

Battery Park Plaza Design Unveiled

By MICHAEL BRENSON

New York Times; Dec 1, 1983

pg. C28

Battery Park Plaza Design Unveiled

By MICHAEL BRENSON

The design for Battery Park City's 3½-acre waterfront plaza, the public space of the \$1.5 billion World Financial Center in lower Manhattan, was unveiled yesterday at the Whitney Museum of American Art by the Battery Park City Fine Arts Committee.

The center will be the keystone of a 92-acre residential and commercial complex alongside the Hudson River, in the landfill between Battery Park and Chambers Street.

With the unveiling of the model yesterday, it was possible for the first

time to get a sense of the precise shapes and proportions of Battery Park City. The plaza will include seasonal parks, reflecting pools, a loggia, gardens and sculptures. There will be several levels, a variety of trees, stone steps resembling the seats of an amphitheater and a terrace 100 feet by 150 feet.

The design is the result of an unusual collaboration between the center's architect, Cesar Pelli; landscape architect, M. Paul Friedberg, and artists Siah Armajani and Scott Burton.

Last April, Mr. Armajani, known for his architectural sculpture and en-

vironments, and Mr. Burton, best known for his sculpture furniture, won an artists competition for the project organized by the committee. The four collaborators spoke at a ceremony attended by Battery Park City officials and members of the artistic community.

"We have co-designed the plan itself," Mr. Burton said. "That is the breakthrough. Normally artists are called in after an architectural project has been designed and given pre-designed spaces."

The plaza will cost an estimated \$13 million. About \$11 million will come from state-financed Battery Park

City funds that have been designated for utilities, streets and open spaces. About \$2 million will come from the Battery Park City fine arts program.

Construction of the plaza is expected to begin next autumn and be completed over two years. Construction of the commercial center's four skyscrapers, with six million square feet of office space, has already begun. The entire complex, which will include 14,000 units of housing, is expected to be completed in 1987. The developer is Olympia & York.

The committee also announced yesterday that the panel, chaired and selected by Victor W. Ganz, a prominent collector and trustee of the Whitney Museum, has commissioned five artists to prepare design proposals

for five other sites in the complex. The artists are Richard Artschwager, Nancy Graves, Patsy Norvell, Ned Smyth and Frank Stella. They will present their projects and budgets to the 12-member committee on Dec. 15.

"We wanted to redefine the traditional role of artist and architect in the design of public spaces," said Richard A. Kahan, chairman of the Battery Park City Authority. "We wanted artists to actually design space and not be assigned spaces in which to do pieces of art."

One basic design problem was how to provide a comfortable and varied space for the more than 100,000 people expected to circulate in the complex daily.

Part of what is intended to hold the design together is its proportions and

geometry. "Formally it is as complex as a Mondrian," Mr. Burton said.

The center was conceived as an extension of Manhattan. "Major east and west streets in lower Manhattan will continue through the landfilled city," Mr. Ganz said. "The lamp-posts, benches and shapes of many of the paving stones will be exactly what people are used to in New York City."

Mr. Burton said: "We hope to find fragments or wholes of 1930's epic sculpture. In the same way that the tops of the buildings are designed to echo skylines and the esplanade is designed to echo New York City parks, the sculptures — on totally contemporary bases and installations — will provide some continuity with old New York. We want to reconnect with what survives and what is familiar."