

University of Rhode Island / Lippitt Hall

Public Art Selection Panel Meeting

1 – 4 pm Monday, October 22, 2007

Thompson Board Room, Ballentine Hall

Kingston, RI

MINUTES Re: Public Art for the renovated Lippitt Hall

Present:

Tom Frisbee-Fulton (agency panelist)

Bill Kite (architect panelist)

Jon Muggeridge (community member panelist)

Mary Beth Murphy (artist panelist)

Kristin Sollenberger (artist panelist)

Winnie Brownell (Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Rhode Island, not a panelist)

Mary Brennan (Office of Capital Planning, University of Rhode Island, not a panelist)

Paul dePace (Office of Capital Projects, University of Rhode Island, not a panelist)

Cristina DiChiera (Director, Individual Artists and Public Art Programs for RISCA, not a panelist)

Molly Sexton (1% for Public Art Project Administrator for RISCA, not a panelist)

BUDGET

It was determined in early negotiations between URI and RISCA that the budget would reflect 1% allocations from Lippitt Hall and from Independence Hall, but that public art would have greater visibility and the potential for greater impact if sited at Lippitt. The panel approved of this strategy. Because of this approach, the budget for public art acquisition for this project is \$65,000.

SUMMARY

Meeting commenced with introductions of the participants and the process. It was clarified that those who are not panelists do not carry decision making responsibilities in this process, but do bring experience and knowledge that are of value to the conversation and which are appreciated. Lippitt Hall is situated just east of Ballentine Hall where the group met, and is fully visible through the enormous windows of the Thompson Board Room. The style of the meeting was conversational. The architect made a thorough presentation of plans for the space with the aid of large drawings and reference to the structure visible through the window. Locations for and qualities of suitable artwork were identified, and the group adjourned after about two and a half hours.

ORIENTATION

Lippitt Hall, named after RI Governor Charles W. Lippitt, was built as a drill hall and armory in 1897. It was one of a half-dozen buildings built during the institution's first decade. The building is located on the northern boundary of the University's main quadrangle, a defining

feature of the earliest campus plans and layouts which has been credited to Frederick Law Olmsted's firm and dates to the 1890s.

In the past the building has been used as a gymnasium, as a dining hall, and for administrative purposes. After the rehabilitation it will house two floors of mathematics department offices and classrooms (floors 1 and 2) and two floors of honors department offices and classrooms (floors 3 and 4). This use is in keeping with the mandate of the university's Master Plan to concentrate academics around the historic Quadrangle, in essence putting the core activities of the institution – teaching and learning – at the heart of the campus. Completion is expected in 8/08.

Exterior restoration work will include repointing portions of the stone facade, new slate shingles, new wooden window sashes, and creation of a new handicapped accessible entrance to the building in a courtyard area to the left (west) of the existing entry. Beyond creating the new entrance, which is expected to become the primary entrance, no significant changes to the façade are planned. (The existing entry will remain intact, but is expected to be less frequently used.)

The historic stairway from the original entrance will remain, but traffic is expected to rely more heavily on a new stairwell being built in the northwest corner of the structure. Two banks of elevators will be located in the middle of each floor, in the buildings core. This will

create a passage from the front of the building through to the rear on the first and third floors, and will be two stories high (connecting the 1st and 2nd floor, and the 3rd and 4th floor). These are the vertical slit spaces discussed below.

The fourth floor has large roof trusses framing the span of the space. There were panel comments about the loftiness of the exposed trusses, and agreement that this is a nice reflection of the Honors Department ideals. Because of the exposed trusses, the 4th floor was described to the panel as most architecturally significant; it is, however, likely to be the least public. The Honors Dept., occupying that space, anticipates rotating exhibitions of 2d wall-mounted artwork in the classrooms / common spaces.

Primary finishing materials are gypsum board and paneling (employed as simple, clean, modern finishes) and linoleum, rubber and carpet flooring.

The building's sides and rear are service areas and parking areas.

Lippett is a relatively high traffic building. About 900 students enroll in Honors classes each year, although not all of them will be hosted in Lippett's classrooms. Every undergraduate takes math classes, and while some of those classes occur in other buildings, this is the center of mathematical teaching and learning, and 14,000 students will be on the first floor at least once per semester. In addition,

20,000 people attend commencement every year, which is held in the Quad. Art sited around the building's exterior would be highly visible to them, particularly something successful on the right hand exterior space detailed below.

DISCUSSION OF SITES

Three locations were identified for public art: (1) in the left-hand courtyard area outside, (2) in front of the right side of the building, and (3) in the two vertical two-storey slits created by the banks of elevators inside.

It was also agreed that artists be presented with the panel's interest in visually reconnecting the building to the quadrangle. Artists will be welcome to propose an alternate site if it is driven by that interest in reconnection. The panel could not imagine how this would be done, but was willing to leave it to artists to explore the idea.

1: Entrance courtyard

This is to the left of the building as it faces the Quad, or the west. In existing plans for the new courtyard, three trees are suggested, lighting, and slate paving that continues from the courtyard to the inside of the building. This handicapped accessible entrance will have no stairs and no ramp; the elevation allows direct access to the first floor. The Lippett courtyard will be adjacent (separated by a few yards of lawn) to the existing entrance courtyard for Ballentine Hall.

The panel felt a variety of materials or approaches could work in this space. Panelists expressed an interest in opportunities presented by this space for direct interaction with the artwork (by moving through or over it, for example).

2: Right side of exterior

On the right of the original entrance is another spot which the panel felt might be appropriate, and might balance the visual activity on the left hand side of the building. The right hand side has a stronger relationship to the Quad than the left, (1) because of the axis of walking paths across the Quad and (2) because Ballentine Hall is a large building and therefore visually 'claims' the relationship with Lippett rather than cede it to the Quadrangle. Because the rehabilitation will not alter the façade of the building, but simply restore it, some panelists felt that putting public art on the exterior right-hand side might make a real difference in the way the building 'reads.' Some panelists expressed that the building is a very strong visual element in and of itself, and that artwork could easily be overpowered against the backdrop of such a façade. Some expressed a concern that works set in this area would provide little or no imperative for direct interaction with the artwork, and run the risk of rendering it a sort of pedestrian 'drive-by art.' This discussion seemed to circulate around the question of whether public art is a thing to regard or a thing to experience in some other way. In spite of this variety of concerns, it was decided that the site would be offered

to artists (1) because it offers the best opportunity the panel could foresee to 're-connect' Lippett Hall to the Quadrangle in a definitive way, and (2) because it is high-visibility enough to point to the whole campus.

3: Vertical slits

These vertical slits are 8' wide, 20' long, and 2 floors high. On the upper floors of each slit the space will be visible through 8' wide glass walls. On the lower floor of each slit the space is an actual passageway. This provides opportunity for multiple perspectives on the artwork. Some panel members speculated that artwork might be replicated in the two spaces, perhaps with variations in order and refinement, say, reflecting the programming of the building's two zones. Other panelists cautioned against tying the programming of the space to the artwork, pointing out that the space has had very different uses over time and that such changes may well occur again in the future.

Plus: The idea of an effort to reconnect Lippitt to the Quad somehow was discussed as a fourth site. Should an artist conceive a project which focuses on reconnecting the building to the quadrangle, and which is sited in a location other than those identified by the panel, the panel will give it thorough consideration.

DISCUSSION OF QUALIFICATIONS

1: Connection to the Quadrangle / Keeping with the spirit of the University's Master Plan

The Quadrangle plays a significant role in the University's Master Plan, as ' the physical and psychological heart of the University, [reflecting] the University's core mission of educating the students of Rhode Island. An interest was expressed in artwork which might tie Lippitt into the Quad. The road, no longer active but still serving as a fire access route, currently behaves as a tourniquet. Landscape architecture which relates the building to the Quad was suggested. Some panelists expressed a hesitance to breach the Quad's own integrity. While it is not imperative to the panel that the artwork ultimately selected achieve this, there was agreement that artists be encouraged to explore it.

2: Heritage

Lippitt is undeniably a historic building. As both a keystone building and a significant architectural building, it was suggested that it presents a particularly good opportunity to reference – or comment upon – the ideas of history, heritage and tradition. It was suggested that the historic nature of the structure and it's location on the Quadrangle offered an opportunity to consider these themes in terms of (1) URI's beginning as a school with a land grant identity, and (2) universities as places which pass on knowledge, culture, and tools of

civil society from one generation to the next. Some panelists saw this as an opportunity to connect ideas of tradition and heritage to modern concerns.

3: Materials

Particularly in terms of proposals addressing exterior artwork on the right side of the building, there was much discussion of materials. Some panelists felt that traditional materials sympathetic to the stone of the building (eg, other stone, timber, etc.) would be preferable, and others felt contrast / non-traditional materials might yield interesting results. Panelists concurred that even as with the interior transformation of the historic place, new interventions can still honor the past. It was also determined that any exterior work should ideally provide a full 12-months of visibility (eg, not be obscured by winter weather).

4: Other: Activity, Interest, meeting a standard of Excellence

It was expressed that artworks incorporating motion could reference the building's original (and later) use as a center of athleticism. It was emphasized that artwork should be interesting, and reflect a standard of excellence that respects the caliber of intellect which resides in the University's community.

People were thanked for their attendance and commitment, and the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by Molly Sexton, December 2007