



Peter Forakis, *Gateway*, tubular steel, 180' X 90' X 90', 1967 (photo: courtesy of the High Museum of Art).

Reflections on the Tragedy of The Great Southwest Industrial Park Sculpture

JOHN HOWETT

The 3,000 acre Atlanta Gateway Park on Fulton Industrial Boulevard, two miles off U.S. Interstate 20, near Six Flags over Georgia, opened November 1, 1968, as the Great Southwest Industrial Park. At the time of the opening approximately 300 acres had been developed over a two year period of construction based on a design by Dallas landscape architect J.O. Lambert with buildings coordinated in color and materials by Josef Albers. Although few Atlantans seem to know or care, the Park included thirty pieces of contemporary sculpture, and there were plans to acquire 1,000 over a ten year period.

Even with the first thirty pieces installed for the opening, the Great Southwest Industrial Park was the largest public collection of monumental contemporary sculpture in the world. The names of the artists read like a *Who's Who* of the 1960's: Donald Judd, Sol Lewitt, Beverly Pepper, Kenneth Snelson, Peter Forakis, Forest Myers, Tal Streeter, Mon Levinson, Robert Murray, Lyman Kipp, Will Insley and on

on. A few local artists were purchased. Dorothy Berge had a piece in the original thirty.

The project of combining the Great Southwest Industrial Park with Six Flags over Georgia was the brainchild of the entrepreneur from Dallas, Angus Gilchrist Wynne, Jr.. Wynne chose the late Douglas MacAgy, Associate Director of the N.E.A. and former Director of the Dallas Museum for Contemporary Art, to select the sculpture for his industrial park. Gudmund Vigtel, Director of the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, was one of the consultants assisting MacAgy.

Wynne envisioned a 3,000 acre industrial park of looping boulevards embracing grassy knolls with coordinated buildings as background for contemporary sculpture. At the same time, he planned Six Flags Over Georgia (as he had in Texas) to bring crowds of people for entertainment who would also visit the sculpture park. It was a true vision of the sixties: private enterprise and art working together (while we destroyed the

enemy of this capitalist paradise in far away Viet Nam). Since President Reagan seems to have a similar nostalgic dream, what happened to the Great Southwest Industrial Park may be a timely lesson in the pitfalls of art dependent upon private enterprise (while we pour money into weapons to defend the dream).

By 1971, barely five years after the Park opened, it was taken over by MGIC Investment Corporation in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In the ten years since that company has been in charge of what is now called The Atlanta Gateway Park, it is obvious that only profits matter and that the vision of Angus Wynne was not transferred. The park has expanded to at least triple its size in 1968, but, in spite of the fact that the new owners use a more euphemistic name, dropping the word "industrial" and referring directly to the large sculpture by Peter Forakis, *Gateway*, 1967, both in their logo and title, they do not seem to care at all for the art nor the design of the park as it was originally conceived. Today trucks rumble through weed-grown, trash-strewn lots with empty pedestals and rusted hulks of once splendid works of art. The "park" has become a dead place, a cemetery of late sixties' Minimalism.

Perhaps the death of the park has been foreshadowed. The Atlanta Gateway Park is built on the site of a pre-Columbian Hopewell Indian settlement discovered at the turn of the century. Emory and Tulane both have

artifacts taken from this site which is now preserved in asphalt. Furthermore, near the center of the original 300 acre development earth digging machines had scooped around an old Protestant graveyard leveling the ground below but leaving the high hill where the dead are buried stranded and looking like an apple core chewed all around with the grave stones and a few trees occupying the stem end. It would seem that the historical function of the place is consistent with its current evolution into a contemporary cultural burial site.

Opening night in 1968 was, however, alive and the most elaborate and gala affair of its kind in Atlanta since *Gone With the Wind*. The people-mover trains from Six Flags were pressed into service at the park to take visitors from sculpture to sculpture between tents lavish with food and drink while search lights illuminated the festivities and swept the evening sky.

Peter Forakis' giant red triangular pipe piece had been commissioned to span the main entrance. Just inside on the grassy parkway was a Michael Steiner which is gone now. The MGIC people have sold some pieces and hauled some away to their homebase in Milwaukee. These, of course, have turned out to be the luckier ones since those that remain have been neglected and vandalized. An historian cannot help associating this with Lord Elgin looting the Parthenon and shipping pieces of it to London in 1802, while

the rest suffered neglect at the hands of the Turks who occupied Greece.

The Alexander Liberman, untitled, 1968, remains in place just to the right as you enter under the Forakis. It was not a very impressive piece when it was new—a series of upright steel poles painted pale green supporting one larger vertical beam, but now has peeling paint and rust amid weeds that nearly obliterate its eight foot height—the pilgrim visitor shudders at the poignancy of its neglect. So it is with all of the pieces. Some are gone, some rust and peel, some have been brutally damaged.

At the first intersection along the main parkway (which once looked like a parkway but now looks like a back alley) is an interesting piece by Isaac Witkin, *Skate*, 1967. It is horizontal on a long concrete base consisting of three white circles surrounded by blue fin-shaped pieces that seem to skim the surface. Today, of course, the piece is rusted and faded. To the left on the corner was where the Sol Lewitt, *A-7*, 1966, was placed. It is gone now, but was a square lattice-work grid composed, typically for Lewitt in this period, of smaller square modules. *A-7* was based on a grid of nine elements with the center square dominant.

On the opposite corner stood the Josef Albers piece, *Garden*, 1966, now a wreckage, which was composed of horizontal and vertical rectangles consisting of the materials and colors he had designed for the buildings in the park.

In the parkway just beyond the intersection stood the shining chrome reflective square column by Beverly Pepper, *Torre Pieno al Vuoto* (Tower of Emptiness), 1967. Only the bare pedestal stands today. Probably the Pepper was abducted to Milwaukee by MGIC.

Up the road on the left still stands one of the best Will Insley pieces I have ever seen. It has endured the MGIC/Gateway Park neglect and carelessness well. The untitled steel black cross base with a fifth element erect, done in 1968, stands on its base atop a mound of earth. Its blackness defies weather, its monumentality defies vandalism, its height defies the weeds—it perseveres triumphantly and nobly. Yet one hesitates to praise it too much for fear the barbarians in charge will lust for it.

Mon Levinson's untitled wall piece from 1968 has also endured. Perhaps

the owners of the building to which it is attached deserve some credit. The tricky kinetic illusionism of Levinson's Op art style is thoroughly dated now. Strange that such a decorative piece has survived.

Farther up the parkway around the first turn is where the Snelson was. *Wiggin's Fork*, 1967, was one of Kenneth Snelson's best pieces in a period when he was a serious and innovative artist. Five chrome poles—three short uprights with two long horizontals suspended by chrome cables—made it a poetic demonstration of tension in space. It sat for years on a flimsy wooden base and, of course, must have been part of the Milwaukee loot. The High Museum wanted this piece in particular but had been assured by MGIC that disposing of such an integral part of the park was not contemplated.

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—John Howett

Was this a lie or did they change their minds?

Now we read in the newspaper that the Atlanta Library is interested in Snelson, along with such greats as Portman's favorite, Charles Perry, and the politically acceptable, Richard Hunt, after rejecting three beautiful maquettes designed for them by the late Tony Smith. I doubt if any but a small fraction of the Library Board was even aware of the Great Southwest Industrial Park or saw the remarkable Snelson there.

At the second intersection there still stands a Nasso Daphnis, *Untitled*, 1968, and a David Hall, *Second Box*, 1965. The Hall is especially fine, or was, with its original pure white surface in the image of an open, flat carton. It had humor, grace and abstract strength. Now the paint is peeling in large sheets and the rusted surface has become, ironically, a place for Communist Party posters—talk about vandalism and neglect in an industrial park!

Originally a right turn at this intersection would have taken you to a Donald Judd wall piece, but it and other pieces were purchased by the Aronson Gallery. The High Museum

of Art purchased Tal Streeter's *Red*, 1973, from them. That Streeter can now be seen on the south side of the Arts Alliance. The museum also bought the red, hand-cranked George Rickey that stands beside the entrance next to his more elegant stainless steel kinetic piece.

Other pieces still standing up the parkway include an ugly black wooden piece, *New Dynasty*, 1964, by Toshio Odate; *For Liz*, 1966, by Anthony Magar, which looks similar to an early Charles Ginnever; an unlisted piece by Dwayne Hatchett; an early Robert Murray; and, standing in the middle of the parkway, a badly damaged piece by Peter Reginato, *Moon Eyes*, 1968, which looks like it has been hit by a truck and crudely repainted. Originally its simple trabeated portal shape with opposing triangular posts had a sing-

ing yellow color. It now sags and lists in a dingy paleness.

Turning left toward Fulton Industrial Boulevard again, along the back avenue of the original area of the park, near the corner lies the empty concrete base with the savagely twisted ends of an uprooted Forrest Myers, *Calipers*, 1968. This was once an important piece by this seminal artist of the 1960's with bright yellow corner pieces implying a large square volume of space between them. The wreckage suggests that the Myers was not abducted but worse probably vandalized and destroyed.

Farther down is *Kalamazoo*, 1966, the beautiful linear piece by Jack Kreuger, one of the most interesting artists of this period. The sculpture lies collapsed and rusting on its concrete platform. But, miraculously, a beautiful, monumental Peter Hutchinson piece, *Blue Triangle*, 1968, has survived. Probably its remote placement has saved it, if not from neglect, at least from the worse fate of vandalism. Finally, at the last intersection, Dorothy Berge's untitled Cor-ten steel piece of 1968 stands undaunted and also ignored. Her piece is the only one by a local artist in the

original installation and holds its own with all but a few truly exceptional pieces.

Out of the original thirty pieces (not counting those in storage) only fifteen remain and most of those are overgrown with weeds, rusting, peeling, wrecked and vandalized. MGIC and its local branch, the Atlanta Gateway Park, should certainly be held accountable for their shameful neglect, destruction and abduction of some of the best sculpture produced in this country and representative of an unique moment in the history of the relationship between art and business.

The citizens of Atlanta should be especially outraged, but that might seem hypocritical at this late date. How many artists or art patrons in Atlanta visited the Gateway Park over the last fifteen years? Last year the Atlanta Arts Festival paid a large sum of money to bring in a small packaged exhibition by the ConStruct group, all of whom work in the 1960's aesthetic, including a Snelson, while the Gateway sculptures languished forgotten.

Action must be taken immediately to save and restore the pieces that remain at Gateway Park. Pressure, nationally and regionally, must be brought to bear upon the barbarians who now own them. Legally, they may own Gateway Park, but ethically they must not be allowed to destroy that over which they have been given charge. They must be either shown that their industrial park can be enhanced by returning to Angus Wynne's vision or persuaded to relinquish the surviving pieces to Atlanta, the community for which they were originally meant.

Save the Atlanta Gateway Park sculpture survivors! Or at least go out to see them—and weep with the dead.

John Howett, Professor of Art History at Emory University, raises many provocative questions in his impassioned plea for the preservation and appreciation of these neglected sculptures. Art Papers will investigate the whereabouts, conditions and history of the Great Southwest Industrial Park's sculpture collection and present our findings in future issues.

Forrest Myers, *Calipers*, aluminum and steel, 16' X 16' X 16', 1968 (photo: courtesy of the High Museum of Art).

