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Proposed Presidio Art Installations (Winter 2012/3)

ART PANEL REVIEW MEETING NOTES

Participants

Diane Frankel, The Museum Group (*see attached bio*)

Mary Zlot, Zlot Buell + Associates, Art Advisors (*see attached bio*)

Ian McDonald, Artist (*see attached bio*)

Michael Boland, Presidio Trust Chief Planning, Projects and Programs Officer

John Pelka, Presidio Trust NEPA Compliance Manager

Robert Thomson, Presidio Trust Deputy Federal Preservation Officer

Allison Stone, Presidio Trust Associate Director, Trails & Philanthropic Projects

Background: On Tuesday November 6, 2012 the Presidio Trust convened a review panel comprised of three outside art professionals and Trust staff to discuss and review two art works proposed for installation in the Presidio landscape. The review was conducted in accordance with the Trust's adopted *Art Policy* and *Art Collections Manual*. The feedback of the panel, which is summarized below, will be provided to the Presidio Trust Board of Directors along with relevant compliance (NEPA and NHPA) documentation and public input, as part of their decision-making process.

MEETING NOTES

The panel review began with brief introductions at Presidio Trust headquarters (103 Montgomery Street), followed by a site walk to both proposed locations and concluded with review and discussion of the art works, the Trust's *Art Collections Manual* provisions, and general questions and answers. A chronological presentation of meeting notes is presented below, followed by a summary of major conclusions from the panel.

Site Walk

Main Post Tunnel/Bluff (future)

The first stop of the group was the future location of the Main Post Tunnel/Bluff located at the northern edge of the Main Post District, north of Bldg. 211 and the Transit Center. Once the Presidio Parkway (Highway 101) Project is complete, the Tunnel/Bluff will create approximately 10 acres of new parkland in this location.

Michael Boland provided the group with a walking tour of the site, pointing out future changes, discussing the general character of the new parkland (trails, seating areas, expansive views of the Golden Gate, Bay and City skyline), etc. He explained that detailed designs for the area have not yet been

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completed and precise placement/incorporation of the sculpture, if accepted by the Trust, would need to be determined.

The group reviewed images of the Bernar Venet sculpture and Michael provided background as to the purpose and need for the work in this location – to serve as a focal point in the expansive new parkland, drawing visitors between Crissy Field and the Main Post. He noted that while detailed designs are not yet available for the Tunnel/Bluff, preliminary concepts consistently encourage the use of a central piece of art or other feature visible from the bottom of the bluff to create a focal point and a visual connection between the Bluff and Crissy Field.

One panel participant inquired as to whether there would be any site security or other protective measures needed to prevent people from attempting to climb the sculpture. The Trust's working assumption is that the public would be able to engage with the work.

This would be the first real abstract work in the Presidio – and the group questioned how the Trust will define and establish criteria to ensure that, if approved, the work doesn't set an unwelcome precedent that would dilute the place-based art focus of Trust collecting activities to date.

One participant suggested that since the artist is living, the Trust may want to consider consulting him on the placement of the piece – if the work is accepted by the Trust.

Others questioned how the design process for the Bluff/Tunnel and siting of artwork would be facilitated. They also inquired as to whether the Trust was interested in considering other works for this space.

Courtyard at the Chapel of Our Lady (45 Moraga Avenue)

Next, the group walked up through the Main Post to the Chapel of Our Lady. Michael provided historic context for the setting, explaining the early development of the post and importance of the El Presidio archaeological site (and its ongoing investigation and interpretation). He provided an overview of the story of Nikolai Petrovich Rezanov and Concepcion Arguello and summarized the project sponsor's stated intent of commemorating and interpreting the story, as well as locating the proposed statue near the site where their ill-fated romance was born. The group reviewed the rendering of the proposed statue.

There were questions about the statue and its placement the courtyard. Michael explained that the art work does not yet exist and that the sponsor has indicated a willingness to work with the Trust on the specific design and placement.

Panel Discussion

Following the site walk, the group convened a roundtable discussion of the works, the proposed locations, and the Trust's policy and procedures for acquiring art. Michael opened the discussion by providing context of the overall park setting (NHLD, national park site, urban setting, etc.) and the Trust's art review process.

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Rezanov & Arguello Statue

One participant indicated that it was difficult to assess the *art* as the art has not yet been commissioned. They stated there is no creative spirit behind the sculpture – the creativity is in the subject matter, which the panel agreed is engaging, but the art as currently proposed does not evoke a sense of creativity or engagement.

There was widespread agreement that the story behind the proposal has direct relevance to the history Presidio and is therefore compatible with the Trust's stated policies related to use of art in the park.

One participant noted that the Chapel site seems more confined than the Bluff given the underlying El Presidio archaeological site and the small space of the courtyard (and 9 foot proposed statue). They inquired as to whether there may be creative alternatives to achieve the intent of telling the story in this location.

Another noted the potential precedent setting nature of this work – given that it is an exceptional place, but there is no artist or exceptional art behind the proposal. One recommended that the Trust discuss with the sponsor the idea of soliciting input from a range of artists to develop creative responses to the content and intent of proposal. Another pointed out that there are other examples of current works that are intended to engage the senses and embody creativity while focusing on a specific topic. A recent work interpreting a specific theme is the 9-11 Memorial in New York. While not relevant in scale, the concept embodies how art can be used in a transformative and engaging way to tell a story.

There were questions as to whether this story may more appropriately be told using another form – perhaps an interpretative wayside or through performing arts.

Bernar Venet Sculpture

One participant provided contextual background for the park setting – noting that the Presidio is a national park site, but it is also in an urban setting and that in many ways it is somewhere between the two.

There was a fair bit of discussion related to the proposed setting (i.e., Tunnel/Bluff) – the fact that detailed designs have not been finalized and the importance of understanding this context when considering the proposal and placement of the proposed art. Questions included whether there will be landscaping or other features to frame the work or create “rooms” or otherwise break-up the landscape and create a space for the sculpture in which to reside. If no, the placement on a large green space would not be as interesting. There were questions about possible foundation and security requirements and whether or not the public would be allowed to freely access the work.

One participant recited that “framing views” has been discussed as important and wondered if it would be more approachable and logical to have the work located on the Main Parade. Another suggested that if the Trust accepts this work, that setting it back further from the Bay (and saltwater environment) may be better for conservation purposes.

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There were questions related to the timeliness in accepting a gift which cannot be installed until completion of the Tunnel/Bluff project. Would accepting now be premature vs. needing to know now so that it could be factored into ultimate designs for site.

Some participants inquired as to whether the Trust intended to develop a collection of abstract art and if there had been discussion of where such art might be placed in the landscape. Michael indicated that given the sensitivity of the Presidio landscape, there were only a few places in the Presidio where non-contextual abstract art might be compatible.

One participant noted it was a good piece, but also acknowledged that the proposed location is so dynamic – and questioned whether this is “the piece” that the Trust wants to present. There were questions as to whether the Trust would consider a competition to solicit ideas from a broad range of artists for the site. Would additional works be considered for the Tunnel/Bluff?

One panel participant underscored the prior discussion during the site walk related to the potential precedent should the Trust accept this work, encouraging the Trust to be diligent in setting up detailed acquisition criteria.

There was agreement that the work was from a world renowned artist and was considered to be “an example of its kind.” Another noted that it was a very generous potential gift.

CONCLUSIONS

Rezanov & Arguello Statue

The group agreed that the story/purpose and need behind the work is consistent with the Presidio’s *Art Policy* as it relates to interpreting an aspect of the Presidio’s history. The artwork, however, does not yet exist and it was therefore impossible to assess its quality and type. There was widespread agreement that the form, as currently envisioned in the rendering, did not embody creativity and would likely not provide an engaging or transformative experience.

Recommendations:

- Explore whether the project sponsor would be willing to engage in a dialogue with a group of artists to develop a range of concepts for consideration, appropriate to the constrained nature of the site.
- Explore with sponsor other alternatives for engaging public interest and awareness of this story.

Bernar Venet

The artwork is by a world renowned artist and is considered an exceptional work of its kind. The site is a dynamic and very visible part of the park and as such, much hinges on the right placement of the work. There was a dissenting view as to whether this piece, while exceptional and a generous gift, is the right piece for this site.

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Recommendations

- If accepted by the Trust Board, the placement of the sculpture should be carefully integrated into the design for the Tunnel/Bluff. If possible, consider delaying acceptance of this piece until designs for the bluff are further developed.

ATTACHMENT A: ART PANEL BIOGRAPHIES

Diane Frankel, The Museum Group

Diane Frankel has twenty-five years of experience in the non-profit arena, serving as the director of graduate programs in museum studies at John F. Kennedy University and the founding director of the Bay Area Discovery Museum. As a presidential appointee of President Clinton, she headed the Institute of Museum and Library Services in Washington, DC. This agency provides funds for museum and libraries across the United States and is the largest Federal cultural agency.

Upon her return to San Francisco, Ms. Frankel directed the Children, Youth and Families Program at the James Irvine Foundation. Since leaving the Foundation in 2004, she has been the Interim Director at the di Rosa Preserve, has served as a consultant to arts and cultural organizations, as an affiliate of Management Consultants for the Arts, and as the Executive Director of the Artists' Legacy Foundation. Ms. Frankel enjoys working with museums as they transition from one director to another, on their strategic planning process and fund raising programs.

Ms. Frankel is a graduate of the University of California at Berkeley. She received her Master of Arts and Teaching from George Washington University. She attended the Getty Museum Management Institute and the Harvard University Kennedy School of Public Policy summer program for senior government officials.

Ms. Frankel has been active in volunteer activities and has served on numerous boards. Most recently she was president of ArtTable (2003-2005) and currently serves on the San Francisco Art Institute Board of Trustees and the Alliance of Artists Communities Board of Trustees.

Mary Zlot, Zlot Buell + Associates, Art Advisors

Mary Zlot is a San Francisco based art advisor. She founded Mary Zlot & Associates in 1983, after developing an art consulting division for the architecture and design firm Environmental Planning and Research, Inc. in 1978. Mary entered into a partnership with Sabrina Buell in 2012 to form Zlot Buell + Associates. Mary has curated modern and contemporary art collections for many prominent private collectors and corporations located in the Bay Area and around the world.

One of her ongoing commitments is to work closely with the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in the development of the museum's collection. Corporate clients include Charles Schwab & Company, Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Company in San Francisco, Menlo Park, London, Paris, Hong Kong, Beijing, Tokyo, Sydney, Mumbai and Dubai, Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe and Dallas Cowboys Stadium in Arlington, Texas. In addition to her work as an art advisor, Mary serves on the board of the California Academy of Sciences, on SFMOMA's Education Committee, the Collector's Committee of the National Gallery of Art and the National Council of the Aspen Art Museum. Mary is also a member of SFMOMA's Director's Circle, ArtTable, and the International Association of Professional Art Advisor.

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Ian McDonald, Artist

Ian McDonald is an artist living and working in San Francisco. He has shown in the United States, Europe and Japan, including Rena Bransten Gallery, aov Gallery, and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco and The New Wight Gallery at UCLA in Los Angeles. European venues include, Nieuwe Vide Gallery in Holland, Sophienholm Exhibition Hall in Copenhagen Denmark, and the Svendborg Kunstingbygning Museum in Svendborg Denmark. In 2007 he was awarded the "Premio Faenza" from the Museo Internazionale della Ceramiche in Faenza, Italy. He has completed residencies in Holland at the European Ceramic Workcenter, the Museum of International Ceramics in Denmark and the Museum of Fine Arts at the De Young Art Center in San Francisco. He is currently on the Faculty at The San Francisco Art Institute in the Ceramics and Sculpture Department. He is represented by Rena Bransten Gallery in San Francisco.