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Photo courtesy of Francisca Sumar

**AIANY'S 2014 PRESIDENTIAL EXHIBITION TO FOCUS ON PUBLIC SPACE,
SHOW 22 GREAT CIVIC PLACES IN NYC, CHICAGO, HOUSTON, AND
LOS ANGELES – OPEN TO THE PUBLIC: CIVIC SPACE NOW
JUNE 12 – SEPTEMBER 6, 2014**

From Times Square to Tongva and Ken Genser Square in Los Angeles, a major show at the Center for Architecture asks: Why are we so aware of public space now?

New York City, June 6, 2014 – This summer, the American Institute of Architects New York Chapter (AIANY) and the Center for Architecture Foundation will present [Open to the Public: Civic Space Now](#), an exhibition exploring why people gravitate to (or avoid) civic spaces – the places between buildings where people can assemble. Curated by **Thomas Mellins** and designed by **Athletics**, the exhibition [opens](#) Thursday, June 12, 6:00 PM and runs through Saturday, September 6 at the Center for Architecture, 536 LaGuardia Place.

Open to the Public: Civic Space Now is related to AIANY 2014 **President Lance Jay Brown's, FAIA, DPACSA**, presidential theme "[Civic Spirit: Civic Vision](#)." Brown, Professor of Architecture and Urban Design at the City College of New York's Spitzer School of Architecture, is co-author of several books on the topic of urban public space, including the recently-published *Urban Design for an Urban Century: Shaping More Livable, Equitable, and Resilient Cities*. Authors Brown and **David Dixon, FAIA**, will be signing copies of the book at the exhibition opening for *Open to the Public*.

Open to the Public: Civic Space Now will be complemented by an international, day-long symposium on Saturday, May 14 that will also develop ideas from other concurrent exhibitions at the Center for Architecture. The program will close with a conversation between **Carl Weisbrod**, Chair, NYC Planning Commission, and **Mitchell Silver**, Commissioner, NYC Department of Parks and Recreation.



Why focus on urban design and civic spaces? Why now? According to Brown, “Public space has always been at the core of civil societies; however, as with all elements of a democracy, such components are fragile.” He explains that “Civic spaces can be neglected, commercialized, unsafe. But public squares can also become newsworthy places that support multiple forms of open and transparent activity, witness the Arab Spring. Or they can be usurped by repressive forces, as seen in other places around the world. *Open to the Public: Civic Space Now* will look at the way our plazas, squares, streets, and other civic spaces are created and used today – from play to protest, from formal to informal. Taken in total, the exhibition asks, ‘What is the future of public space?’, a topic well-worth exploring.”

"The Center for Architecture is pleased to focus attention on the public spaces between buildings, whether paved or green, where people come together" comments AIANY Executive Director **Rick Bell, FAIA**. "Civic space is an important topic for the Center to take on because these places are designed, intentional, and owned by us all."

Exhibition Features

Thomas Mellins, curator of the Center for Architecture’s 2012 exhibition *Edgeless School*, divided the exhibition’s 22 civic spaces into three intersecting themes: congregation, contemplation, and circulation. *Open to the Public* presents the work of contemporary designers including Snøhetta, WEISS/MANFREDI, and James Corner Field Operations, along with other almost unnoticed places where people gather.

According to Mellins, what will become apparent from the exhibition are the “inherent conflicts and contradictions” of public space. He points out, “Places that make chance encounters possible have become far more valued. Yet we want the element of perceived risk to be low, or at least well within our comfort zone.”

“It was important to include Zuccotti Park because it hit a nerve,” he comments. “The park suddenly emerged as a compelling public space because of how it was used. Its location in the Financial District and its largely open hardscape made it an effective place for protest. The verb ‘occupy’ suggested control, and who was in control – and why – immediately became a vigorously debated and widely publicized issue.”

Brooklyn-based Athletics designed the exhibition and its collateral materials. One of the show’s features is a 10-foot-high by 35-foot-long wrap-around mural of Times Square that AIANY commissioned from photographer **Francisca Sumar**. *Open to the Public* also presents models, street furniture, and an interactive social media component.

Civic Spaces Included

Projects in New York City are:

- In Manhattan: NYC bike lanes and Citi Bike system, Four Freedoms Park, National 9/11 Memorial, Times Square Reconstruction, and Zuccotti Park
- In Brooklyn: Brooklyn Bridge Park, McCarren Park Pool
- In the Bronx: New York Restoration Project Target Community Garden
- In Queens: Hunters Point South
- City-wide: DOT public plazas in all five boroughs

There are also other less formal spaces, including the new Broadway malls, the Grand Army Plaza Greenmarket, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art steps.

These New York public spaces are joined by three others, one from each of the nation's next largest cities: Tongva and Ken Genser Square in Los Angeles, the Nature Boardwalk at Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago, and Discovery Green in Houston.

“Open to the Public” Symposium

On Saturday, June 14, two days after the opening of *Open to the Public: Civic Space Now*, the Center for Architecture will host a day-long international [symposium](#) to discuss the multiple facets of public space. Christine Bräm, director of the Department of Public Space of the City of Zurich, will deliver the opening keynote. NYC Planning Commission Chair **Carl Weisbrod** and NYC Department of Parks and Recreation Commissioner **Mitchell Silver** will participate in a closing conversation. **Bernard Tschumi, FAIA**; **Michael Arad, AIA, LEED AP**, of Handel Architects; and **Marion Weiss, FAIA**, of WEISS/MANFREDI Architecture/Landscape/Urbanism will also speak at the symposium. The event is open to the public and will be live-streamed.

Four Related Shows

Civic space is also the subject of four concurrent exhibitions in the Center for Architecture's galleries:

- [Polis: 7 Lessons from the European Prize for Public Space \[2000-2012\]](#) on view through June 21
- [The Swiss Touch in Landscape Architecture](#) on view through July 19
- [Barcelona Glòries: Dialogues & Transformation](#) opening June 12 and on view through June 28
- [Queensway Connection: Elevating the Public Realm](#) opening July 17 and on view through November 1

Related Writings in *Oculus*

The [Spring 2014](#) issue of AIANY's quarterly print publication *Oculus* is related to the 2014 Presidential theme, “Civic Spirit: Civic Vision.” The magazine commissioned five essays, each comparing the public space of two cities. Four are by the architectural writers Sam Hall Kaplan, Jonathan Lerner, Bill Millard, and Michael Sorkin. The fifth piece is by the urban anthropologists Setha Low, Manissa Maharawal, and Dimitris Dalakoglou. Quotes from these essays punctuate the exhibition.

Available to the media:

An exhibition press kit is available upon request. Members of the press are invited to attend the exhibition opening and symposium. Interviews and tours with Lance Jay Brown, FAIA, AIANY 2014 President and exhibition curator Thomas Mellins are available.

Sponsors

Open to the Public: Civic Space Now is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.



This exhibition is made possible by the generous support of the following sponsors:

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List as of May 22, 2014

Athletics

About Athletics

Athletics is a design agency based in New York City. Founded in 2004, the studio has grown through a commitment to design innovation and an ability to work with organizations large and small to meet the challenges of design and contemporary brand-building. Athletics' work is focused on developing authentic and immersive products and experiences using the web, broadcast, print, and the environment in smart, interrelated ways. The Athletics team consists of practicing designers, technologists, writers, and thinkers with unique expertise in their respective fields. Staff work in modular project-based teams to leverage talent, skill sets, and resources that are tailored to the unique needs of each project brief. The company's core capabilities encompass branding, graphic design, web design and development, mobile, strategy, art direction, motion graphics and data visualization.



About the AIA New York Chapter

AIA New York is the oldest and largest chapter of the American Institute of Architects with over 5,000 architect, allied professional, student, and public members. AIANY is dedicated to three goals: design excellence, public outreach and professional development. www.aiany.org



About the Center for Architecture Foundation

The Center for Architecture Foundation promotes public awareness and a broader appreciation of the important role architecture and design play in daily life. The Foundation engages general public audiences in contemporary topics on the built environment to encourage design literacy. Programs include K-12 in-school collaborations, youth and family workshops, professional development, scholarships, and public exhibitions the Center for Architecture.



About the Center for Architecture

The Center for Architecture is a destination for all interested in the built environment. It is home to the American Institute of Architects New York Chapter and the Center for Architecture Foundation, vibrant nonprofit organizations that provide resources to both the public and building industry professionals. Through exhibitions, programs, and special events, the Center aims to improve the quality and sustainability of the built environment, foster exchange between the design, construction, and real estate communities, and encourage collaborations across the city and globe. For more information, please visit cfa.aiany.org.

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