity and the wishes of the public? Just who is the "public"—the people whose daily environment is transformed by the art work; the amorphous community at large, who might experience the art work once or twice; or art experts? The questions tran-

scended the environmental issues Serra raised about the Javits building plaza, yet the sculpture always stood as a reference point.

Those who use the plaza say *Tilted Arc's* point had been made and it was time for the sculpture to come down. Others note *Tilted Arc's* impact will be long lasting: public agencies are now more likely to involve the communities they serve in selecting artists and reviewing the designs of public art.

Nevertheless, the removal seems a loss. Fundamental questions about the nature and responsibility of public art were sidestepped, not resolved. Without Serra's aggressive work to prod us, these questions will be much less vivid and we will be less inclined to confront them.

PAPAGO FREEWAY'S SILVER LINING

Phoenix—Papago Freeway met bitter opposition when proposed here in the 1960s, as did countless other freeways across the country. The elevated highway would have blocked views of the Phoenix Mountains in the northeast section of the city, and the cars coursing along it would have been an ever-present, all-too-visible reminder of the noise and air pollution that were raining on the city. Phoenicians feared their city's image as a healthy place with wide open vistas was in jeopardy.

But this freeway revolt ended differently from most others. Despite opposition, Papago Freeway is under construction. On top of it, covering a half-mile stretch that passes through a historic district and under the city's main commercial and ceremonial street, the city is building a park.

Parks over freeways are not so unusual anymore; more than a dozen have been built or are planned in this country. What is most noteworthy about Deck Park (which was designed by Howard Needles Tammen & Bergendoff) is its attempt to achieve a synthesis with the surrounding city, a task it accomplishes by serving as three parks in one.

One end of Deck Park will be a broad, landscaped space with a pond, Japanese garden and groves of trees that will serve as a quiet green for the four historic neighborhoods that abut the freeway. This part of the park will also reach into an adjacent neighborhood so a nearby school will be connected to the open space.

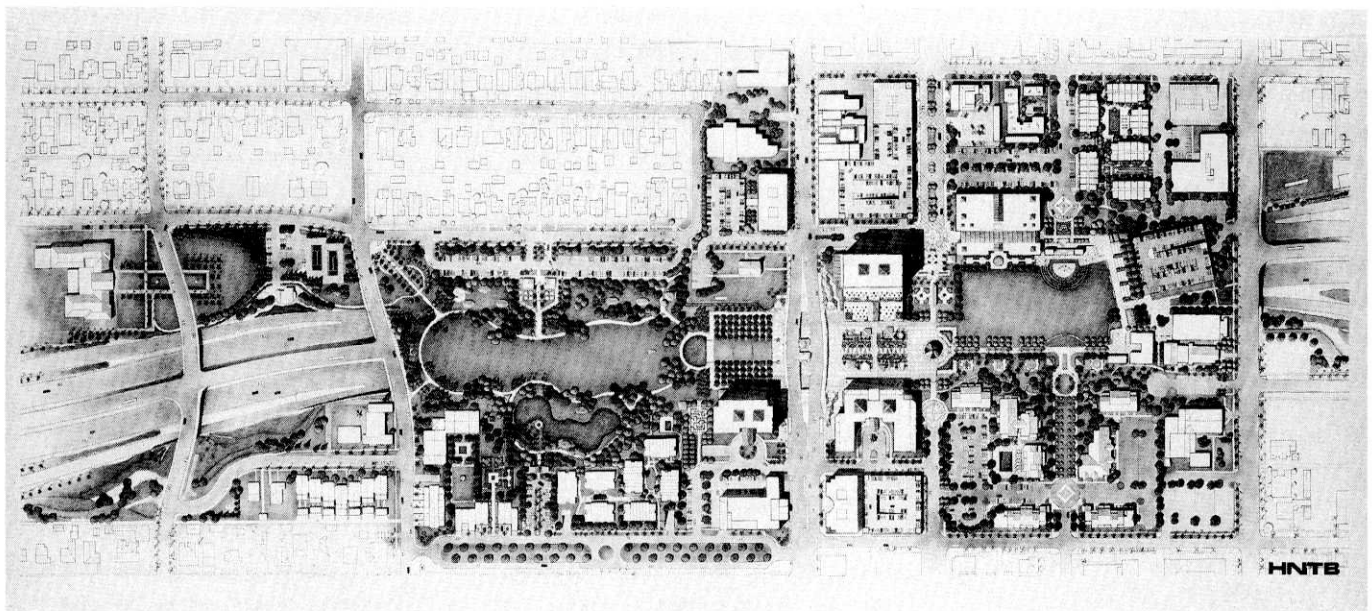
Central Avenue, Phoenix's main street, will arch over the park on a bridge of its own. The crossing, which will bisect the park, will be celebrated with a tightly scaled urban plaza that contains retail shops, amenities such as fountains or a carousel, and access to an express bus stop in the freeway median below the park. The plaza might also serve as a terminal for a historic trolley line.

Finally, an existing cultural building at the other end of the park will be supplemented with a cultural park containing an amphitheater, an open lawn for festivals and, perhaps, a library. Plans also call for an "arts walk" to lead from this section of the park through a nearby artists' housing district to museums and theaters in Phoenix's civic center, a half mile away.

Freeway air rights projects have a mixed track record: at worst, they are beacons, such as Boston's Prudential Center, that serve the automobile traveler, not the urban fabric. At best, they are open spaces, such as Lawrence Halprin's Freeway Park in Seattle, that derive their success by engendering feelings of escape and insulation from the rest of the city.

Phoenix's Deck Park is setting a new standard for air rights developments: it tames the freeway by making it part of the surrounding city.

"Dispatches" will be a regular feature of Places. It will report on timely, noteworthy attempts to make, care for, and understand places. We invite readers to send brief reports or news clips on topics that would be of interest for future "Dispatches."



Aerial view of Papago Deck Park and adjacent development plans.

Courtesy Howard Needles Tammen & Bergendoff.