

Today's News - Wednesday, May 23, 2012

- A new report "explores the detrimental effects the constant use of the term 'icon'" in the UAE where "an 'icon greenwash' of sorts" is common practice.
- Hockenberry is most eloquent about the new icons in the Middle East and the "region's centuries-old struggle between its cultural identity and its utopian dreams...the harder question of why these facilities are being built has been ignored."
- The redevelopment of the Christina River waterfront in Wilmington, Delaware, has both cheerleaders and naysayers: "It's very easy for the same project to be viewed as both a terrific success and an appalling waste of money."
- Byles cheers Brunzema's IBA Hudson Valley project "to transform gravel pits to green growth in Upstate New York. America is desperate for just this type of urban innovation."
- Goodyear gathers all the snippets we've been following to try to unravel rather reports about plans by Chinese investors to build a 300-acre housing development in rural Michigan designed specifically for Chinese immigrants: they "may not have done their homework terribly well."
- An architect and a transportation planner make their cases for why Auckland should give a green light to a waterfront theater for the Auckland Theatre Company and a pedestrian/cyclist SkyPath on the city's "much loved but rather drab icon" of a harbor bridge that would go a long way towards making Auckland "the world's most livable city by 2040."
- Moore x 2: Olympic Park is "an urban effort of a scale and ambition that this country has not managed for a long time" that "shows good technique and fantastic delivery" - but perhaps all that effort (and money) should/could have been "applied more directly to places where people actually live."
- He cheers the Photographers' Gallery extension as "a fine work of post-crash architecture" with the "potential for joining the inner life of the galleries with the city around it."
- Rosenbaum's Round 2 re: the new Barnes (nowhere near as polite as her first go - see Monday's newsletter): Williams and Tsien "got the chance to design impressive, well-crafted facilities" (like eateries and a gift shop), but "the central task was one that would make many, if not most, contemporary architects cringe" - then there's the "handsome" - but hands-off - exterior.
- Q&A with Williams and Tsien re: the creative process and "the idea of service" (via Arch Digest, so very polite).
- Iovine makes the case for MoMA to add Williams and Tsien's American Folk Art Museum to its collection "if only to prove that contemporary architecture is not instantly disposable."
- Chan makes the case for why Johansen's "crumbling concrete theaters should be saved": to "accuse their hollowed concrete forms of inflicting urban blight is to uphold a very specific and unyielding vision of a healthy city," and to demolish them would "certainly take away something that is invaluable."
- In the new Wits Art Museum in Johannesburg, "composed of three buildings fused into one" (including an old Shell station), the "sculptural lines, voluptuous volumes and tranquil pockets of white emptiness are all the composition that the senses need."
- Foster + Partners teams with Adrien Gardere to win commission to design a new museum for Roman antiquities in Narbonne, France.
- Berg reports on the Trust for Public Land's new ParkScore ranking system that "will help show cities ways their parks systems can improve, and help residents to take more action to get parks where their needed."
- Call for entries: Floating Cinema 2013 "Extra-Ordinary" international two-stage competition.

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Are Architecture 'Icons' Overexposed? ..."Iconic' architecture on the decline in the UAE" report [by Devina Divecha] explores the detrimental effects the constant use of the term 'icon'...an 'icon greenwash' of sorts has occurred, where the value of icon status has become completely depleted. - DesignBuild Source (Australia)

Cities of the Imagination: The building boom in the Middle East – spearheaded in large part by Western design firms – is the latest chapter in that region's centuries-old struggle between its cultural identity and its utopian dreams...the harder question of why these facilities are being built has been ignored... By John Hockenberry -- Rem Koolhaas; Frank Gehry; Rick Bell; Nezar AlSayyad; Parsons Corporation; Skidmore, Owings & Merrill/SOM; WATG; Sandy Isenstadt; Walter Gropius; Frank Lloyd Wright; C. A. Doxiadis; Snøhetta/Buro Happold; James Carpenter Design Associates; nArchitects [images]- Metropolis Magazine

A triumph, a failure -- or both? Each stakeholder has a different way of assessing redevelopment: 25 years ago, a few pioneers moved their operations to the Christina River waterfront. Today, the Riverfront is home to restaurants, shops, museums, offices, apartments and town houses..."It's very easy for the same project to be viewed as both a terrific success and an appalling waste of money" -- Witold Rybczynski; Susan Henderson/PlaceMakers; Jonathan Justice- DelawareOnline

Comment> IBA Hudson Valley: Architect Meta Brunzema looks to transform gravel pits to green growth in Upstate New York: ...has borrowed a page from Germany's famed International Building Exhibition...which over the last century has leveraged design intelligence to tackle urgent social and urban challenges...America is desperate for just this type of urban innovation. By Jeff Byles -- IBA Emscher Park- The Architect's Newspaper

Will Chinese Investors Build a Chinese Town in Rural Michigan? Or perhaps the better question is, can they? ...reportedly want to build a 400-unit upscale housing development...designed specifically for Chinese immigrants...purchased 300 acres...about 20 miles from Ann Arbor...the investors may not have done their homework terribly well. By Sarah Goodyear- The Atlantic Cities

Op-Ed: Theatre offer shouldn't be wasted: [Today] Auckland Council makes decisions for its long-term plan that will affect two visionary projects: a new [Wynyard Quarter] waterfront theatre and a path and cycleway across the harbour bridge...The development of a waterfront theatre...is consistent with...long-term plans to make Auckland the world's most liveable city by 2040. By Gordon Moller/Moller Architects- New Zealand Herald

SkyPath chance to transform bridge: ...Auckland Harbour Bridge...our city's much loved but rather drab icon. We enjoy the spectacular view of the city as we drive over the top...Let's face it, it's not glamorous. But [it] can be reborn as a symbol of a vibrant modern city...SkyPath will enhance the way we interact with our harbour, help us to start seeing the opportunities for walking and cycling... By Bevan Woodward/AHB Pathway Trust- New Zealand Herald

Olympic Park: The Velodrome, the Copper Box, the Energy Centre: some fine buildings will grace London 2012. But tawdry compromise is never far away...: It's an urban effort of a scale and ambition that this country has not managed for a long time...it shows good technique and fantastic delivery...But could they not be applied more directly to places where people actually live... By Rowan Moore -- Hopkins Architects; Make architects; Nord; John McAslan; Anish Kapoor; Cecil Balmond; Zaha Hadid; Hargreaves Associates- Observer (UK)

Photographers' Gallery extension: O'Donnell + Tuomey have made a success of a physically and financially constrained project: ...a fine work of post-crash architecture...the best thing about this building is its potential for joining the inner life of the galleries with the city around it... By Rowan Moore- Observer (UK)

Bogus Barnes Foundation: Fake Galleries, Phony Populism: In taking the controversial assignment that put them at odds with some of their professional colleagues...Tod Williams and Billie Tsien got the chance to design impressive, well-crafted facilities...But the central task was one that would make many, if not most, contemporary architects cringe...No knockoff can function as an acceptable substitute for the authentic experience...By Lee Rosenbaum [images, video]- Huffington Post

Tod Williams and Billie Tsien: The husband-and-wife team behind the new Barnes Foundation building discusses the

creative process and why smart architects work in pairs: "[We] have been talking about the idea of service and how serving people really makes every project better"... "And serving has its own nobility. You can transcend the idea of service alone into something sublime." -- Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects - Architectural Digest

Editorial> MoMA, Develop Don't Destroy: Julie V. Iovine considers the fate of Tod Williams Billie Tsien's American Folk Art Museum: ...breathed warm, sensual life into a poorly understood and too easily dismissed architectural voice, Brutalism. Something has to be done to prevent the cannibalism of a small icon by an as yet to be built icon, if only to prove that contemporary architecture is not instantly disposable.- The Architect's Newspaper

Brutalizing Brutalism: Why John M. Johansen's Crumbling Concrete Theaters Should be Saved: ...Mummers Theater in Oklahoma City and the Morris A. Mechanic Theatre in Baltimore, are facing the wrecking ball...to accuse their hollowed concrete forms of inflicting urban blight is to uphold a very specific and unyielding vision of a healthy city...constructing new skyscrapers might add valuable square footage...but it will certainly take away something that is invaluable. By Kelly Chan -- Paul Rudolph- Artinfo

When the Wits Art Museum in Braamfontein opens its doors, both its concept and context will express its integral connection with Johannesburg: ...sculptural lines, voluptuous volumes and tranquil pockets of white emptiness are all the composition that the senses need...owes its quirky multilevelled structure and unconventional spaces to the fact that it's composed of three buildings fused into one – the old Shell garage... -- Nina Cohen; Fiona Garson; William Martinson [images]- The Property Magazine (South Africa)

A blast from the past: Foster + Partners to collaborate with Adrien Gardere on museum design in Narbonne, France: Musée de la Romanité [images]- World Architecture News (UK)

The Best City Parks Systems in America: A new ParkScore metric from the Trust for Public Land names San Francisco and Sacramento the nation's best...based on more than a year's worth of data...rankings will help show cities ways their parks systems can improve, and that the data will help residents to take more action to get parks where they're needed. By Nate Berg [links]- The Atlantic Cities

Call for entries: Floating Cinema 2013 "Extra-Ordinary": International two-stage competition to design a cinema-craft to launch in June 2013 on London's canals and waterways; pre-qualification questionnaire deadline: June 26- UP Projects / The Architecture Foundation

-- soma: "One Ocean" Thematic Pavilion EXPO 2012, Yeosu, South Korea
-- Mecanoo architecten: Kaap Skil Maritime and Beachcombers Museum, Texel, The Netherlands

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