Pittsburgh Art in Parks

Sans façon /
Steve Gurysh
Sans façon is an award-winning art practice who work internationally on projects ranging from temporary installations in public space, large scale permanent artwork, to collaborating with design teams on major infrastructure projects or developing and implementing city-wide strategies involving artists in discourse with a city. The majority of our work tempts interaction with the surroundings and is developed in close collaboration with communities, corporations and individuals including city councils, scholars, architects, engineers and designers.

Steve Gurysh is an artist who works fluidly between sculpture, time-based media, and site-specific gestures to explore environmental systems, machinic behavior, and geological contexts. His research compresses expansive narratives into potent objects and experiences containing wild materialities and speculative relationships to time. His project-based works are often developed in collaboration and correspondence with scientists, engineers, other artists, and non-human participants.

We came together for the Art in Parks project because of our shared passion for the complex and overlapping layers of place, culture and nature and the expanding role of art and artists in engaging these issues. Collectively, we share a deep interest in the ways that public sculpture can not only serve as clues or hints for a public to engage with embedded histories, connecting people to hidden or forgotten layers, but it also has the potential to change how we look at and understand, and interact within a landscape.
Over the last 24 months communities in urban areas across the country have been made acutely aware of the importance of publicly accessible green spaces. Parks and public land are seeing some of their highest usage in modern times, according to the Trust for Public Land, and it is with deep interest and with a sense of responsibility that as artists we feel the renewed importance of working with these places.

Pittsburgh is incredibly unique in both the richness and abundance of its public parks – the combined area of the 5 parks selected for the AiP is well over twice the surface of New York’s Central Park. Beyond this sheer size and their footprint on the city, Pittsburgh parks reveal unique combinations of storied histories, ecologies and social fabrics. Many parks serve not just a single community, but vast networks of surrounding neighbourhoods. Contrary to the mythology of the Steel City, Pittsburgh is a deeply forested urban area where its post-industrial identity intermingles with its wild geographies, its dizzying inclines and riverbanks. In this sense, its parks not only embody the growth of an historic American city, but they speak to the future of urban spaces and the accelerated need to cultivate diverse ecologies and public lands within our country’s most densely populated communities.

Within this context, Riverview Park has a unique character that we have been discovering, exploring and trying to unearth with the help of subject matter experts and the community.

Timeline of Engagement and Research Process so far:

> Art in Park artists teams (8) session, 24th June 2021
> Site visit one, July 10th 2021
> Friends of Riverview Park introduction, 27th Sept 2021
> Site Visit two, Oct 11th – 12th
> Walking tours Nancy Schaefer, Riverview Park Ranger; Mark Masterson, Executive Director, Friends of Riverview Park.
> (Contracted Oct 12th 2021)
> Engage public event online (available on youtube) 4th Nov 2021
> Site Visit three, 18th – 21st November 2021
> Riverview Park Ranger meetings and site tour; writer/story teller (Mark Kramer) walking tour; Community Engagement Manager, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, site tour; Pittsburgh artist visits.
> Community meeting, 18th Dec 2021
> Online map story/history plotter, live 18th Dec 2021

After these community meetings, discussions on site with stakeholders, guided walks and site visits through the park, the complexity of the context is becoming more tangible.
Narrative

There is a tangible and persistent sense of disturbance, discontinuity, reverence and longing for a social fabric, an ecosystem, a personal connection and memory of a place that has either been lost, improperly healed, displaced or left to ruin.

But within that place of loss and grievance there is a space for contemplative, hopeful recalibration. There is a genuine sense that the park itself is cut wide open and its layered confluence of human consequences, mismanagement, spent resources, attempts at reinvestment, the failure to reach consensus or equilibrium, the amplified waveforms of the anthropocene, all collide into a pervasive sense that the park and its identity is eroding at an inescapable, irreversible, and alarming rate.

There’s too much to fix. What we can do as artists is recalibrate perspectives and perceptions to amplify, accelerate, mute, slow down, refocus, rearrange, reorder the timeline in which the place exists.

From this ongoing process of research and continued engagement, three overlapping and complementary fields are driving our project:

- **Ecological**
  Riverview Park is in an evolving ecosystem that has constantly been changing in relation to human’s interaction, from the First Nations and their relationship to this original landscape, then a farm, a park, it is currently shrinking due to invasive plant species, diseases, overpopulation of deer.
  Within this context, the park is cherished for its perception as a wild place where one can be within nature and access solitude within the city limits.

- **Social**
  The park also has complex overlapping uses and stories. It has a rich history of social interaction between communities and nature, it was once a place of urban horse riding, the former nature center was a thriving social place with nature classes taught at the Wissahickon Trail-Side Museum, the trails are still actively used for recreation (although many community members perceive the park as being underused by the wider Pittsburgh community), the park shelters carry the many traces of their use, as well as the ruins and their implied stories.

- **Perceptual**
  The steep terrain of the park along with the presence of the Allegheny Observatory creates opportunities to reorient our perspectives, shifting our understanding of the city, the surrounding landscape, but also training our gaze both skyward and inward, to deeply speculate, drawing pictures of the future and past.

**NEXT STEPS:**

> **Schematic development** (Jan/Feb)
  from what we’ve heard and research to date

> **Return visit** (Feb)
  Share schematic intent, location-specific research

> **Detail design** (Feb/March)
  Site preparation

> **Fabrication** (April / May)
  Install (May)
Narrative / Ecological

Devastating impact of Emerald Ash Borer beetle on native Ash trees

Deer overpopulation impacting understory and accelerating erosion

History of nature classes taught at the Wissahickon Trail-Side Museum

Invasive Norway Maples dominate 80% of tree canopy in Riverview Park
Narrative / Social

Traces of celebrations in the Valley Refuge Shelter

Community meal at the former visitor center

Community gatherings and the ruins of the Wissahickon Trail-Side Museum

Legacy of Moses Carper and the Chiyou (Children & Youth) Corral
“Within the broken hills, nooks, dells and secluded spots, the young can whisper in each other's ears and can draw pictures of the future without either paint or brush. (Laughter)” Riverview’s grand opening on July 4, 1894
Narrative / Precedents

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The following examples were part of artwork precedents shared with the community in our Dec 18\textsuperscript{th} workshop to discuss the possibilities of artworks combining and exploring the three overlapping and complementary fields that are driving our project.

Maya Lin, \textit{Fish Cleaning Table}, part of the Confluence Project, Columbia River.

Made out of a polished monolith of columnar basalt, this sculptural working table replaces an old fish cleaning station and celebrates the interdependence of the Chinook people and the Columbia River’s salmon.

James Turrell, \textit{Sky space} series

An apparently minimal building leaves a precise opening in its roof, revealing a diffusely shimmering section of the sky, aiming to challenge and change the viewer’s perception and experience of light, by converging sky and earth.

Jacqueline Donachie, \textit{South}

In response to the residency period of the artist in this studio complex in Bristol, UK, Jacqueline Donachie created a sculptural disk made of heated black concrete. The sculpture became a welcomed gathering point and social focus in this cold building where artists used to isolate in their heated studios.
THE "KNOWN" FOCUS POINTS
Narrative/
“Known” focus points

Chapel Shelter

Valley Refuge Shelter

Allegheny Observatory

Music performances near park entrance
THE “HIDDEN” FOCUS POINTS

- Clearing
- Former Nature Center
- Watson's Cabin
- Clearing
- Clearing
- Bear Pit
- Maintenance Facility
Narrative/
“Hidden” focus points

Maintenance Facility, soon to be decommissioned

Ruins of former nature center: the Wissahickon Trail-Side Museum

The Bear Pit, currently underutilized as storage

Clearing near Snyder’s Point
Dale Hodges Park

In 2010, The City of Calgary expropriated an abandoned gravel pit adjacent along the Bow River with the intention of restoring riparian and upland habitat. The site also presented an opportunity for major end-of-pipe stormwater quality improvements (1,775 hectares of stormwater drainage).

A collaborative design approach between City departments and the different consultants was fostered by Sans façon, positioning the artists as the conceptual lead for the design process from the outset, and bridging the two design intents, the ecological restoration of the landscape with water resource engineering requirements.

Instead of an imperceptible and visually disconnected treatment system, the journey of stormwater throughout the park and its creation of different habitats are made apparent. The different stages of the active treatment train are designed as distinct environments defined by their specific treatment functions, and the transitions between the stages highlighted. All at once the stormwater is creating habitat, being cleaned, and expressing the processes at work. The park expands the possibilities of connection and appreciation of the complexities of watershed management.

In collaboration with O2 Planning+Design, Source2Source and AECOM.

Location: Calgary
Completion date: 2019
Commissioning Agency: City of Calgary
Budget: $26,000,000 CAD
Media: Soft Landscaping, Hard Landscaping
Dimensions: 1km by 1/2km (124 Acres)
Project Partners: City of Calgary: Water Resources, Parks, Public Art; O2 Planning and Design, Source2Source; AECOM
- Emerald Foundation 2020, Shared Footprints Award
- Mayor’s Urban Design Award 2013, Conceptual/Theoretical Urban Design Projects Honourable mention
- Canadian Society of Landscape Architects / AAPC, 2015, National Merit
Emerald Documentary series: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=durkzMUZbzQ
Previous work

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Dale Hodges Park
The Drift

The Drift is a platform that explores bodies of water as a context, site, and material for temporary art in public space. Since 2012, The Drift has worked with visiting artists and collaborative teams offering project-based commissions and residencies in relation to the confluence of the Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio rivers in Pittsburgh, PA. Their projects interface with the public through a series of curated programs including lectures, tours, publications and events. This particular image depicts an architectural scale projection series called H3O which took place beneath the Veteran's Bridge along the north shore of the Allegheny River, featuring a curated presentation of video projections, live performances, and interactive VR installations by over 30 local and international artists.

More info here: [http://www.the-drift.org/h-3-o](http://www.the-drift.org/h-3-o)
Previous work

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The Drift

Steve Gurysh
The simple intervention replaces two streetlights with theatre spotlights and instantly transforms the street into a stage and passers-by into performers, somewhere between spectacle and surveillance. This intentionally subtle alteration to street lighting suggests on one hand the latent potential of public realm as places of interaction and celebration and on the other hand offers an alternative approach to city’s lighting as more than securitarian.

To date over 10,000 people have performed in the Limelight.

*Limelight: Saturday night* was originally chosen to form part of a series of works commissioned to mark the launch of ARTISPHERE, a new visual and performing arts centre in Arlington Virginia, USA.

**Location:** London (UK), Glasgow (UK), Gaborone (Botswana), Miami (USA), Toronto (Canada), Frankfurt am Main (Germany), Arlington (USA), Kansas City (USA), Hamm (Germany), Vancouver (Canada), Calgary (Canada), Barrie (Canada), Lawrence (USA); Manchester (UK), Newcastle (UK), Inverness (UK).

**Completion date:** 2010-2017

**Commissioning Agencies:** Initially developed for Radiance, Glasgow Light Festival; ARTISPHERE; Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea; Newcastle City Council; SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT; Scotia Nuit Blanche; City of Miami Beach; Glasgow City Council; City of Calgary; eldorado architects; Emily Carr University of Art + Design; Calgary Nuit Blanche; Urbane Künste Ruhr; Inverness Old Town Art; University of Salford; Lawrence Arts Center; City of Barrie; British Council

**Budget:** $150,000 CAD (16 cities)

**Medium:** 2x Selecon Acclaim Axial lights

**Dimensions:** Variable

**Project Partners:** Variable
Previous work

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Limelight

sans façon