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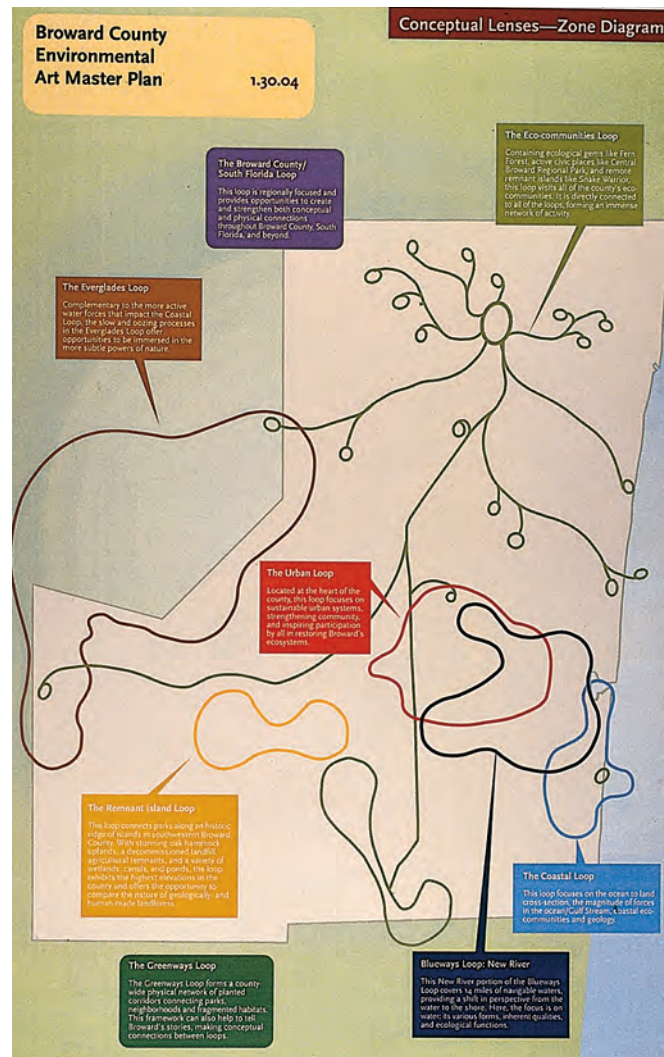
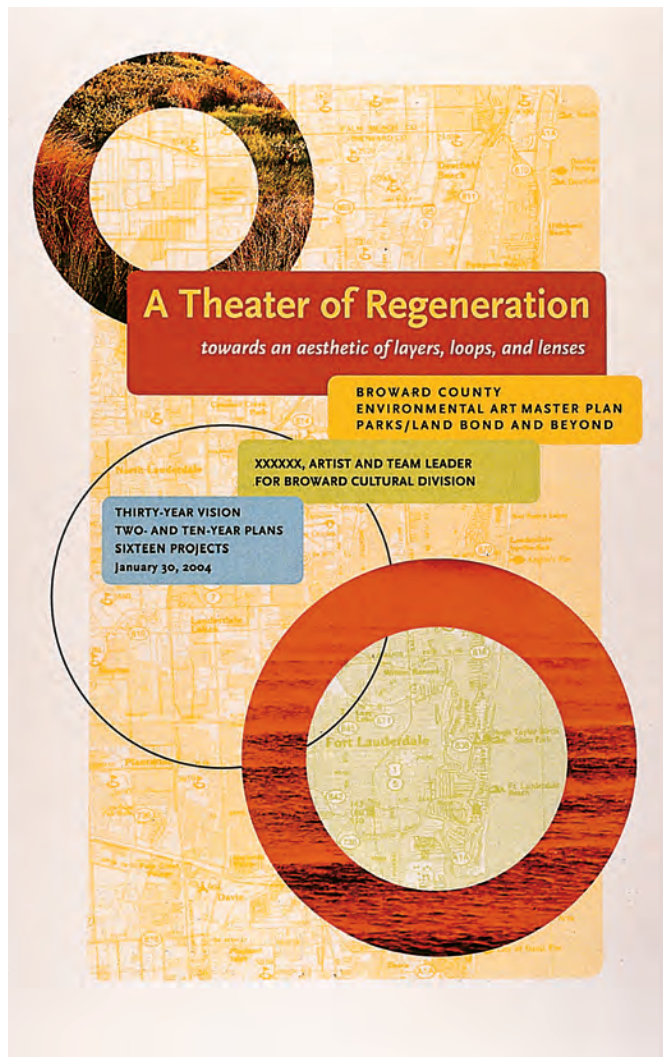
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Theater of Regeneration: An Environmental Art Master Plan – Broward County, Florida

Lorna Jordan Studio

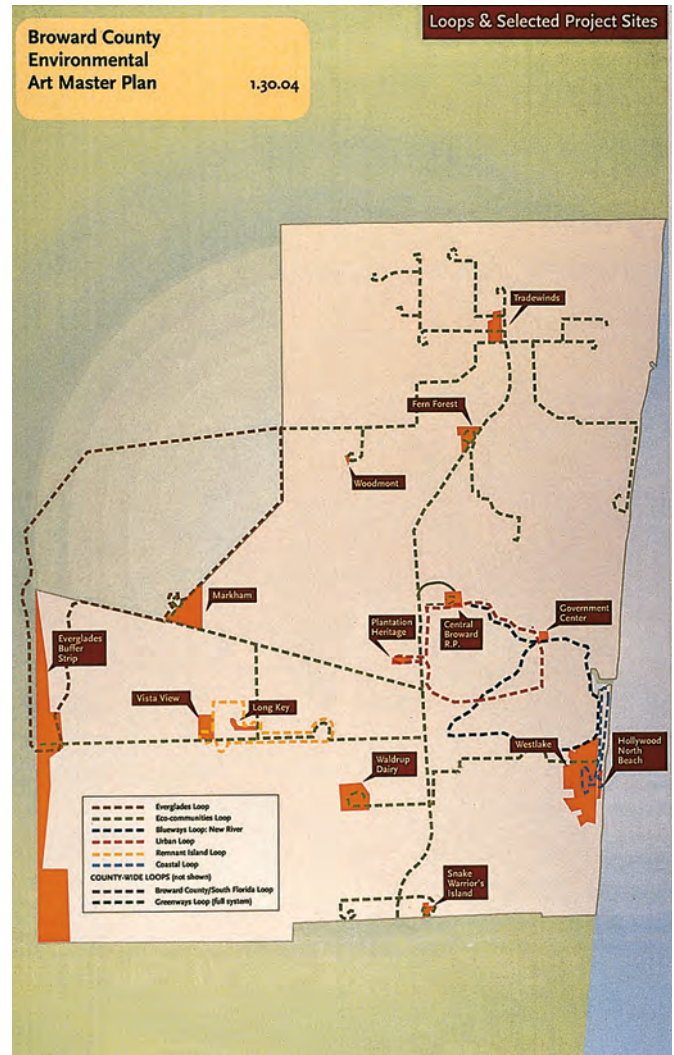
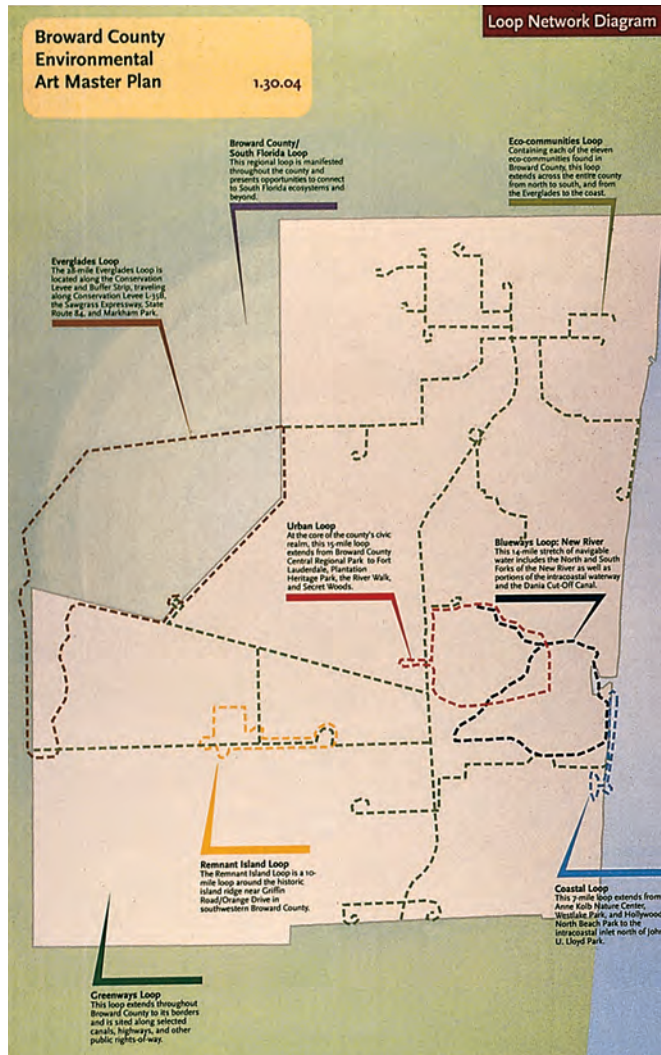


Fifteen years ago, Phoenix’s groundbreaking public-art master plan posed a simple question: how could the city’s public-art program help residents make sense of their ever-sprawling cityscape?¹ That plan, by Morrish, Brown and Mouton, documented the visual traces of Phoenix’s underlying urban, landscape and cultural patterns, and provided a detailed strategy for interpreting them through public-art projects generated by the city’s capital program.

In the years since, about forty local public-art agencies have engaged in similar planning efforts. At one level, this new type of plan has helped determine which public-art projects are likely to have the most resonance, which will make the best use of available resources, and (in some cases) which are most likely to avoid controversy. But at their best, such plans may also serve as de facto urban (or civic) design frameworks. And in this capacity they have

demonstrated a capacity to translate public-art programs to the scale of the city (or regional infrastructure like an airport, highway or transit line), shifting from incidental “percent-for-art” approaches to comprehensive strategies for building the public realm and addressing public narratives dispersed through time and space. In the process, they have drawn on knowledge of ecology, cultural geography, and social history to transform the way we look at cities — much the way City Beautiful plans imagined a new urban order a century ago.

“A Theatre of Regeneration,” prepared for the Broward County Cultural Arts Division and park agency, is perhaps the best example of this new genre of planning to date. It digs aggressively into the environmental and social history of this particular corner of Florida. More than most plans, it also reaches beyond simple capital-improvement strate-



gies to set out a proactive agenda for engaging a range of city and infrastructure-planning processes. Finally, it proposes a particularly ambitious concept for deploying public-art projects, attempting to use public art to bring landscape patterns to view that convey new layers of experience and meaning.

A Plan and a Process

In terms of institutional origins, “A Theater of Regeneration” was developed as a tool to implement Broward County’s Safe Parks and Land Preservation Bond. This measure raised \$400 million to preserve and reclaim open space and repair and enhance the county’s aging park system.

In attempting to fulfill its obligations toward this bond measure, Broward’s public art program (which dates to

1976) sought an artist-led planning team experienced in such disciplines as environmental art, ecology, planning, landscape architecture, and greenway development. It then charged the team with producing a thirty-year vision that would identify both a tier of projects that could be accomplished in the next two years and a second round that could be accomplished within ten years.

The team members, led by Seattle artist Lorna Jordan, worked through much of 2003, visiting Broward County and taking measure, as they put it, of the “stories, processes, ecologies and events that explain the landscape’s complex mosaic.” In particular, the team focused on understanding how Broward’s history is intertwined with the presence, mystery and infrastructure of water. But their efforts also included documenting a series of “eco-communities” — patterns of natural and constructed settings

that serve as habitat for humans, wildlife and vegetation. In addition, four community meetings helped the team learn about the county’s “hidden processes and forgotten histories,” as well as “which outdoor experiences the residents consider important.”

Building on this research, the plan then imagined a diverse range of artistic responses to the particular place structure of Broward — from site-integrated sculpture and architecture to living theater/performance and ecological infrastructure. However, rather than identifying discrete projects, the plan recommends areas of intervention — some as specific as parks; some as ambitious as newly imagined “loops” and trails; and others related to inherited infrastructure such as canals, or emerging systems such as greenways. For each area, the plan lists a range of environmental considerations, experiential possibilities, and linkages to planning and public works projects that can become the focus of work by artists and planners. In this regard, the plan is open-ended and flexible, a stimulus to individual creativity within a larger order.

Designing at the City Scale

Clearly, Broward’s plan itself is also a piece of art, an attempt to interpret the complex processes that underlie the inhabitation of this section of Florida. Physically and graphically, the plan is a lavish, accomplished document — colorful, memorably designed, and printed on heavy, oversized paper stock — atypical for public agencies.

Combined with Broward’s strong tradition of funding public art, the plan also provides an ample basis for developing extraordinary art projects. But “A Theater of Regeneration” sets its sights higher, and in doing so, revisits a fundamental challenge that Morrish, Brown and Mouton struggled with in Phoenix: can a cohesive civic or environmental narrative be made legible through art projects spread over a wide area?

Jordan has considered these issues before. In “Waterworks Garden,” an eight-acre garden in Renton, Wash., she created a sequence of environments, or rooms, linked by a modest path, that enable viewers to contemplate the various stages of a natural process for cleansing stormwater runoff.² For Broward County, which covers hundreds of square miles, the challenge, of course, was far more daunting. In response, she has proposed a system of “loops of physical and process-based connections,” routes that people may follow “to experience the layering of forces, land uses, activities and phenomena,” and so bring the plan’s narrative structure to life.

No matter how strong the impact of an individual artwork may be, however, the cumulative effect of several, or

many, is harder to anticipate. Jordan and her team imagine all manner of ways to bring the loops to life: repeated infrastructure elements, linear landscape projects, events like parades or flotilla, even “worldwide-web-ways” as connective tissue.

Indeed, the plan’s main flaw may be that it only thinks expansively without coming to closure on specific initiatives — a handful of concrete, doable, schedulable projects that could serve as demonstrations of its broader concepts. It’s easier to imagine the creative energy this plan might unleash than it is to understand how its proposals might actually be accomplished.

EDRA/Places and Public Art

This award reflects the close attention EDRA/*Places* juries have tended to pay to the work of public artists. The first EDRA/*Places* jury recognized not only Jordan’s “Waterworks Gardens” but also the “Radnor Gateway Enhancement Strategy.” In recent years juries have also recognized “New•Land•Marks,” “Cultural Landscape Goitzsche,” and the “Rosie the Riveter” memorial.³ All these projects have sought to break the mold of “percent-for-art” projects, and re-engage people in important civic places or serve as “acts of atonement” for the construction of heavy-duty infrastructure.

In its awards over the years, then, EDRA/*Places* juries have clearly been tracking a critical discourse — but not so much in terms of how public art engages place as in terms of how public art engages wider strategies for shaping city form. In this context, “Theater of Regeneration” raises the bar. Ten years from now, the editors of *Places* might very well want to organize a “place debate,” as they did for the Phoenix plan, to take measure both of the art projects this plan has inspired and the way these have collectively shaped a new understanding of public space in south Florida.

— Todd W. Bressi

14 ECO-COMMUNITIES LOOP

Phenomenological Art— Natural Processes and Phenomena

Key County Initiatives

- SENSE OF PLACE
- EDUCATION
- WILDLIFE HABITAT

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

These site-based projects offer sensory experiences that heighten our awareness of natural processes and phenomenological elements that are unique to the region. The phenomena can range from the subtle to the sublime, revealing characteristics and qualities of sky, fire, wind, sun, thunderstorms, and water (including the movements of the immense Gulf Stream).

Andrej Zdravic, Water Waves

Ned Kahn, Circling Wave Umbrella

Doug Hollis, Aeolian Harp

Nily-Lili, Water House

Ned Kahn, Breathing Sky

OPPORTUNITIES

1. Draw upon wide range of phenomena that are unique to Florida and its ecosystems
2. Create awareness of forgotten or invisible aspects of the Broward environment

POTENTIAL PROJECTS

1. Vegetation management artwork (fire)
2. Dune migration artwork
3. Water transformation artwork: liquid to vapor
4. Aeolian harp (sound created by wind action)
5. Wave action artwork

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JURY COMMENTS

MISS This is one that I felt very quite strongly about. It is altering the ways central arts projects are done. Traditionally, you build a new building and you put a little thing in front of it, and it doesn't work — it's terrible. Broward County is attempting to take funds that are generated by percent-for-arts programs and see how they can do art projects throughout the county that add up to something more. I think it is really an important precedent.

GRATZ I also like the idea of using art as both a wayfinder, a place-maker, and a way of defining the landscape. It reminds me a little bit of Barcelona. When anybody tells you about what was done in Barcelona for the Olympics, they tell you about the art — that they used it to mark places around the city. This is in many ways an environmental project, but art is defining it. It brings everything together, and art becomes the thread. I also think the presentation is absolutely superb. I think this is innovation with a capital "I."

SMITH Of all the projects we've picked, this is the most holistic. You can actually see some of the traditional planning stances: working at a big scale, understanding soils

and circulation and precedents, and putting together a proposal to deal with it. It's really a traditional planning document, but because of its arts perspective, it is a different type of planning than we're used to.

MISS And it's building a role for artists in the development of an environment. I think artists can affect the way we look at our environment and respond to it. They aren't just commentators. This puts artists in a shaping role rather than a responding role.

GRATZ And it really reconnects the disciplines — instead of the art is here, the planners are there, and here are the architects — and at some point someone will put it all together badly.

TIMBERLAKE It premiates collective intelligence. I also think one of its great strengths is that it doesn't end with the analysis. The analysis supports the next step in the process. That to me is a great strength of a planning project. A lot of them just end with "here's the analysis." Here is a conclusion.

NASAR But it does bring the analysis to bear on this special sector — this special planning question of how are you going to deal with art in a region? They bring all the analysis to bear on it, and that is good planning.

GASTIL I think what made me excited about it was the way comprehensive planning has turned to art. Even in good projects, people normally just say "let's do art along the highway." But even those people only think about it in a linear way. They never think about it through an entire watershed or an entire county system of roads and development. So you have to applaud the county that's spending money on this type of initiative. You are celebrating not just the people who ran the planning study but also the government that backed this.

Notes

1. See William R. Morrish, Catherine Brown and Grover Mouton, "Western Civic Art: Works in Progress," *Places*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Fall 1988); and various authors, "Place Debate: The Phoenix Public Art Master Plan," *Places*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Summer 1996), pp. 52-63.
2. Donald Canty, "Waterworks Garden," *Places*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Fall 1998), pp. 16-19.
3. "Cultural Landscape Goitzsche: Bitterfeld, Germany," "New•Land•Marks: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania," and "Constructing Memory: Rosie the Riveter Memorial, Richmond, California," *Places*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Fall 2002), pp. 14-17, 18-21, 34-37.

Project Credits

Lorna Jordan Studio (Lorna Jordan, artist and project lead;
Karen Janosky, Fred Young)
Becca Hanson, Landscape Architecture/Planning/Facilitation
Steve Badanes/Jersey Devil, Landscape Architecture/Planning/Facilitation
Wendy Brawer, Green Mapping
PBS&J (Dale Siska, Erin Degutis, Patrick Siler), Engineering/Permitting
Steve Moddemeyer, Sustainable/Community Design
Steve Gatewood, Environmental Science
Aron Temkin, Artist
Kovacevich Design (Joseph Newland, Olga Owens), Graphic Design
and Editing