

## common room 2

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constantly variable  
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The natural landscape of the Lower East Side discouraged early settlement due to the wetlands and marshes along the East River, but also encouraged farming and industry, through natural water resources such as the now-covered Collect Pond. Increased industry led to increased settlement. Early roadways were built upon Indian trails or established with a direct relationship to the island's edges, but land speculation and the superimposition of the 1811 street grid upon the terrain brought a neutralizing force to the island's varied topography. An indelible mark has been left upon the land with every iteration.

The Lower East Side of Manhattan is further defined by the shifts in its immigrant population. Each of these diverse groups has brought their own specific character to the cultural mix that is New York, and their presence has left its marks upon the land as well. From the density of tenement housing, where the open street offered the only relief from overcrowding, to the construction of co-operative towers which rise up and shift away from a conformance to the street edge and disconnect from the vitality of the street. The urban fabric of the Lower East Side encompasses these types in sharp juxtaposition.

The linear relationship between street, to sidewalk, to building plinth, to building lobby suggests an opportunity to think of this layered landscape as a horizontal as well as vertical/sectional stratification. Ground plane and idealized plane, the past, the present and the future each become worthy of consideration. Each of these terms is understood differently when viewed in relationship to one another. The future comes into play, ever-uncertain but always anticipated. Our perception of THIS place, in THIS time, is something which is not a constant but, instead, constantly a variable.

The landscape installation at common room 2 attempts to reflect this notion of layering, confluence, and interplay. The building's modernist architectural articulation suggests that the mass above the lobby has been lifted up on pilotis, so that the front lobby becomes an extension of the outside. Although conceived as a whole, the exterior installation elements, by their very nature, undergo change. Plants will grow and markings on the sidewalk will begin to erode as foot traffic and natural forces cause them to fade, and then disappear.

Thomas Navin is an architect and garden designer with work in both the private and public sector, including collaboration in the design of Headwaters Park in Fort Wayne, Indiana (1996) and The Paterno Trivium, a small park overlooking the Hudson River in Washington Heights (2000). He teaches History and Theory of Landscape Design in the MS Landscape Design Program at Columbia, and is on the architecture faculty at the College of Architecture and Design and NJIT. Students in the Landscape Design Program at Columbia have assisted in this installation.

Justin A. Capuco has been a collaborator in the formation of this installation. With a BS in Biology from the University of Virginia, he is soon to complete his M Arch at NJIT and he has been involved in other ventures with common room.

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