

Looking for

Braddock's Fields

Groundworks Proposal - GroundZero Action Network
Christine Brill & Jonathan Kline Project Artists



Looking for Braddock's Fields is a project led by Christine Brill and Jonathan Kline of the GroundZero Action Network. The project began with a month long residency in June 2004, during which the project team operated an open "laboratory" in the Braddock Carnegie Library. The project is ongoing and will end with a performance and dialogue event in the summer of 2005. Braddock is a small borough outside of Pittsburgh. The site of Braddock's defeat in 1755, and of Andrew Carnegie's first steel mill in 1873, this once thriving town is now in a state of severe economic distress, physical decline and abandonment. Braddock's population has shrunk from 25,000 in the 1950's to a mere 3,000 today. For thirty years a plan to build a new expressway through the center of town has only exacerbated disinvestment and decline, even though surrounding steel towns have begun to recover.

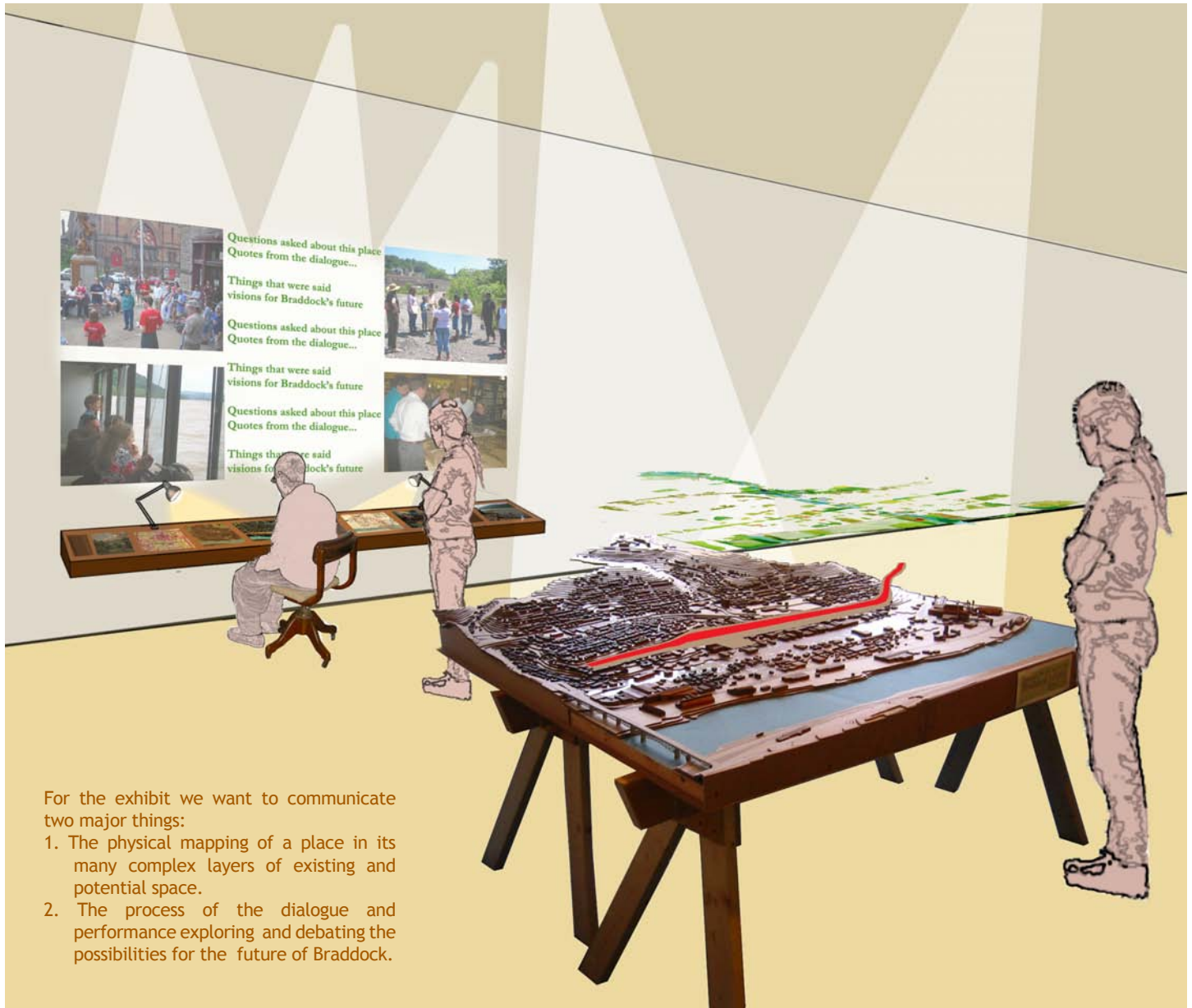
Working as artists we began an open ended dialogic inquiry into place. We came to Braddock to look, listen and initiate a public conversation about Braddock's past present and future. The project used mapping to explore the multi-layered geography of place investigating the history, physical decline and emergent ecology of Braddock. A major tool for the project was a large scale model of the entire community we created as a catalyst for dialogue. We also researched and represented the various histories of the site: Native-American, colonial-expansionist, industrialist-capitalist, labor-activist and African-American. The mapping explored two possible futures for Braddock. An externally recommended likely future where a planned new highway would split the town in two and a second possible future where re-emerging ecology could become an asset for Braddock's future. We mapped this emergent green to study its potential.

During the June residency we also initiated a community conversation to discuss Braddock's past and present and to think about possibilities for its future. Our conversations became a way of exploring possible futures with residents. A series of events were used to engage different members of the community in a dialogue about the past, present and future of Braddock including individual discussions with the mayor, council members, business owners, citizens and members of the non-profit community, a series of children's workshops, an urban hike to bring together residents of Braddock with outsiders on a three hour walk through the community with stops for story telling, a free boat ride for Braddock residents to see their community from the river and two public dialogues about the project in the Braddock Carnegie library. Our mapping and conversations revealed a possible new way of looking at Braddock: As place with emerging potential in its vacant green spaces- at the river's edge, in vacant lots, and along railroad tracks.

In the summer of 2005 the project will culminate with a two part performance/dialogue event with a group of invited participants including Braddock citizens, politicians and organization leaders, leaders from the surrounding boroughs, members of the county planning department, the Mon valley regional development non-profit, the media and others. Part one of this event will consist of a performance/walk which pre-enacts the physical limits and presence of the proposed elevated bermed highway which has now been officially approved by the federal highway administration to cut Braddock in two. We will use human marker participants to delineate the edges of the road while we walk with the invited participants for the length of the highway down the center of the future right-of-way. Periodically we will stop to discuss the past present and future of the space we are in, explain the highway design and pose questions about future potential.

Part two will consist of a one day dialogue about different kinds of potential for Braddock's future. The same invited participants will be gathered either at the Braddock Library or in a vacant Braddock church to discuss different kinds of potential using our large model as a centerpiece for the discussion. For the event the model will show the existing conditions of the community, and have two removable overlay pieces, one which physically models the highway as it has been proposed, the other which diagrammatically indicates some ideas about the potential for reconnecting to the riverfront and weaving green space back through the community based upon the vacancy and abandonment which are already occurring. We will pose questions and lead an open ended discussion about different kinds of potential, that of the highway, the re-emergent green spaces, the river, the forces of development etc. This will include the potential for positive change and frank discussion of the potential for destructive change and how ecological and social issues might be addressed. The questions will focus on the physical environment and how it could/should change in relation to the social and environmental community. This dialogue will be recorded and transcribed. Our goal is to bring diverse participants together, confront them with the physical reality of Braddock and what is happening to it, and then to bring them together in a room with an abstract representation where they can begin to see and have a dialogue about possibilities for the future.

[Proposed Exhibition Format]



For the exhibit we want to communicate two major things:

1. The physical mapping of a place in its many complex layers of existing and potential space.
2. The process of the dialogue and performance exploring and debating the possibilities for the future of Braddock.

[3 Part Exhibition]

Model

A sculptural representation of the place. Suspended above the existing conditions are representations of the proposed highway and a diagram of the green infrastructure potential

Wall Piece

2-4 large documentary photos from the final project events paired with a few lines of large text from the dialogue.

Information Counter

A display case containing more detailed information - explanatory text, images of the community, the process, the history and our mapping.

[Project Images]



Mapping Braddock's Possible Futures:
The proposed Mon-Fayette Toll Road



Mapping Braddock's Possible Futures:
An emergent green network



Mapping Braddock's Possible Futures:
Possible Green Infrastructure



Community Dialogue:
Meeting with elected officials



Community Dialogue:
Urban Hike

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