



Kellogg Mall Park Icon by Cliff Garten with George Mason and Karyn Sproles.

KELLOGG MALL PARK Design Team Experiment by Karyn Sproles

When the city of Saint Paul decided to renovate Kellogg Mall Park, a dramatic space on top of a bluff along the Mississippi River, one of the major concerns first addressed by the city was how to use art in the space to stress the historic significance of the site and to emphasize its location as a boundary between the city and the river. Artist Cliff Garten was brought in near the beginning of the project, in late 1987, to work with the city's landscape architects in the Division of Parks and Recreation. This was a crucial hiring decision, not only because it evidenced the city's commitment to the arts, but also because of the timing and extent of the artist's involvement. Instead of placing art in the park, art was to be integrated into the planning of the park renovation from its conception through its realization (the projected date for completion of the park is August, 1989). Garten's role as artist has not been simply to create a piece of art for the park, but also to be a part of the design team.

Garten had worked on the issue of public art before entering the project and was aware of the conflicts and compromises such an undertaking would involve. Working with the Parks and Recreation Division was an opportunity for him to test his ideas about space and collaboration. The Parks and Recreation Division, on the other hand, had been instructed by the city to include an artist in the project. This shotgun marriage set up a relationship in which Garten felt he had to struggle to claim space for himself in the design process. He wanted to create a park that was itself sculptural and representative of the historical significance of the site. The division's agenda was simply to build a park.

Garten's first step was to find historical information about the site. He had begun research even before he was selected for the project, while serving on the Kellogg Mall Park Redesign Citizens' Advisory Committee established by the city. His research led him to emphasize several elements in the park design: the significance of the space as the symbolic founding site of Saint Paul (the location of the city's first chapel founded in 1841 by Father Lucien Gallier, who also changed the city's name from Pig's Eye to Saint Paul); the relationship of the site to the rest of the city as the only remaining sightline from the river to the Capitol building, down Cedar Street; and the relationship of the space to the river, and therefore as the edge of the city. Garten wanted to address these issues by creating a sculptural space instead of a monument.

In his original design for the project, the shape and grade of the park were emphasized by a trough in which water flowed down the entire length of the park's natural slope, paralleling the river below as a severe yet fluid boundary. The park would serve as a cultivated but open interface between nature and culture. Looking back at that proposal, landscape architect Tim Agness said that it was rejected not because it was impractical, but because the Parks department has a more traditional perspective on what elements can be used to arrange space that people have become comfortable with in the past.

One important modification was implemented in the park's design because of Garten's presence on the design team. In the original proposal winding, Olmsted-style paths curved through the long narrow mall. Garten felt that straight paths would create borders that focused attention on the park as the edge of the city and would duplicate the inherent geometry of the space. Although the

design team was unconvinced, a large committee (made up of city officials, citizens, and community art advocates) agreed that the artist's plan for the paths

was both ideologically and aesthetically preferable.

Another type of collaboration occurred between Garten and other artists that he invited to work with him. To mark the site's historical significance, he proposed sculptures for several areas of the park that would be commemorative as well as integral to the overall design. Rather than explain the significance of the place with a monument or history lesson, Garten's idea was to "pick important symbols that access history and let them be." His strategy was to create symbols accompanied by text that suggests their historical significance. With city approval, Garten invited artist George Mason to work with him on the design of iconographic reliefs that will be set into the walkways of the park, and he asked me to assist him in collecting additional historical information and in writing the text that will surround the reliefs and four granite sculptures to be set in the chapel site.

One of the three situations in which text is used is at the top and bottom of iconographic reliefs that will be set into the "History Walk." There are six images: oak leaves, a campfire, a trap, wheat, a steel bridge, and a dragonfly resting on a computer circuit. The images were chosen to evoke the experience of settling a wilderness. I wanted the text to imply a narrative in which the reader has a role

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and to have the resonance of poetry, while still remaining simple and unromantic. I designed a formula for the phrases in which each is a complete sentence beginning with "We" and including an active verb. The first line reads: "We entered a strange wilderness." Garten, Mason and I worked on the six lines of the poem together. It was a true collaboration; we each had veto power, and we shared common assumptions about the purpose of the text.

The final line, "We stop to remember the wilderness," most clearly illustrates the balance the entire project hoped to achieve. This image brings the narrative of settling a new land up to the present moment with a playful self-reflexivity that does not instruct the reader, even though it points out the significance of the place. We wanted this last image to clarify the connection between the settling of Saint Paul and the city as it is today. We hoped that the text would encourage the questioning of our accomplishments in settling the wilderness as well as celebrate them.

While we were working on the "History Walk" text George Mason said, "It stops being collaboration when you find yourself trying to do something the other people will like." Likewise, it stops being collaboration when you disregard what the other people will like. Garten believes that his collaboration with the design team has resulted in a better design for the park, and this is, I think, enough to justify any compromises made by an artist or by landscape architects. The final design is not one that either would have come up with alone, but all members of the design team express satisfaction with the outcome. As Tim Agness said, "We've covered a lot of history with just a few images and just a few words."