

Roosevelt Island – Island of Art

I would like to follow up on the comments I already shared with the community and Hudson-Related during the October 20 meeting organized by Matthew Katz and RIRA.

I have lived on Roosevelt Island for the past 20 years. I am an architect and designer as well as an artist by profession and, as the President of RIVAA (Roosevelt Island Visual Art Association), I run Gallery RIVAA with 27 fellow artists.

Hudson-Related's Presentation

Hudson-Related's presentation, with images for new storefronts and with an introduction by David Kramer, was interesting and received well by the community. This was the first public interaction with Islanders regarding a design so important for all of us living or working here. My hope is that there will be more meetings with the community, and more presentations. I invited David Kramer and his associates to put together a full-blown exhibition in Gallery RIVAA, with large-scale prints of images, sketches, and color and signage proposals. RIVAA will be delighted to help Hudson-Related arrange it. The Revitalized Main Street exposition can be a great tool to better inform and to engage residents and potential new store owners, as well as the future neighbors from the applied-science center that may occupy the Goldwater Hospital property.

This can be a good beginning, and an important step in the process of community involvement as retail spaces are renovated and allocated.

Planning Rules

The great figures in twentieth-century urban planning, such as Jane Jacobs, Lewis Mumford, and Rem Koolhaas, were united in endorsing fundamental planning rules.

Rule 1: The community members and the city officials must be engaged in the early stages of planning to accommodate their ideas and concerns. This process should be continued to the end. It provides opportunities for people to participate in decision-making that will impact their quality of life. It makes the final design better tailored to fit the community needs and expectations. Let me quote Jane Jacobs: "Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody."

Rule 2: The purpose of good urban and social planning is to preserve, recognize, and enhance what already exists, what works, and what is the best. Roosevelt Island is a unique place with a unique and diversified community, and requires a unique and carefully analyzed approach to any plans and programs, especially plans changing our Main Street. Main Street should be revived but, in this process, we should recognize what is unique and what already works from a social and architectural point of view, and make every effort to preserve it, and enhance it if possible, as well as from an economical point of view. Our community will have a competitive advantage if we can build upon indigenous assets.

Rule 3: Urban planners and developers must recognize art as an economic engine stimulating business and revenues.

immigrant family tom otterness



Tourists don't come to New York City because we have Bloomingdale's, Saks Fifth Avenue, and Lord & Taylor. They come because of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Lincoln Center, the Guggenheim Museum, theaters, and art galleries. Macy's and Madison Avenue shops make money because of art. *Where art exists, business is blooming and communities flourish.* The power of art and culture in building stronger communities has long been recognized.

RIVAA

The Roosevelt Island Visual Art Association

(RIVAA) is a non-profit organization composed of an internationally diverse group of artists. RIVAA is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life in the community through art, community events, and workshops. Supported by private donations and artist contributions, RIVAA opened the first gallery on Roosevelt Island in 2002.

Gallery RIVAA was a distant dream when several artists on Roosevelt Island came together to request a gallery space in one of the residential buildings. The space was granted by RIOC in 2001. Over the next

year, more artists became involved and, with hard work and dedication, the former pharmacy was converted into a beautiful gallery.

Over the past 10 years, Gallery RIVAA has showcased over 80 different exhibitions, including member and guest shows, and it has organized more than 100 free-of-charge community-oriented events like concerts, plays, movie screenings, poetry readings, book signings, etc.

We are working to establish Roosevelt Island as a major art center in New York, as a gateway between Manhattan, Queens, Long Island City's PS1, the Noguchi Museum, and Socrates Park. We aim to bring world-class art to Roosevelt Island and revitalize the economic environment through the arts.

Island of Art

Roosevelt Island is a unique place in many ways and dimensions. As a part of this, Gallery RIVAA is internationally recognized – a bright, colorful place that is the best-kept spot on today's Main Street. *It is something more than a gallery.* It is a cultural hub of the community. This is an artistic place fostering social capital and social cohesion that reverses alienation and isolation.

Tourists will not come here more frequently than now unless we make Roosevelt Island a **destination** with interesting spots to visit.

Four Freedoms Park, with the FDR Memorial designed by the famous Louis Kahn, will be open on the south tip of the Island next spring. This will certainly be a new destination point for visitors. If we can bring more outdoor art and sculptures to the Island, it can easily create a new image for Roosevelt Island as an arty island.

Tom Otterness created three bronze sculptures that were erected in the river many years ago off the northwest shore of our Island. We are already discussing the possibility of working together on a new sculpture here.

Imagine a beautiful bronze sculpture, *Immigrant Family*, by Tom Otterness, standing in our plaza.

Imagine a new monumental sculpture, *Oculus* by Victoria Thorson, at Octagon Park, and a few other sculptures at the lawn behind the subway station or at the Tram station, welcoming everybody to Roosevelt Island.

Imagine Motorgate with a new installation of the old Tram machine parts called *Spinning Wheels*, adding a splash of strong colors and new dynamism to this gray concrete space.

Imagine the murals painted every year during the Fall for Arts Festival on the walls of Motorgate as a yearly show called *Fall-to-Fall Art*.

We can do all of this and more if there is a vision and a will.

To create a better place to live, we need true active involvement and the leadership of the community's artists, architects, designers, musicians, singers, and actors, in a joint act of creation with planners, developers, and politicians.

We welcome David Kramer and his team, and applaud Hudson-Related for taking on a very difficult task to revive and invigorate Main Street.

Let's hope that, with new energy and with the support of the community, RIOC, and all organizations and institutions, Main Street will be done well and uniquely..

We should embrace the changes with an active stand to create the new vision worthy of the twenty-first century, continuing the legacy of great planners and architects by shaping our Island as unique – as the *Island of Art – Roosevelt Island*.

Tad Sudol — RIVAA

spinning wheels tad sudol



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