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### HARLEM'S FIRST SKYSCRAPER

Harlem's first skyscraper, designed by Enrique Norten of TEN Arquitectos, is racing toward a January 2004 groundbreaking. Dubbed Harlem Park, the project's approval process has been expedited by the City Planning Department as part of its 125<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Initiative, a new program geared toward developing a planning framework for Harlem's primary thoroughfare.

The building site, at the corner of 125<sup>th</sup> Street and Park Avenue, is now home to a parking lot owned by the New York College of Podiatric Medicine. Pending a site rezoning to allow for commercial uses, the project will accommodate a mix of tenants, including a Marriott hotel, the Podiatric College, business offices, and retail outlets. Located in a neighborhood of mostly low- to medium-rise residential and commercial structures,

the 380-foot-tall building will be the tallest in Harlem when completed in late 2005.

The project's developer, Michael Caridi, selected Norten from a pool of five architects recommended by City Planning officials, attracted by what he describes as "his ability to think originally about Harlem's particular architectural condition." But Nellie Hester Bailey of the Harlem Tenants Council worries that the project will "open the floodgates of development," threatening to displace small businesses and low-income tenants.

Norten, who has offices in Mexico City and New York, insists that the building will be integrated with its environment, both culturally and economically. His design consists of a two-story street-level podium supporting a massive 14-story cube and a slender 30-story tower, all sheathed

in glass. Despite the apparent incongruity of the project's scale and materials to its context, the architect was inspired by Harlem's lively street culture to enclose the ground floor in sliding glass panels, aimed at creating an environment more akin to a marketplace than a mall. Moreover, according to Caridi, the hotel, conference center, and banquet hall will be the only such facilities in Harlem, allowing local companies to congregate on their home turf and increasing opportunities for tourism.

Caridi also estimates that the complex will create between 1,800 and 2,000 new jobs. However, community activists are skeptical about the quality of these jobs. Harlem is just the latest in the ongoing urban gentrification saga; the location might be different, but the issues are the same.

DEBORAH GROSSBERG

### KURT FORSTER NAMED CURATOR OF 2004 VENICE BIENNALE

Kurt Forster has been named curator of the 9<sup>th</sup> Venice Architecture Biennale. The Swiss-born critic and historian has been living in Italy since 2002, though for the past year has been teaching at the Bauhaus Universität in Weimar where he holds the Walter Gropius Professorship. His recent curatorial projects include an exhibition on Carlo Scarpa for the Palladio Center, held in Verona and Vicenza in 2000; and a retrospective on Herzog & de Meuron at the Canadian Center for Architecture in 2002, where he served **continued on page 4**

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#### HOLL DESIGN CITED AS POSSIBLE FACTOR IN MUSEUM'S FAILURE

### BELLEVUE BELLY UP

When the Bellevue Art Museum (BAM) moved into its new, \$23 million Steven Holl-designed facility in 2001, it was a watershed moment in the museum's history. Dramatically increasing programming opportunities—as well as operational costs—the building was heralded as a gem in the landscape of Bellevue, Washington, which had often been thought of as second citizen to adjacent cities Seattle and Tacoma. It came as a surprise then, when the museum announced in September that it would be shutting its doors temporarily, letting go all but three of its thirty staff members.

"The decision to close the museum was a preemptive strike," says Barbara Jirsa, a spokesperson for the museum. Cutbacks in funding—as well as the new realities of operating a facility three times as large as its former home, in a shopping center—forced the museum's board to realize that continuing to operate would put the museum in a serious deficit. "It took a lot of courage to own up to the fact that we weren't hitting our mark," says Jirsa.

Many critics cite the building's architecture as a factor in the museum's **continued on page 5**



LARA SWIMMER PHOTOGRAPHY / COURTESY BELLEVUE ART MUSEUM

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# THE BLOB LANDS IN EUROPE (AGAIN)

Since Asymptote's Hani Rashid and Lise-Anne Couture and Greg Lynn brought their students to churn out blobs on computer screens in their high-profile exhibition at the American Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in the summer of 2000, their work has begun to ooze into European museums and even into the real world, morphing into solid, built form.

A kind of U.S.-Dutch-Austrian blob axis has begun to jell. Currently the Netherlands Architecture Institute (NAI) in Rotterdam is exhibiting *The Asymptote Experience*. This is a big, slick, and ultimately, uni-dimensionally technophilic show. Asymptote is dead serious. Rashid and Couture write in the exhibition pamphlet that their work explores "technology's impact on society"

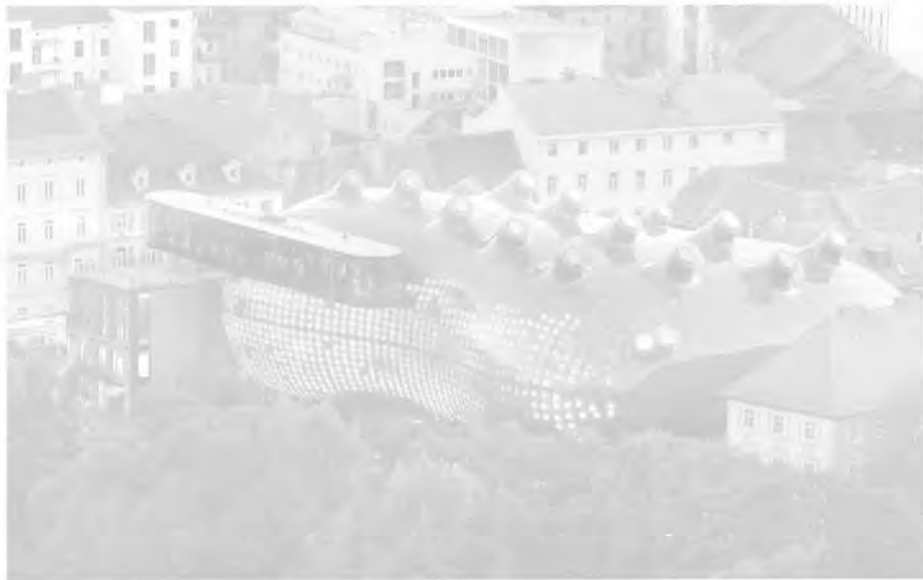
and "bridges modernity and art through virtual reality." Besides the fact that such statements sound a bit trite, they fail to explain the great formal diversity of the material on display. The work betrays a split personality. They seem unable to decide which camp they're in, deconstruction or blobism. Some of the beautifully crafted models and graphic work fall into the one category, and some in the other. The exhibition ultimately gives the impression of a career of eclectic formalism, which is only compounded when one looks at the rare actual building the architects have realized in their long professional life, the Hydrapiet in Haarlemeer (2002), which somehow doesn't match up to the rhetoric in the show. Peter Noever, the director of the Museum

of Applied Art (MAK), has, in a very different, playful spirit, given full vent to blobism's wildest dreams. In Spring 2003, he presented a gigantic, mind-blowing retrospective exhibition on Zaha Hadid, featuring as a centerpiece an 8-ton white plaster blob structure called *Ice Storm*. Now, he is featuring a small but ambitious exhibition, devoted to Greg Lynn, entitled *Intricate Surface*. This show draws on the tradition of the *Wunderkammer*, or Cabinet of Curiosity, a 17th-century tradition that brings together works of art and works of nature. It is the second architectural show in Vienna in the past six months that does so; the first, *Like a Bird*, is an exhibition I curated last spring at Kunsthistorisches Museum, which put the work of Santiago Calatrava alongside bird skeletons and taxidermy from the Naturhistorisches Museum. What is original is that Lynn's show brings live animals into the museum, juxtaposed with his project for a Visitor's Center in Costa Rica, the focus of the show.

The small darkened exhibition space contains an illuminated blue tank filled with live Moon Jelly jellyfish, another with blue Morpho butterflies, and yet another with miniature cobalt-blue tropical dendrobates frogs borrowed from the local zoo. These small, softly croaking, squirming creatures are exhibited side by side with a baroque Viennese silver coffee set and Lynn's own bulbous titanium coffee set for Alessi. From a morphological point of view, the Visitor's Center could just be a distant cousin of the baroque coffee set, with its body resembling hollowed out, hairy red testicles with giant housefly's wings.

Meanwhile, in nearby Graz, another charming architectural creature has taken shape. It's taken forty years or so, but Archigram has finally hatched out of its cocoon. Peter Cook's Kunsthalle was inaugurated in early October—just in time to remind us that once upon a time, way back in the ludic, experimental, pop 1960s, blobs were dismissed as wacky, visionary, and absolutely unbuildable. The metallic blue building resembles a beached whale with a serious case of chicken pox. You can't help loving it. It's here to remind us that architecture can still loop the loop. **LIANE LEFAIVRE**

**The Asymptote Experience.** NAI, Museumpark 25, Rotterdam. Through January 18  
**Intricate Surface.** MAK, Stubenring 1, Vienna. Through November 16



TOP: COURTESY KUNSTHALLE GRAZ / LNL GRAZ; LOWER LEFT: MAARTEN LAUPMAN / COURTESY NAI; LOWER RIGHT: COURTESY GREG LYNN FORM

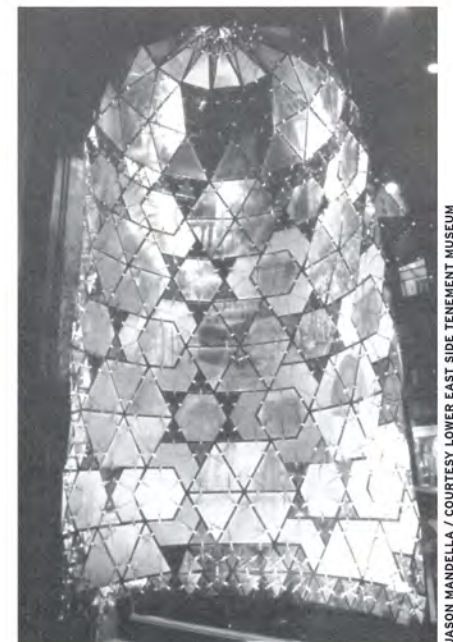
# SPIRITUAL STOREFRONT

The exhibition on view in the storefront windows of the Lower East Side Tenement House Museum is precisely the sort of thing one most appreciates when one simply happens on it while walking through the city. The museum's four large display windows were given over to three young architects, invited by the museum to conclude its year-long series exploring New York's immigrant communities, *Points of Entry*. Though the installation appears slight, it is hardly modest in intention. Goil Amornvivat, Can Tiryaki, and Tom Morbitzer, coworkers in Robert Stern's office, hope that it transports passers-by from Orchard Street to a more contemplative plane.

The architects—from Bangkok, Istanbul, and Columbus, Ohio, respectively—recall the hardships of immigrant tenement life by closing off three windows with a brick curtain. The fourth window features model of a *Mihrab*, or Muslim prayer niche, made of colored plastic panels knitted together with wrist ties (the kind used to handcuff people). In the sacred space of a mosque, these niches are meant to direct the body towards mecca. Here, its poetic recreation takes viewers away, if briefly, from its secular shopping street.

The exhibition, cosponsored by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, is well suited to the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, which has worked since its establishment ten years ago to convey the cultural diversity and difficulty of immigrant life. Like this storefront installation, the museum's programming and preserved tenement apartments strive to avoid sentimentalizing the immigrant experience. At a time when Islam is being demonized in American culture, this little exhibit is a thoughtful, poignant, public statement. **WILLIAM MENKING**

**Regarding the Mihrab.** Lower East Side Tenement Museum, 90 Orchard St., Manhattan. Through November 30



JASON MANDELLA / COURTESY LOWER EAST SIDE TENEMENT MUSEUM

# PSYCHO PLOT

Got a Palm Pilot and an itch to get interactive? *PDPal*, the latest of Creative Time's elusive urban art projects, encourages people to plot their personal "psychogeography" of Times Square on their PDAs. Here's how it works: Head over to one of two "beaming"

stations in Times Square, designed by architect Scott Paterson, and download the *PDPal* (Personal Digital Pal) software. The software provides a digital map of Times Square and an arsenal of tools (route plotter, cartoon icons, and descriptions)

with which users may notate their impressions and experiences of the mega-mediatized square. For example, at 43<sup>rd</sup> and Broadway, you might want to rubber-stamp it with Big Brother's eye, or at the WWF restaurant, you might choose the phrase "brutishly blasphemous." When you're done, you can upload your data and view your own and others' maps at [www.pdpal.com](http://www.pdpal.com). Cosponsor Panasonic donated

the 59" minute of every hour on the Panavision screen in the middle of the square. But the screen time is given over to a dopey *PDPal* ad rather than the maps created by participating "psychogeographers." Confusing and unsatisfying, it's no surprise that only 24 people have bothered to register for *PDPal* online. **DEBORAH GROSSBERG**

**PDPal: Write Your Own City.** Times Sq., [www.pdpal.com](http://www.pdpal.com). Through December 12