

March 19, 2009

INTO THE OPEN: POSITIONING PRACTICE AT THE NEW SCHOOL By Sarah Hromack

On View at the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center at Parsons The New School for Design through May 1st, 2008, Into the Open: Positioning Practice brings Stateside the work of all sixteen practitioners from the U.S. pavilion at the 11th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia (September 14 through November 23, 2008). As its title might suggest, the exhibition's curators, Aaron Levy, William Menking, and Andrew Sturm, posit their project as one that focuses on the "increasing interest in civic engagement in American architectural practice."

With a roster that includes the Center for Land Use Interpretation, the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP), Project Row Houses, Rebar, and the Edible Schoolyard/Yale Sustainable Food Project, Into the Open melds social consciousness with political activism in a project that was, ironically enough, commissioned by the U.S. State Department under George W. Bush's administration. Tongues planted firmly in cheek, Levy, Menking, and Sturm refer to their exhibition as "the first architectural endeavor of an Obama presidency." Like other projects conceived before the Obama administration - Jeremy Deller's It Is What It Is: Conversations About Iraq, on view through this weekend at the New Museum, proves another fitting example -- Into the Open represents a marked shift in the way politically-minded exhibitions now read.



By necessity, many of these initiatives were conceived as micro-interventions executed at the grassroots level in order to confront problems raised by a dearth of Federal funding. Obama's proverbial change is nigh, however: Recently approved by Congress, the new economic stimulus package has added an additional \$50 million to the National Endowment for the Arts' current \$145 million annual budget. The administration has also vowed to redevelop our national infrastructure while considering affordable housing issues, sustainable agricultural practices, and urban planning initiatives -- but a few of the concerns addressed in this exhibition. In light of this transitional moment in U.S. history, Into the Open: Positioning Practice captures what may be a pivotal moment in the work of sixteen individuals and collectives faced with the inevitability of change.

From the top: Spatial Information Design Lab / Laura Kurgan: Architecture and Justice: Million Dollar Blocks; Yale Sustainable Food Project: The Edible Schoolyard / Yale Sustainable Food Project



March 4, 2009

INTO THE OPEN, OPENING TONIGHT

By Eva

Not that Open! Ideological open, silly! For anyone who missed last year's Venice Biennial, all is not lost. Parsons the New School for Design's Sheila C. Johnson Design Center—recently revamped, to great [acclaim](#), by former [OpenOfficer](#) Lyn Rice—opens a repeat of the U.S. Pavilion's exhibition Into the Open: Positioning Practice here in New York (how's that for pulling a geographic!), tonight. The show features “sixteen architectural groups who actively engage communities, responding to social and environmental issues, including shifting demographics, changing geo-political boundaries, uneven economic development, and the explosion of urban migration.”

Highlights include Estudio Teddy Cruz's border fence project (we're still not sure how photographs of the sixty miles north and south of the US/Mexico border constitutes a “porous” architecture but we'll run with it, for now), Alice Waters' very necessary Edible Schoolyard, Deborah Gans' Roll Out House, and Official Edificial Top-Five-to-Seven Laura Kurgan's Spatial Information Design Lab's—surely you'll recognize it from the back left corner of Paola Antonelli's blockbuster 2008 [Design and the Elastic Mind](#) show—[work](#), which maps the relationship of the prison system to infrastructural investment (points for timeliness!).

Also, Design Corps, Studio 804, and the Rural ([Juror!](#)) Studio show up with their usual affordable housing for extremely low-income people, while Jonathan Kirschenfeld of the beloved [Floating Pool](#) gets still more props (and wall space.)

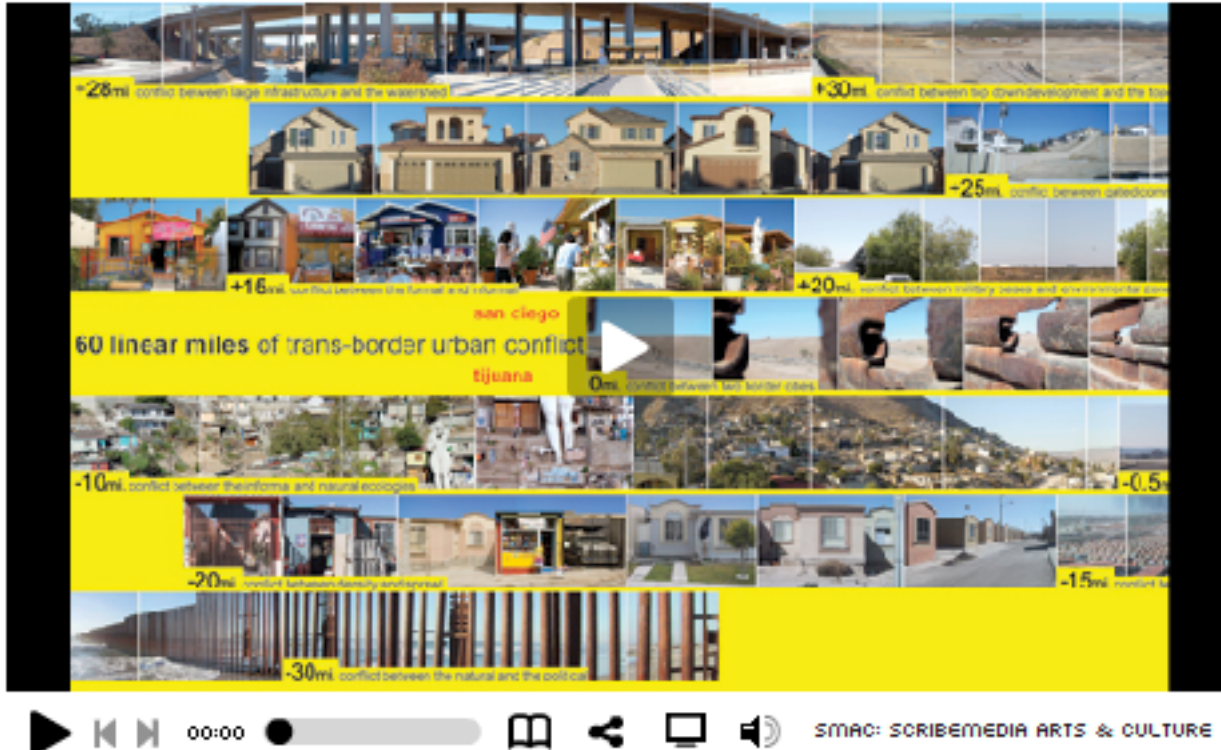
Into the Open was curated by Aaron Levy of the Slought Foundation, Andrew Sturm of the PARC Foundation (which he runs in collaboration with Estudio Teddy Cruz, which is first on all the lists, which we're just saying), and Architect's Newspaper-er William Menking. Party should be fun. Let's go! Sheila C. Johnson Design Center, 66 Fifth Avenue at 13th St. 6-8pm. We'll be there at six.

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April 16, 2009

THE ARCHITECTURE OF COLLABORATION

By Maren Miller



To view full video, visit <http://www.smac.us/2009/04/16/into-the-open/>

What is the role of the architect in contemporary society? As the gap between the very rich and the very poor cracks wider, so do the emerging poles of architectural practice. At one end is the cult of the celebrity designer; at the other, architecture as an act of collaboration, community organizing, and activism.

The 11th Venice Architectural Biennial, Out There: Architecture Beyond Building, makes it clear that most architects can agree on one thing: it doesn't have to include actually building anything.

Into the Open: Positioning Practice, which runs at the Parsons School of Design through May 1, exhibits the work of the American Pavilion from the Venice Biennial. This includes the work of 16 different groups or individuals: Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP), Teddy Cruz, international Center for Urban Ecology (iCUE), Laura Kurgan, Rebar, Project Row Houses, Rural Studio, Design Corps, Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI), Detroit Collaborative Design Center, Jonathan Kirschenfeld Associates, Gans Studio, Smith and Others, Heidelberg Project, Firebreak Project, Edible Schoolyard/Yale Sustainable Food Project, and Studio 804.

Each one of these projects represents a different approach to the problem of "the city." Some provide infrastructure and amenities to under-served communities, such as the Jonathan Kirschenfeld Associates' "floating pool" which docks in Brooklyn and hosts over 50,000 swimmers in the summer. Others, such as the Center for Urban Pedagogy and Center for Land Use

Interpretation position themselves as educational tools for the community. CUP's project, *The Subsidized Landscape*, diagrams the financial make-up of the New York landscape in terms of models and photomontage, which it then mobilizes as educational tools in its *Affordable Housing Workshops*.

The curators of the show William Menking, Aaron Levy, and Andrew Sturm are confronted with the difficult task of working with ideas rather than objects. Many of the projects in the show no longer exist; others do not have a built manifestation at all. The *Project Row Houses*, which addressed the mysterious conflagration of nearly 25 homes in the Northern Third Ward in Houston, TX shows two photographs, commanding in their simplicity: a house on fire, and a row of newly constructed homes. The walls and furniture of the gallery are painted dark-green, chalk is available at the front door, and visitors are encouraged to write on the walls. Walking by the display for the Design Corps' *Migrant Housing and Bath House*, one sees written on the wall: "Fascinating—But doesn't this perpetuate what is already an unfortunate situation?" Closely followed by: "STRAWBERRY FIELDS 4 EVER." The green paint on the walls makes the whole space feel rather dark, and ultimately comes off as a somewhat superficial nod to "interactivity."

However, the curators successfully raise the question: need the end product be a building? More importantly, they ask: need the end be a product?

In our video, we've highlighted the work of Teddy Cruz, Laura Kurgan, and Rural Studio. Cruz's project, *Radicalizing the Local: 60 Linear Miles of Transborder Urban Conflict* maps the collision between wealth and poverty, the formal and informal city and many other disparities apparent along the 60 miles north and south of the Mexican border at Tijuana and San Diego. Kurgan organizes city data on poverty, infrastructure, criminal activity and prison displacement to ask: what if more resources were spent on investment in housing and infrastructure rather than sending people to prison? Rural Studio's *Animal Shelter* is a project carried out by students earning their degrees by assisting the structural development of Hale County, Alabama.

Although the work at the Biennial didn't include actual structures, it did not necessarily question the need of the structure in terms of its context, socially or politically. Instead, the drawings, renderings, installations or models of individual architects or firms seemed to simply swap places with "the structure"; displacing the glorification of one object to another. *Into the Open: Positioning Practice* proposes truly new solutions and an expanded, exciting way of looking at architecture in America and elsewhere.

ARTICLE: Maren Miller

VIDEO: Alexandra Lerman, Michael Cervieri, Tami Meir, Maren Miller

MUSIC: Tad Piecka

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ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

April 15, 2009

A TIMELY REPRISE FOR U.S. BIENNALE EXHIBITION

By Tim McKeough



The official exhibition from the U.S. pavilion at the 2008 Venice Architecture Biennale has arrived in the States—and it's proving to be more relevant than ever. Although it was originally intended to serve as a showcase of American design for a foreign audience, this time the exhibition is being presented as an example, and even a call to arms, for those at home.

Into the Open: Positioning Practice opened at Parsons The New School for Design in New York on March 4 with new introductory text from the curators and a new exhibition design that reflects the change of context (chalkboards hanging on the walls, for instance, invite visitors to jot down their thoughts). When originally selecting projects for the exhibition

last year, curators William Menking, Aaron Levy, and Andrew Sturm eschewed sculptural new buildings in favor of concepts by designers who are engaging communities and attempting to address social problems. It was a serendipitous decision. Now, with a full-blown economic crisis under way and a slowdown in architectural activity, the exhibition appears surprisingly pertinent.

The 16 projects included in the exhibition range from a “floating” public pool built on a decommissioned barge by New York-based Jonathan Kirschenfeld Associates to a bandshell made from 65 automobile hoods, reclaimed wood, and 3,000 plastic water bottles by San Francisco-based collective Rebar. San Diego-based Estudio Teddy Cruz presents meditations on urban conflict on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, and New York-based Deborah Gans offers portable housing systems designed to respond to a humanitarian crisis. According to the organizers, the common thread running through all of the projects is that each designer saw a need, and then rallied people around it to begin developing a solution. “Here, you have private architects actually defining the problem, and then often finding the client,” says Menking.

The curators argue that this is a uniquely American phenomenon. While many public projects in Europe are sponsored by the government and awarded via competition, the projects in this exhibition begin at the grassroots level and pull together many different players from the public, private, and nonprofit realms. “The architects and designers are kind of forced into it by this peculiarly American privatization of public space and public support,” opines Menking. “We’re trying to show that American architecture is about more than just form. It’s about ideas, the response to crisis, and the response to contemporary social issues.”

The exhibition’s focus on social improvement and public benefit made it particularly interesting to Parsons. “It addresses, in a very direct way, the concerns that are at the core of the school,” says Laetitia Wolff, Parsons’ director of strategic alliances, who brought the exhibition to the school. In fact, Wolff says Parsons is introducing

more programs over the coming year that will emphasize research and activism. “There’s definitely this interest of looking at design and architecture through the lens of social responsibility, civic engagement, and a commitment to larger topics and global issues,” she says.

Citing the new economic reality and the new president in the White House, the curators say they believe that the present moment will lead to a new understanding of social space in the U.S. “I think a lot of that extravagant concern for form, at the expense of all else, by architects, is going to be put on the shelf, at least for the moment,” says Menking. “We’re going to see all kinds of different ways of thinking about how architects can remain engaged.” By providing examples of alternative practices through Into the Open, they’re hoping the exhibition begins to facilitate that discussion.

The exhibition runs through May 1 at the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center, 66 Fifth Avenue in New York. The school also is hosting a series of related public programs, including a conference on April 24. More information is available on the [center’s Web site](#).

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March 12, 2009

INTO THE OPEN: POSITIONING PRACTICE AT PARSONS THE NEW SCHOOL FOR DESIGN



Studio 804 designed an arts center for a rebuilding project Greensburg, Kansas, a town flattened by a tornado in 2008.

curtain-sized graphic about the U.S.-Mexican border by Estudio Teddy Cruz of San Diego to built structures like a floating pool made out of a decommissioned barge by Jonathan Kirschenfeld Associates and a bandshell made from post-consumer waste by the San Francisco studio Rebar.

How's architecture holding up in the recession? Great, actually. Sure, some starchitect monuments may be stalling, but underneath the glitz and glam that has characterized the industry for so long, there's a revolution taking place. In America, small studios and collectives are experimenting with ground-up, community-oriented projects that see architecture as a force for change.

"Into the Open: Positioning Practice" gathers 16 of these projects at Parsons The New School for Design in New York, from now until May. The work runs from research projects like a



Estudio Teddy Cruz's 2008 research project on urban conflict around the U.S.-Mexico border hangs in the exhibition space. (copyright Matthew Sussman/The New School)

"Into the Open" premiered at the Venice Biennale architecture exhibition in September. There, it was more of an idea showcase—a report for the rest of the world on what was happening in America's architecture scene. At Parsons, the exhibit is a classroom. The walls are covered with chalkboard paint—Have an idea yourself? Scribble away—and the school is planning a series of design classes and charrettes with some of the architects. To understand how it all came together, I talked to Aaron Levy, who curated the show, and with Melina Shannon-DiPietro, director of the Yale Sustainable Food Project, whose work is one of the centerpieces: a garden-as-

classroom inside an exhibition-as-classroom.

Aaron Levy, the executive director of the Slought Foundation, curated the show with William Menking, founder of The Architect's Newspaper, and Andrew Sturm, director of architecture for the PARC Foundation.

GOOD: Participatory exhibitions are hard. You don't always get the visitor reaction you want—just flip through any guest book at a museum show. Were you worried about that?



The exhibition walls are chalkboards where students and visitors can add comments about the show. (copyright Matthew Sussman/The New School)

AARON LEVY: We had a discussion about how to take the press photos—should we do it before the walls were written on? It became clear that there is no “official” photo—it’s evolving over time. And because this is a design school, and we’re doing those charrettes, it’ll encourage an interaction you wouldn’t get with just anybody off the street. That helps us avoid the traditional failure of participatory exhibitions. The charrettes are a way to engage with someone in the field, and think with them. They allow intimacy beyond what just the exhibition can do.

G: Is there a connection between how the show was set up and organized, and how the architects in it operate?



Design Corps built low-cost bath-houses for migrant workers in Sampson County, North Carolina in 2003.

AL: The way we were organized and funded mimicked the groups. It was a collaborative approach—there were three different organizations involved, and we had to raise a lot of money from all different sources, public and private. And that’s the way many of these architects get support for their work. They don’t uphold the individual author idea. It’s more a choreography of collaboration.

G: Is there something about the work that’s uniquely American?

AL: They do add up to an entrepreneurial vision of architecture. We’ve been calling it intellectual entrepreneurialism. These architects are each marked by an



Rebar's 2008 Panhandle Bandshell in San Francisco is made out of post-consumer trash.

experimental disposition that leads them to initiate and undertake complex collaborations, and to unlock hidden resources in the private and public sectors. They do this in their own, typically American, do-it-yourself manner, by creating and sustaining novel institutional and organizational frameworks. And that dimension is unique, I think.

Melina Shannon-DiPietro is the director of the Yale Sustainable Food Project, which collaborated with Alice Water's Edible Schoolyard program to plant a garden of local produce in the exhibition space. Both organizations promote education and community-building through local gardening projects.

GOOD: You're not an architect. How does your project fit in with the rest of the work in show?



The Center for Land Use Interpretation researched the waste in Los Angeles from the curb to this giant landfill.

MELINA SHANNON-DIPIETRO: A garden is about simpler spaces, but spaces that create community and also spaces for beauty, so it's definitely an inspiration for architects. Urban agriculture changes the way we see the land. We're not talking about environmental stewardship in the abstract—we have a piece of land, we plant beans, we water it, we hike it. It's a direct connection. And if architects understand that, they can be environmental stewards in our country. Architects build for people, and people eat, and in cities, architecture can make room for that.

G: What do gardens do for a city or for a community?

MSD: It's not just that communities use gardens, gardens build communities. Everywhere we go, we find people working together in

gardens that got to know each other working in gardens. And gardens are of course about eating together, and sharing meals is an age-old way of building community.



Jonathan Kirschenfeld Associates' floating pool turned an old barge into a mobile public swimming pool in New York.

G: Aaron Levy said the work in the show is, at least in part, an American thing. What do you think?

MSD: Well, school gardens and victory gardens are an American phenomenon or an American tradition. In World War II, forty percent of produce was grown in victory gardens—there was a huge spirit of patriotism. But at the same time, the radicchio in our garden is from Italy, the okra is from the southern U.S., the beans some students brought back from Mexico. I don't know if I want to disagree with the curators, but gardens are universal.



The Yale Sustainable Food Project and Edible Schoolyards built a garden in the exhibition.

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March 4, 2009

INTO THE OPEN: POSITIONING PRACTICE

If you couldn't make it to Venice this past fall for the 2008 Architecture Biennale, you can thank the New School for bringing the amazing U.S. Pavilion back to our home turf. This morning, I had the opportunity to get a preview of the Into the Open: Positioning Practice Exhibition. Curated by William Menking, Aaron Levy and Andrew Sturm, Into the Open is a glimpse into the awe-inspiring world of architectural activism. From showcasing housing solutions for displaced populations to installations exploring the source of urban conflict, the exhibition illustrates how a new generation of architects is using the built environment to respond to social, political and environmental issues. Despite the fact that the exhibition was commissioned by the U.S. Department under George W. Bush and that it opened in Italy a few weeks before our historic election, the curators have labeled it as "the first architectural endeavor of the Obama presidency."

While there are differences between the Venice edition and the New York one (for example, The Edible Schoolyard/Yale Sustainable Food Project is made up of vegetation native to the Northeast while in Venice it contained plants typical of the Veneto Region and Estudio Teddy Cruz's Tijuana-San Diego border wall surrounds a proposed meeting room/screening room whereas in Venice the scrim stretched across the entire 89-foot facade and courtyard of the U.S Pavilion), the effect is no less compelling and thought-provoking.

The NYC exhibition has been designed to be bold, immersive and interactive. It is a multi-layered installation with chalk-board painted walls (creating an open forum for feedback by visitors and students), large stenciled texts (a typography made using spray painted Cool Wool), informally arranged images, multiple digital projections, text banners and display furniture.

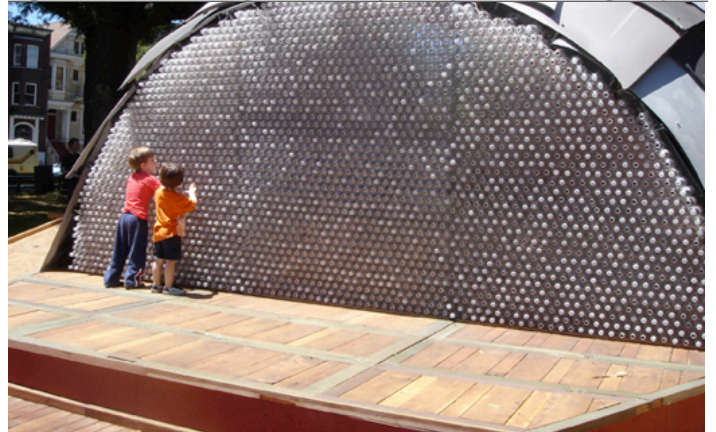
Into the Open officially opens tonight at the Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Gallery at the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center and will run through May 1.



60 Linear Mile Section, San Diego/Tijuana, 2008



Migrant Farmworker Housing, Adams County, Pennsylvania, 2003 Design Corps



Panhandle Bandshell Flyout, San Francisco, California, 2008 Rebar

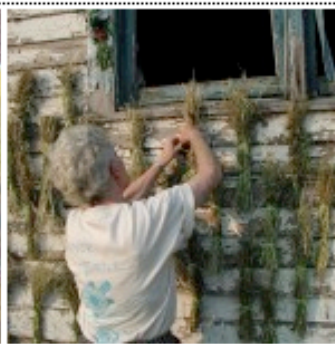
March 10, 2009

INTO THE OPEN, OR WE'RE MOVING TO CLEVELAND!

Want to feel good about architecture again? Forget the glam-palace condos blocking your view. Forget the brilliant but over-budget towers stunted by “the economy.” Forget everything you think architecture is and can be, and go see *Into the Open: Positioning Practice*, up now at Parsons. Go. Now.



Why? In one room, there are sixteen ways architecture can change the world. There's the requisite affordable housing, of course, but also a community garden project, a map of Brooklyn based on incarceration statistics (which you may remember as that “woah, is that for real?” piece in the far-back corner of *Design and the Elastic Mind*), a barge-based swimming pool, a tour of LA landfills, and concert stage made out of water bottles.



Plus, the gallery walls are chalkboards so you can add your own ideas. Here's ours: Toby Barlow's op-ed from the *Sunday Times*. A brilliant counter-point to the depress-fest that made the cover of the

Magazine. All those abandoned houses in Cleveland? In Baltimore? In Detroit? Calling all artists! Move in, pay nothing for rent, and make great art. Take over a dead city and make it shine again.

We're eyeing Cleveland. Get some friends, plop down a few hundred on a house, fix it up, build some sculptures in the yard, a big garden out back, a dancefloor in the basement, and get cookin'. The river's cleaned up (mostly), the lake's beautiful, and the corned beef is de-lish. Cleveland's calling! Who's with us?



March 4, 2009

PARSONS BRINGS VENICE BIENNALE TO NEW YORK



Just in case you weren't among the 129,323 people who made it to Venice last fall to visit the 11th Architecture Biennale, directed by Aaron Betsky and organised by La Biennale di Venezia, Parsons The New School for Design has brought part of it home. Opening today at the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center is "Into the Open: Positioning Practice," the official U.S. pavilion at the Architecture Biennale. And it's not your grandfather's architecture: curators William Menking, Aaron Levy, and Andrew Sturm focused the exhibition on the increasing interest in civic engagement in American architectural practice.

On view through May 1, the exhibition examines how a new generation of architects is reclaiming a role in shaping community and the built environment. Translation: an in-depth look at the work of 16 architectural groups-cum-intellectual entrepreneurs, from the Alice Waters-helmed Edible Schoolyard to Detroit's Heidelberg Project, which combats urban blight with outdoor art.

Come for the content, stay for the exhibit design! Exhibition and graphic designers Ken Saylor of Saylor + Sirola and Prem Krishnamurthy of Project Projects designed the exhibition's stateside incarnation as a multi-layered installation of chalkboard painted walls (chalk-scrawled feedback is encouraged), large stenciled texts, informally-arranged images, multiple digital projections, text banners, and display furniture.

After snatching a Hakurai turnip or two from the exhibition's Yale Sustainable Food Project demo garden, impress your friends by pointing out that striking display typeface: it's the sampler-ready CoolWool, inspired by clothing labels and care instructions.

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March 9, 2009

LITTLE SLICE OF HEAVEN...

By AnnMarie Marano

Thanks to 14 students at **Parsons The New School for Design**, the future tenants of the Louis Nine House in the Bronx, N.Y. will be treated to their own private oasis in the form of their rooftop.



The New York Neighborhood Coalition for Shelter (NCS), a non-profit organization committed to ending homelessness by providing housing and support, will occupy the 46-unit Louis Nine house with young adults between the ages of 18-26, all now aging out of foster care. The project should be at full capacity by early April.

Not only will tenants finally have a place to call their own, but a "green" roof that will serve as an area to hang-out, cool-off and most importantly, learn a thing or two. According to student Victoria Cuddy, the roof incorporates a fully functioning vegetable garden, a kitchen to prepare them in, as well as a composting

program, giving tenants a glimpse into their complete life cycle.

During the Parsons students' upcoming spring break, they will also be installing photovoltaic roof panels, and a rainwater collection system that will feed the shade garden located toward the south end of the roof. Bench areas allow for relaxation, while a greenhouse provides the link between the vegetable garden and the kitchen.

The roof was the graduate architecture program's second year spring elective studio that included 11 architecture students, two lighting students and one senior undergrad. Students completed full scale mock-ups by the end of May. Not just clever but quick too, the group actually installed the project in three short weeks, as the building permit only came through August 11, 2008.

AZURE

DESIGN
ARCHITECTURE
ART

March 10, 2009

THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS

By Rachel Pulfer

An edible schoolyard. A roll-up shelter for the dispossessed. A community theatre built with car hoods, plastic water bottles and other post-consumer materials. These are just some of the thought-provoking projects on display at Into The Open: Positioning Practice, a fascinating new exhibition on at **Parsons The New School for Design's** Sheila C. Johnson Design Center in New York City. The show runs until May 1.



Essentially, Into The Open takes the U.S. Pavilion from the Venice Architecture Biennale and makes it available for a North American audience. For those not lucky enough to make it to Venice, the U.S. exhibit offered a sneak peek at current preoccupations among a new school of U.S. architects whose work exhibits an increasing interest in civic engagement: shaping community through the built environment.

The central exhibit as you walk into the space is Estudio Teddy Cruz's "border fence" – a seamless photograph of the border between San Diego and Tijuana, silkscreened onto a gauzy fabric. This exhibit originally covered the entirety of the U.S. Pavilion in Venice; last summer Azure published an interview with Cruz in which he explained more about the studio's work and the message the exhibit was attempting to get across. (You can check that out [here](#).)

Other practitioners on display include Rural Studio, a project started by Samuel Mockbee of Auburn University in Alabama, whose work repurposes local materials, recycled materials and junk to create innovative structures for poor communities in extreme need; Deborah Gans, a New York-based architect whose Roll-Out House attempts to provide a non-tent solution to the housing needs of those who have suddenly lost their homes, and Jonathan Kirschenfeld Associates, who supplied the models and images of a mobie swimming pool.

My personal favorite exhibit, however, is a series of three box gardens that represent the Edible Schoolyard, a project started by food guru Alice Waters at a middle school in San Francisco, CA. Young students plant and tend a garden and use its produce to prepare their lunches and snacks. Through the project students learn about the origins of the foods they consume, principles of ecology and a healthy respect for living systems. Working in cooperation with the Yale Sustainable Food Project, a Yale University-based non-profit that promotes sustainable food cultivation, both the U.S. Pavilion and Parsons the New School for Design developed a model garden based upon principles of the Edible Schoolyard, complete with instructions and signage made by these young California students.

Neat, inspiring stuff - especially for those who regard their design work as something more than simply shaping forms.