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Marion Weiss and Michael Manfredi: Vision Statement for the Olympic Sculpture Park

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At the site of Seattle's largest and last remaining waterfront property, the Seattle Art Museum's Olympic Sculpture Park transforms a nine-acre former industrial site into a vibrant new venue for contemporary sculpture. Formerly a fuel storage and transfer station, the site fell 40 feet from the city to the water and was divided by highway and train lines into three separate parcels. With such a complex site, traditional distinctions between art and nature, design and ecology were no longer relevant. At the Olympic Sculpture Park, art, architecture, landscape architecture, infrastructure and ecology are reciprocal conditions embedded within the trajectory of our design. Our ambition was to exploit the friction of combining these disciplines to foster new insights and perceptions.

As a cultural endeavor, this sculpture park circumvents the typical relationship of art inside the museum and offers a radical alternative: art and design as part of the public realm. We wondered what transformation would capitalize on the urban infrastructure that divided the site. How could this park generate new relationships between the city and Puget Sound? How might this project illuminate the immeasurable power of art and landscape together? The genesis of our design originated with these questions.

Our design, an invented ground plane that wanders from the city to the water's edge, is sculpted to rise over the existing infrastructure. This new uninterrupted Z-shaped landform for sculpture links the three separate parcels and offers multiple settings to view both city and sound. Central to this landform is a 2,500-foot path that leads visitors from the luminous steel-and-glass PACCAR Pavilion for art, performances and educational programming, through a series of outdoor sculpture "galleries." The path links four emblematic landscapes: the *East and North Meadows*, with native grasses and wildflowers; the *Valley*, an archetypal evergreen landscape of the Northwest; the *Grove*, with deciduous trees adaptable to the urban environment; and the *Shore*, a waterfront setting shaped by wind and saltwater, and including aquatic terraces that form a regenerative underwater landscape for fish and wildlife. As one traverses this path, views are directed north toward the sea and mountains and then shift south toward the city and port. Throughout the park, seemingly parallel lines converge, accentuating the laws of perspective to suggest infinite distances.

Our fundamental aspiration was to create a sculpture park at the intersection of the city and the sound, defining a new model for bringing art to the public and the public to the park. Our intent was to establish connections where separations existed, inventing a setting that brings art, city and sound together - implicitly questioning where the art begins and where it ends.

Awards: Winner, International Competition, Progressive Architecture Citation

Exhibitions: Museum of Modern Art, New York; Van Alen Institute, New York; Seattle Art Museum; University of Pennsylvania; Harvard University; Essen Design Center, Germany