

THE Arts

The New York Times

The Drawing Center Finds Its Perch

After Exile From Ground Zero, Hope Centers on a Fulton Fish Market Site



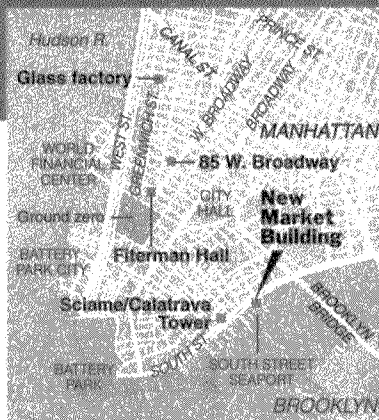
Ruby Washington/The New York Times

By ROBIN POGREBIN

Leaving ground zero last summer in a furor over its mission and content, the Drawing Center considered more than 150 alternative sites downtown before making its choice before the holidays: a site occupied by part of the old Fulton Fish Market alongside the South Street Seaport.

In interviews, officials at the center, currently based in SoHo, described their search as something of a roller coaster ride from dejection to giddy hope. Scouring abandoned buildings, vacant parking lots and high-rises, they fell in love with some locations and flatly rejected others, while learning the perils of what its president calls a "lack of nimbleness" by losing out to quick bidders.

The site they ultimately chose, known as New Market, is by no means a done deal: the building currently there, which would be razed to make way for new construction, is owned by the city, which has not yet entered negotiations with the Drawing Center. But city cultural officials have so far voiced support, signaling that the Drawing Center, an institution devoted to historical and contemporary works on paper, may



The New York Times

The Drawing Center considered several places, left, before choosing an East River site, above.

soon be able to declare victory.

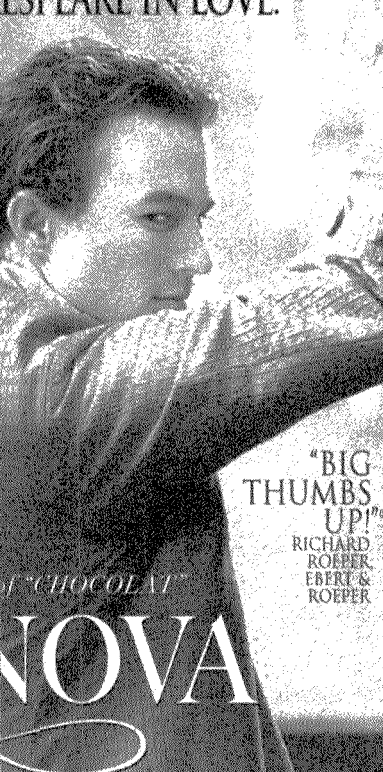
"The ultimate desire of the city is that they be relocated and contribute to the revitalization of Lower Manhattan," said Kate D. Levin, the city's commissioner of cultural affairs. The city and the Drawing Center have yet to start formal discussions.

To some extent, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, which is overseeing the downtown rebuilding effort with the city, seemed to feel an obligation to help the Drawing Center after its departure from the former World Trade Center site.

"We have always believed that the Drawing Center would make a positive contribution to Lower Manhattan's revitalization," said Stefan Pryor, president of the development corporation. After a seemingly auspicious start in June 2004, when it was selected as one of four cultural institutions to be based at ground zero, the Drawing Center suddenly found itself vilified last summer by families of some 9/11 victims as un-

Continued on Page 7

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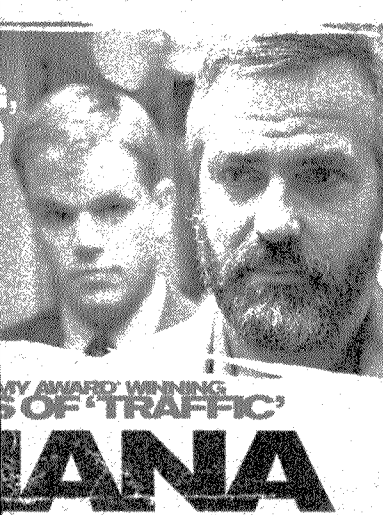
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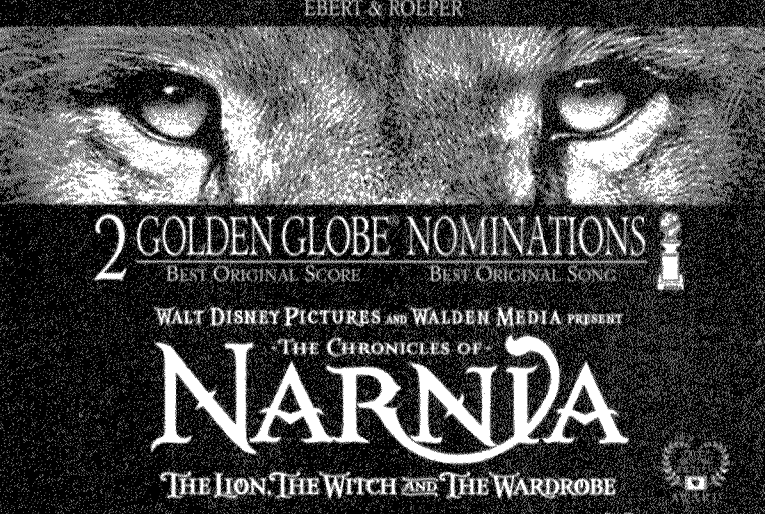
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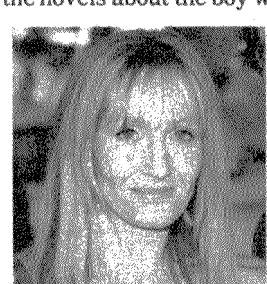
Arts,
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Critics Draw First Blood From

"Lestat," the Broadway-bound musical, by Anne Rice, was skewered by tryout in San Francisco. The San Francisco Chronicle called the show "didactic, disjointed, miscast, confusingly designed and floundering," while calling the score, by (from right) Elton John and Bernie Taupin "unrelentingly saccharine." Variety was dismissive but still called the show "a bling timeline of the several high-pulp picaresque events." Gregg Maday, executive vice president of Warner Theater Ventures, the lead producer of the show, said it was respectful of the reviews and that the show's creators planned to take the comments into consideration. "You can't like good notices, but we are in a creative process," he said, adding that he believed in the help. "The reason we came out of town with a hit," directed by Robert Jess Roth, is on April 13.

Of Death and Inspiration

J. K. Rowling, below, orphaned Harry Potter by dying of multiple sclerosis 15 years ago, wrote the novels about the boy wizard that books are made of. Tatler magazine's Daily Telegraph Press. "We're weeping, then in to about Potter, think of how to tell her said the f venture in



ten and locked in her safe, and she had children's book, described as a political that not even her publisher has been in ture, Ms. Rowling said only her husband the plot, and he is unlikely to talk: "N what happens because he instantly fo

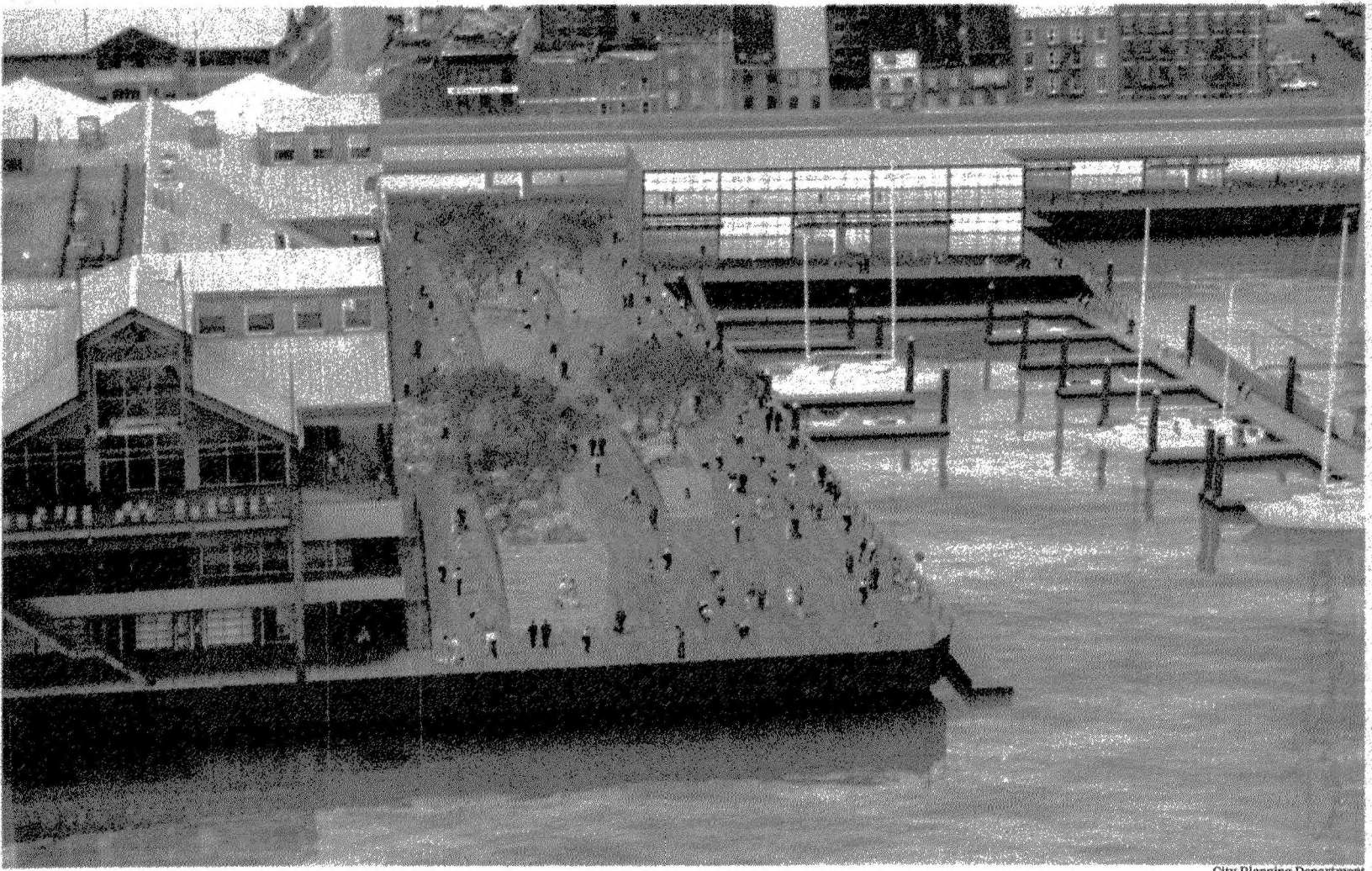
Lifetime Grammy Awards

David Bowie, Richard Pryor, Merle Haggard, Cream, Jessye Norman, Robert Johnson, below, and the Weavers will receive lifetime achievement awards at the Grammys next month, the Recording Academy announced yesterday. "Their work exemplifies the highest artistic and technical standards, creating a timeless legacy that has positively affected multiple generations and will continue to influence generations to come," Neil Portnow, the academy's president, said in a statement. A ceremony to acknowledge the awards will take place in Los Angeles on Feb. 7, the day before the Grammys. Mr. Pryor died last month, Johnson in 1938 and Lee Hays, a member of the Weavers, in 1981.



Beanie Sigel Convicted

The rapper Beanie Sigel, below, was convicted of misdemeanor sexual assault in 2005.



City Planning Department

A rendering of a proposed new building for the Drawing Center on Pier 18, part of the old Fulton Fish Market; South Street Seaport is to the left.

Drawing Center Finds Its Perch, Not at Ground Zero

Continued From First Arts Page

patriotic in its content and unworthy of the site.

After an ultimatum from Gov. George E. Pataki — “We will not tolerate anything on that site that denigrates America” — the institution bowed out, departing with \$150,000 from the development corporation to finance its hunt for an alternative location. Today, Drawing Center officials seem philosophical about the experience.

“On my better days, I really believe any institution that’s looking to expand and relocate goes through a process that’s not too dissimilar,” George Negroponte, the center’s president, said, adding: “There’s a public dimension to what we’ve gone through that is draining. We’re in a fish tank, and we’re constantly scrutinized.”

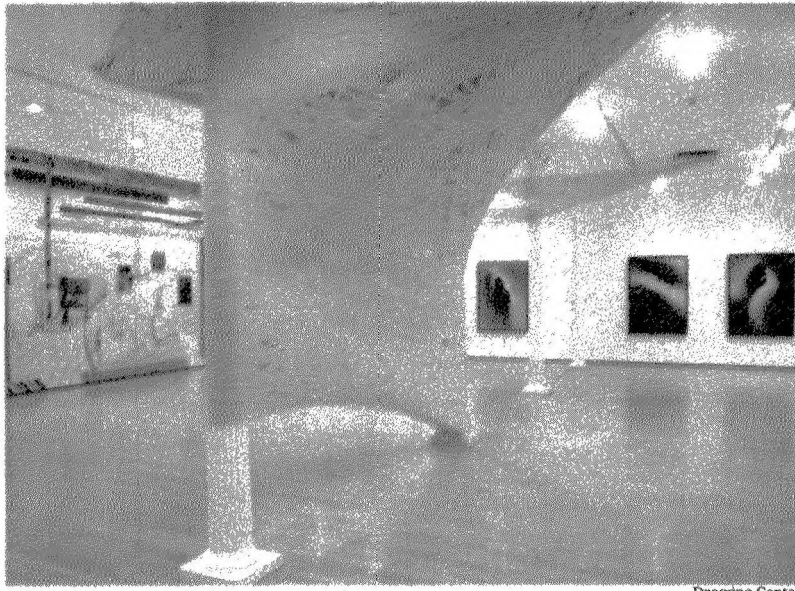
Yet many involved in those travails said the search helped the Drawing Center clarify its priorities. What was more important, they asked themselves, a ground floor presence or access to transportation? A hip neighborhood or a family environment? Should the Drawing Center be part of a larger building, or aim for its own free-standing structure?

After “the trauma of the ground zero site,” said Adrian Ellis, an arts consultant who worked with the center, “I think they’ve ended up in a very good position.”

The space the Drawing Center has decided on at the New Market site is more modest than the space designated for it at ground zero — 23,500 square feet, compared with 35,000 in the other building, designed by the hip Norwegian firm Snohetta. (An International Freedom Center was to have shared the building at ground zero but was also ousted from the project.)

Its current space on Wooster Street measures only 10,000 square feet, with an additional smaller exhibition space across the way. Even before it was chosen for the World Trade Center site, the Drawing Center had been looking for a larger home to present historical and contemporary work simultaneously and expand programs for emerging artists.

The Drawing Center’s initial projections for developing the New Market site are about \$45 million, and the development corporation has pledged up to \$10 million toward cap-



Drawing Center

A fall 2005 group show at the Drawing Center’s present home in SoHo, with drawings along the walls and an installation by Monika Grzymala.

ital expenses.

The search for a new site began in September, with Drawing Center officials canvassing the area below Canal Street with a team of consultants. By October, it had narrowed its list to 75 possibilities; by November, it had whittled that down to 5 for consideration by the center’s board.

Each candidate had its pros and cons. The building that the center dubbed the glass factory, at the corner of Hubert and Greenwich Streets, permitted a clear view south to 7 World Trade Center. “It presented a kind of corridor,” Mr. Negroponte said. It was also close to Hudson River Park, the turnaround for the Holland Tunnel and Public School 234, and across from Citigroup offices, with all the daily foot traffic.

“Because it was in northern TriBeCa, it put us closer to SoHo and Chelsea,” Mr. Negroponte said. “It would have been that kind of intersection where a cultural institution really would thrive.” With 5,000 square feet on the ground floor and two street faces, the glass factory became a template for what the Drawing Center was looking for.

But the property was snatched up by another buyer. “That was sort of a lesson for everyone in the importance of speed,” said Claire Weisz, an architecture consultant to the center.

Fiterman Hall was a similar case. The classroom building, part of Borough of Manhattan Community Col-

lege, had a convenient location, at 30 West Broadway between Barclay and Murray Streets, with open space directly south as part of the ground zero master plan and short walks to almost any subway line.

But the building, which had been damaged on 9/11, was already being reconstructed, and the Drawing Center would have had to fit in somehow. “It was too late in the process,” Mr. Negroponte said.

The center also considered applying for ground-floor tenancy in a luxury apartment tower at 80 South Street on the East River designed by Santiago Calatrava that is intended to have a cultural institution at its base. The building promises to be an attention-getter, with its alternating duplex apartments resembling town houses in the sky. But center officials felt that the design could upstage their institution — making it difficult to establish a distinct identity — and its curvilinear structure provided for only about 1,400 square feet at the base.

The Drawing Center also considered a site at 85 West Broadway, at Chambers Street, a two-story bank that is to be developed into apartments, Ms. Weisz said. But that, too, was complicated by having to share the building.

Crucial to the New Market’s attractions was the city’s plan to transform a two-mile stretch of East River waterfront into a vibrant esplanade. “We see so much potential in

this part of town,” Mr. Negroponte said. The two-story building, on Pier 18 on South Street, just north of Fulton, has about 26,000 square feet per floor and water on two sides. It would afford ample natural light for contemporary works as well as dimmer lighting for historical exhibitions.

“We have the opportunity to relate to the elements, to modulate that experience so it really suits the presentation and viewing of works on paper,” said Andrea Woodner, chairwoman of the Drawing Center board’s steering committee on the project.

Still, the site comes with considerable risks. The walk is seven to ten minutes from the 2 and 3 subway lines and 11 minutes from the 4 and 5 trains (although consultants noted that the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum uptown is a full nine minutes from the 86th Street stop on the 4, 5 and 6 lines). To arrive at the building, pedestrians must pass beneath the busy F.D.R. Drive. For now, there are few commercial sites in the area to attract walk-ins, and South Street Seaport has been struggling. But a revival of the area is planned, and several developers have new buildings in the works, like a residential and commercial tower developed by Bruce C. Ratner and designed by Frank Gehry on Beekman Street and a refurbishing of Front Street by Frank J. Sciamé, who is also developing the Calatrava tower.

“Let’s face it, it’s not folded into the city, it’s on the city’s edge under the F.D.R. — those are very real challenges,” Ms. Woodner said. And as Simon Bertrang, Ms. Weisz’s colleague at Weisz & Yoes, remarked, “It stinks of fish.”

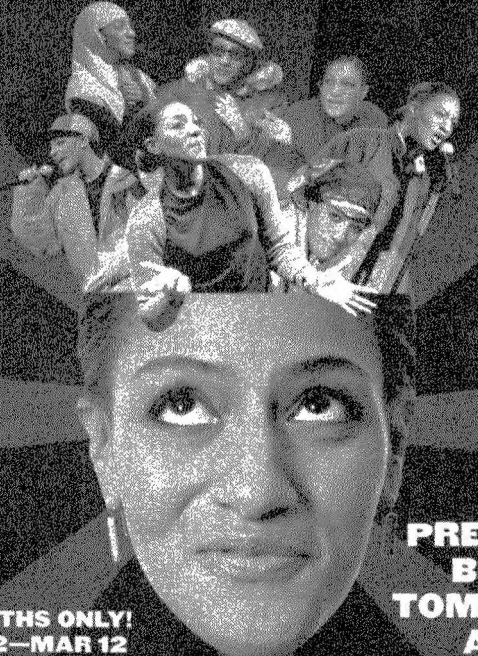
But Ms. Weisz said the center would have to be a magnet of its own. “You have to understand the Drawing Center as a destination,” she said, “not something you just walk by.”

This would not be the first time the Drawing Center was a cultural pioneer; it was one of the first arts institutions to arrive in SoHo, in 1977. “I think we become symbolically powerful in that kind of a situation,” Mr. Negroponte said.

Perhaps most importantly, for some officials, the Drawing Center will not have to prove that its programming is politically palatable. “I don’t feel at all this is second helpings or something we’re settling for,” Ms. Woodner said. “We’re a little bit more autonomous.”

THE NEW YORK TIMES, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2006

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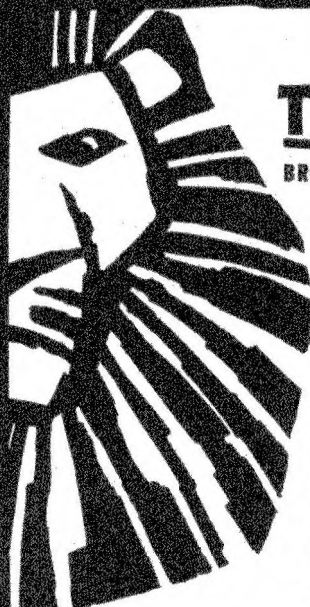
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