

Proposal for an AIDS Memorial: Key West, Florida

1997 ACSA Design Award

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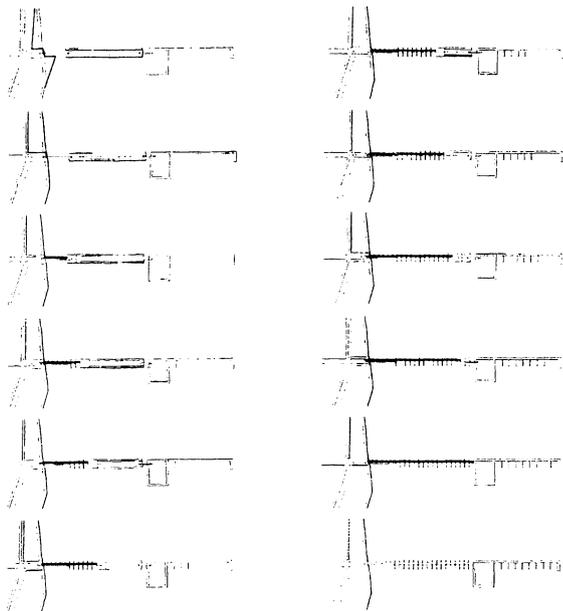
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The memories that we sought to reference on the Key West site could not be codified and contained only by analogy. We intended our project to suggest various metaphorical, symbolic, and analogous relationships, but to limit our response to these would not be sufficient. We desired a project that could frame the ambiguous and solitary associations that remain hidden from public sight, but moreover, we wanted to incorporate the project within the production of a clear and purposeful result.

The site delimited by the competition program (a parcel of paving between two beaches, at the terminus of White Street, one of Key West's most active public spaces) could not adequately address our fundamental social requirements. A pier (actually a solid extension of White Street) stemmed from this place, projecting 1400 feet into the sea. The mere requirement to have the memorial placed off to the side—a secondary concern beside the derelict pier that itself was being ignored—furthered our contention that the site should be adjusted to include the pier. By including the pier, the memorial would become suitable to the projected scale of visitor use, and the scale of heuristic capacity it was intended to transfer.

Researching the history of the overlooked pier, we discovered that since its construction in 1950, a process of erosion resulting from altered currents had both decimated the shore, and caused the contamination of local waters. The city of Key West had in 1990 initiated a healing effort with a cut/fill operation of the land that had been displaced by the errant currents, and cut six sections from the pier's underside in the hope that restoring some water-flow might lessen further problems. We began to consider a parallel course of healing: dismantling the pier we could continue the City's need to sustain and further promote the integrity of the shore.

The intermittent process of repair by cutting the pier's structure and transferring its rubble fill would be registered by the periodic building of a minimal passageway. If it was vital to the site's ecology that the pier disappear, it was also important to us that an alternate pathway remain. Additionally, we believed that our intervention would restore programmatic vitality to this place. Through the activation of the remade pier, it would be returned to the community as a significant public gathering place, a role it satisfied before the city's necessary first cuttings took place.



cut / fill
vital / dormant
describable / ineffable
single / multiple
limit / endless
presence / absence

to hold on / to let go
to weep / brine
to recognize / to respond
sunrise / rest
to collect / to bring
to comprehend

to comprehend: Key West, the very last island in an extensive series, represents a significant geographic limit despite its minuscule size. The proposal described here attempts to frame the gravity of this disease and the enormity of the suffering it has precipitated, not in regional terms, but in global terms. This project seeks to establish, in a modest way relative to the horror of this illness, the breach of the cultural limit that trivializes the recognition of massive losses, and the self-same limit that forbids us to grieve. Our proposal provides simply a sanctuary offering momentary respite to those whose lives have been irreparably altered by the voracious turbulence of AIDS.

