

Governors State University

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### Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park: An Introduction (GSU 25th Anniversary Revised Edition)

Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park

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# NATHAN MANILOW SCULPTURE PARK:

## AN INTRODUCTION

The Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park may well be the most enduring contribution to south metropolitan Chicagoland of that turbulent and exciting period, the 1960s and '70s.

Its unique story begins with Nathan Manilow, one of the developers of Park Forest. Built soon after World War II, Park Forest quickly gained national recognition for its citizens' remarkable commitment to community—a commitment many planners attributed in great part to the genius and sensitivity of the village plan designed and executed by its developers.

Following his success with Park Forest, Nathan Manilow turned his attention to an even more ambitious project, the development of Park Forest South (renamed University Park in 1984). With projections of a population of 80,000 by the year 1980 to inspire him, Manilow set to work with the federal government as a key participant through its New Town legislation. Partners were attracted.

Tragically, in the midst of all this expectation and hope, Nathan Manilow died in 1971.

His son, Lewis Manilow, later to become chairman of the board of Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art, assumed leadership of the development of Park Forest South. Concerned that residents of this new town enjoy a future rich in culture and art, Lewis Manilow established the Park Forest South Cultural Foundation which commissioned works for a sculpture park planned for the civic center of the town.

At its inception the foundation's sole asset was a sculpture by Mark di Suvero, "For Lady Day," built over a period of two summers while the artist lived as Manilow's guest in Park Forest South. Manilow bought this sculpture from di Suvero and donated it to the foundation. This asset then proved to be the base for a growing collection.

In 1971 Manilow asked the National Endowment for the Arts to match the value of the "Lady" so that the foundation could commission new sculptures. The NEA agreed. With NEA funds the foundation commissioned works by Charles Ginnever, Jerry Peart, and John Chamberlain.

While Park Forest South and its cultural foundation grew, so did a new university for the south metropolitan region. Founded in 1969 and opened in 1971, Governors State University was an essential ingredient in the exciting cultural and educational format planned for the model town.

Synergism between the new university and its host city and developer emerged immediately. Soon after its founding, a group of six individuals, including Lewis Manilow, donated to the University Foundation a piece of land in the village of Park Forest. Attached to this gift was the stipulation that the proceeds from its sale be used "to honor the name of Nathan Manilow in the cultural arts."

Dr. William E. Engbretson, founding president of Governors State and a progressive, dynamic innovator, became a close friend of Manilow's, sharing his excitement not only for the emerging new city but also for sculpture. Because of the relationship between these two men and because of Mark di Suvero's presence, Park Forest South and Governors State University, became in the late '60s and early '70s, a kind of informal gathering place for Chicago sculptors. Frequent visitors were John Henry, Richard Hunt, John Chamberlain, Jerry Peart, and others. Both Hunt and Chamberlain were university lecturers in the first days of GSU.

It was during these earliest days that the university acquired its first sculpture, "Phoenix," by Edvins Strautmanis. Originally commissioned in 1967 for a Hyde Park apartment complex, the work was rejected by the apartment building inhabitants. They found its monumental size and abstract design inappropriate. Lewis Manilow, owner of the building, called Bill Engbretson and let him know that the sculpture was available. United States Steel supplied the flatbed used to ship "Phoenix" to its new home in the southern suburbs.

This first acquisition enabled Engbretson to approach the NEA with a successful proposal for matching funds of \$25,000 to commission a work by John Henry for the university. Henry began "Illinois Landscape #5" in 1974.

While the university flourished, the fortunes of Park Forest South declined, primarily because of the recession of 1972-73. Survival, not cultural enrichment, became the prime concern of the leaders of the city. All building ceased in the new community. With Manilow gone, so was the commitment to a sculpture park for Park Forest South. Or so it seemed.

In 1976, after serving seven years as university president, Bill Engbretson also departed. As a going away present to the university he had guided from its inception, however, he announced a major sculpture exhibition for August of that year.

Much to the amazement of the university community, the first two weeks of August saw a parade of cranes and flatbeds across the campus. Giant sculptures appeared almost daily, as if emerging miraculously from the prairie.

Lewis Manilow loaned di Suvero's "The Mohican" to the show. The Park Forest South Cultural Foundation loaned "For Lady Day," which was shipped from Battery Park in New York, "Icarus" by Charles Ginnever and "Falling Meteor" by Jerry Peart.

"Phoenix" was brought out from university storage, blasted, painted, and sited. John Payne, university sculptor-in-residence, created and loaned "Mock I V-Form" to the exhibition. Richard Hunt loaned "Large Planar Hybrid" and "Outgrown Pyramid."

Rusting away for some seven years, 1,000 yards south of the university building, stood Mark di Suvero's "Prairie Chimes." Inexplicably, the artist had never called for this work, inspired by the very prairie on which it stood and completed during his two-summer stay as Lewis Manilow's guest. With the artist's permission, this piece too was blasted, painted crimson, and brought to its current site.

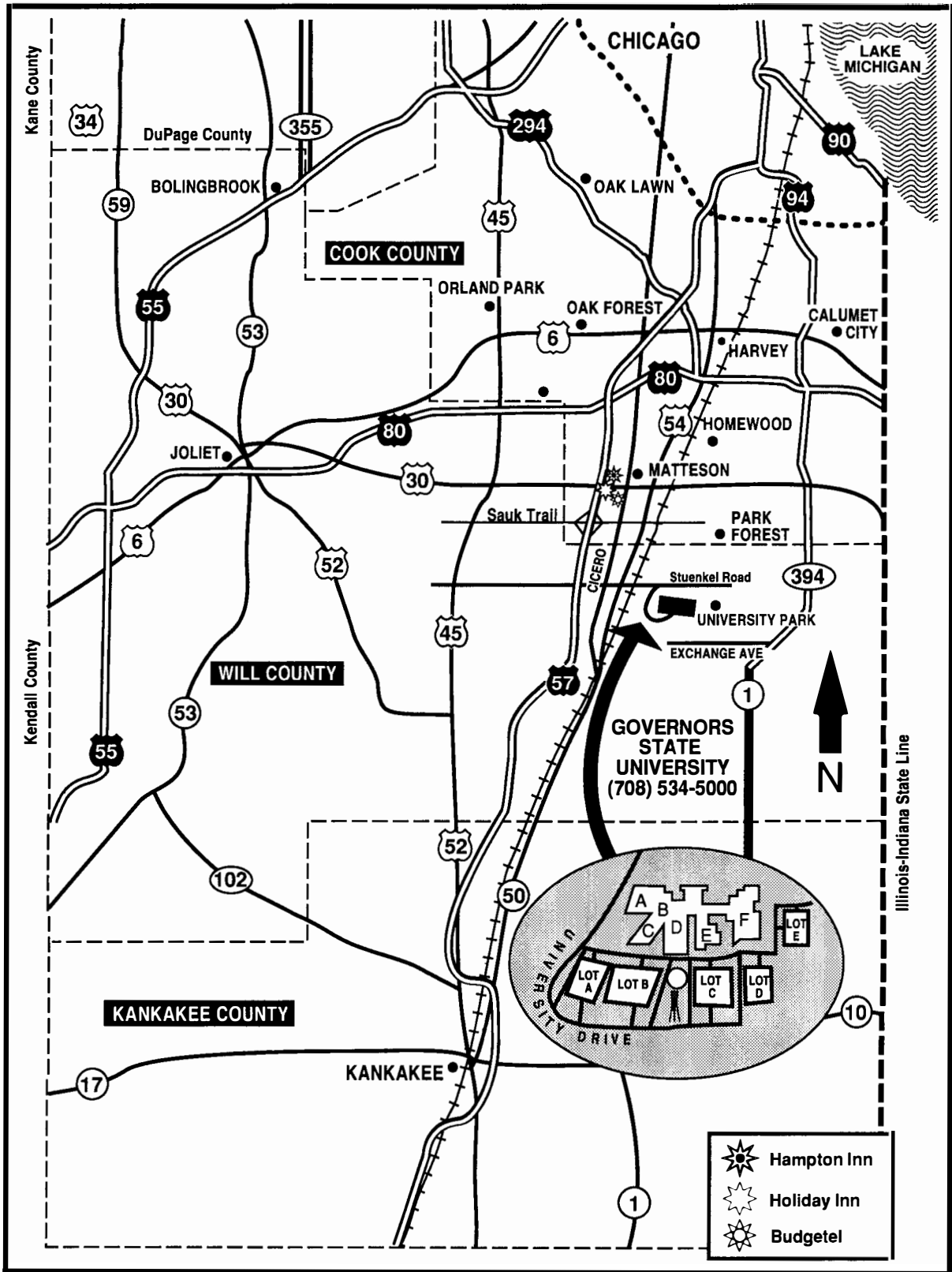
Finally, even as the reception marking the opening of the show was getting under way, John Henry was putting the final coat of paint on "Illinois Landscape #5."

Present at this August 20, 1976, opening was Ira Licht, director of the Art in Public Places program of the National Endowment for the Arts. Licht chaired a discussion among all the sculptors exhibited, with the exception of Mark di Suvero who could not attend.

"The Sculptor, the Campus, and the Prairie," as the exhibition was named, received immediate critical acclaim. Alan Artner of the Chicago *Tribune* called it a "virtual model for all public art projects." Franz Schulze of the *Daily News* was also enthusiastic. He states, "... the Chicago area is presently the locale of one of the most impressive collections of this kind of art that I have ever seen." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* printed a full-page story on the exhibition.

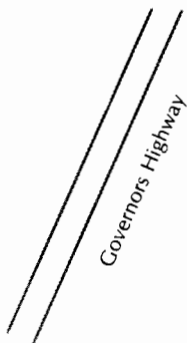
Continued growth was not assured, however, despite the obvious merit of the collection. With both Manilow and Engbretson gone and no state money available, even for maintenance, let alone expansion, the exhibition spent two years in virtual limbo.

In 1978, however, the land given to the GSU Foundation nearly ten years earlier was sold for \$300,000. The sale occasioned a meeting of the board of directors of the Governors State University Foundation at which Lewis Manilow suggested that the proceeds be restricted to the maintenance and expansion of the sculpture exhibition on campus. With the enthusiastic support of Dr. Leo Goodman-Malamuth, university president, and with approval, from both the GSU Foundation and the Illinois Board of Governors, GSU's governing body at the time, the name of the exhibition was changed, in accordance with the stipulation originally attached to the gift of the land, to "The Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park."



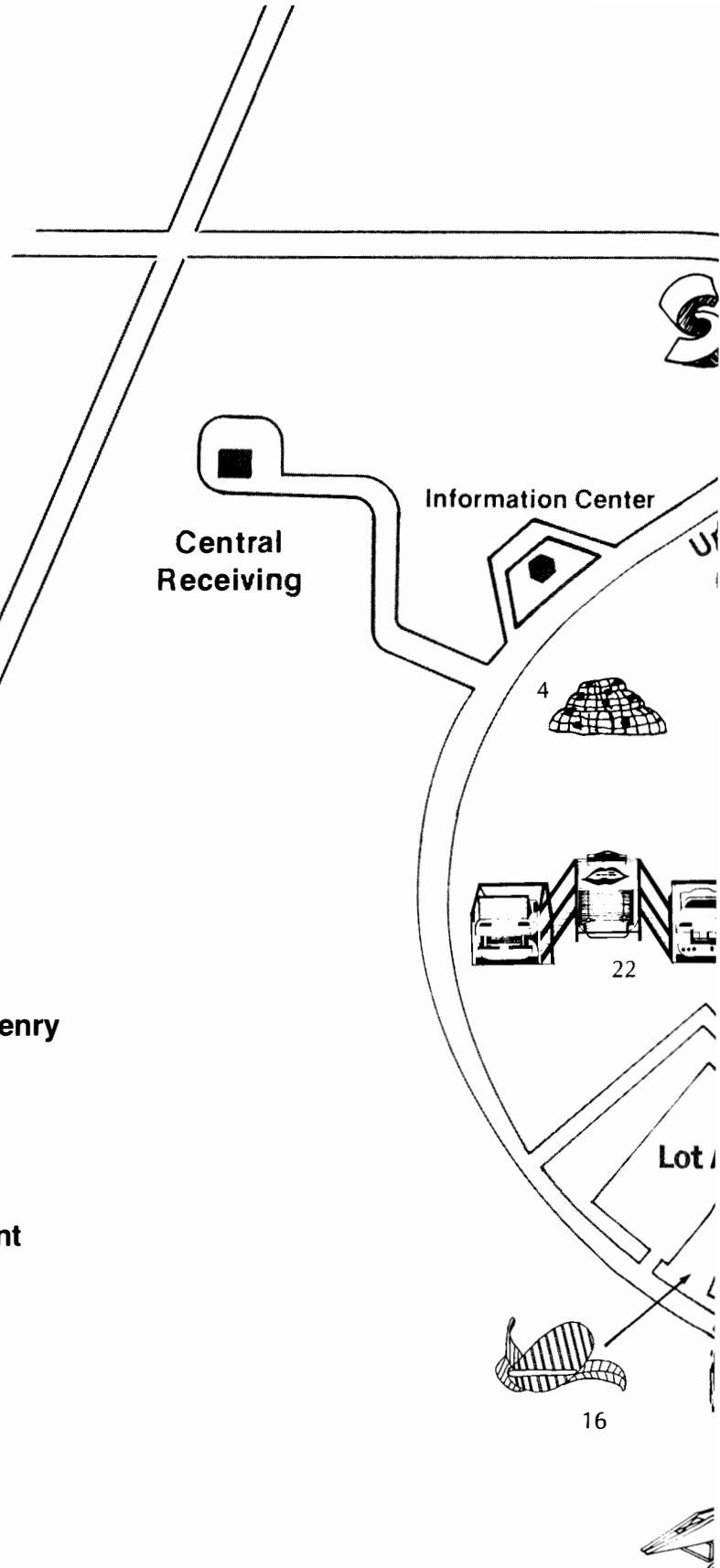
# NATHAN MANILOW SCULPTURE PARK

1. "SPIRAL" Clement Meadmore
2. "ICARUS" Charles Ginnever
3. "FLYING SAUCER" Jene Highstein
4. "SYSIPHUS AVIARY" Dan Yarbrough
5. "PHOENIX" Edvins Strautmanis
6. "FALLING METEOR" Jerry Peart
7. "BODARK ARC" Martin Puryear
8. "FORMS IN BLUE" John Payne
9. "MOCK II, V-FORM" John Payne
10. "PRAIRIE CHIMES" Mark di Suvero
11. "FOR LADY DAY" Mark di Suvero
12. "ILLINOIS LANDSCAPES No. 5" John Henry
13. "OUTGROWN PYRAMID" Richard Hunt
14. "ART ARK" Terry Karpowicz
15. "FIELD ROTATION" Mary Miss
16. "THRONE" Ted Garner
17. "MOCK I, V-FORM" John Payne
18. "LARGE PLANAR HYBRID" Richard Hunt
19. "A VIRGIN'S MILE" John Chamberlain
20. "HOUSE DIVIDED" Bruce Nauman
21. "UNTITLED" Joel Shapiro
22. "HOUSE OF CARS" Vito Acconci
23. "ISIS" Mark di Suvero

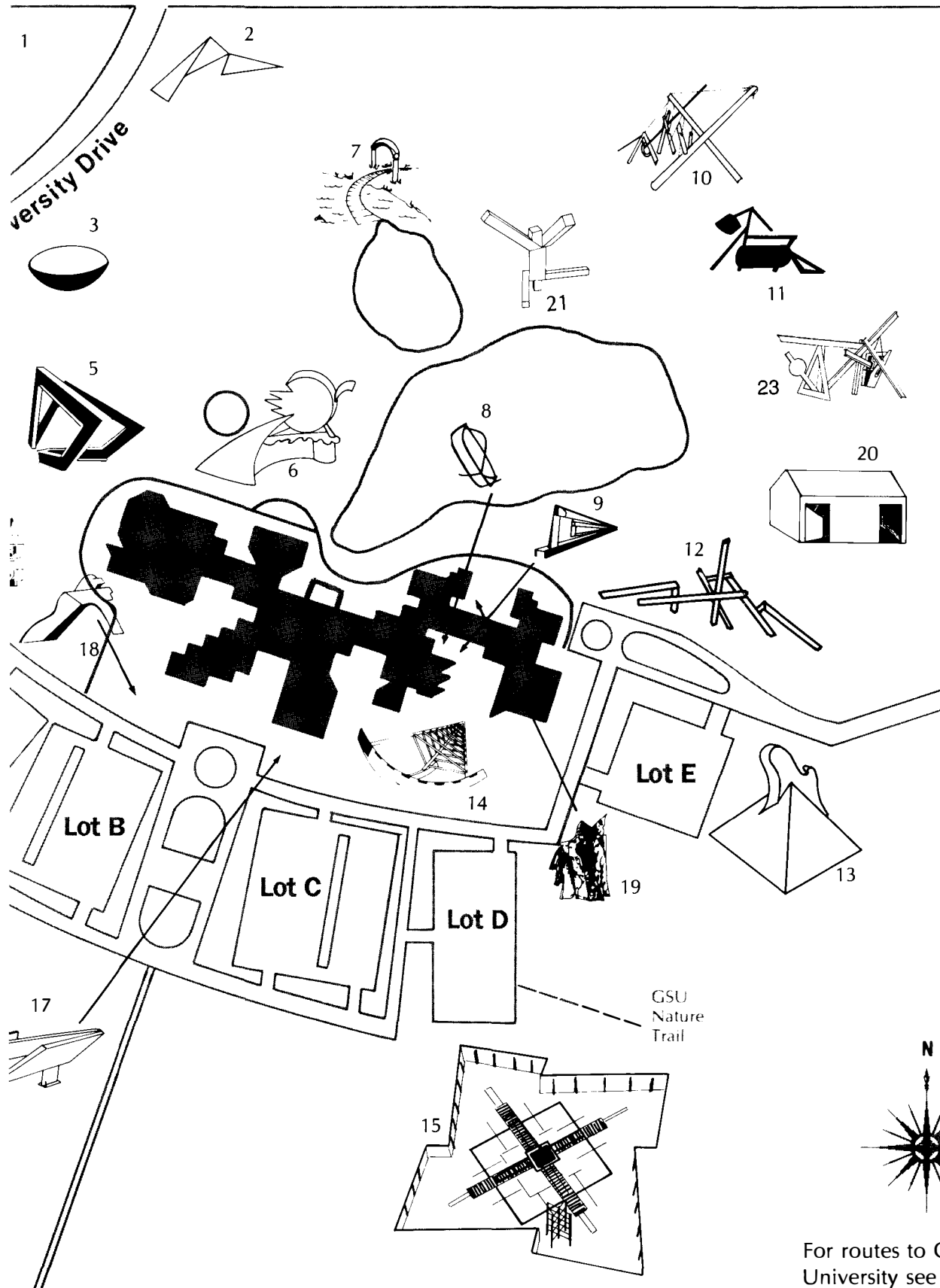


**Governors State University**  
**University Park, IL 60466-0975**

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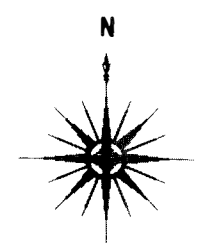


University Parkway



University Parkway

University Parkway



For routes to Governors State University see map on overleaf.

The Governors State University Foundation then assumed responsibility for maintaining the park, commissioning new works, and publicity. The exhibition had entered an exciting new state of development.

An Advisory Committee was appointed to counsel the foundation on sculpture purchase and maintenance. Both committee and board agreed that the funds would be spent within a short period of time during which high visibility for the park, it was hoped, would be achieved. During the period of intense activity, it was further hoped, the park would generate through gifts and endowments the funds needed to perpetuate its development.

After careful study of interest projections, the board decided to spend \$45,000 for each of ten years: \$40,000 on commissions, \$5,000 on maintenance and publicity.

To seek its first commission under the "new dispensation," the GSU Foundation established a special ad hoc selection committee in accordance with NEA guidelines. This committee included Ann Rorimer, assistant curator of contemporary art, the Art Institute of Chicago; Suzanne Ghez, director of the University of Chicago's Renaissance Society; Dr. Curtis McCray, provost of Governors State University; Walter Kelly of Walter Kelly Galleries; Sue Gray, GSU alumna and resident of the southern suburbs; Lewis Manilow; Robert Wolf of Robert Wolf and Associates, Olympia Fields; and Dr. William Dodd, chief executive officer of the GSU Foundation.

This committee decided on a new direction in the park's acquisitions, choosing to commission an environmental sculpture by Mary Miss. A proposal to the NEA resulted in matching funds—\$40,000 from the NEA to match the foundation's \$40,000. Miss's "Field Rotation" was completed in the Summer of 1981. Other acquisitions during this period were: "Large Planar Hybrid," formerly on loan, purchased from Richard Hunt; Jene Highstein's "Flying Saucer"; "Mock II V-Form" and "Forms in Blue," loaned to the park by GSU's own Professor John Payne; and Martin Puryear's "Bodark Arc," a second environmental work.

The exhibition's growing reputation has, as had been hoped, begun to bring contributions and recognition. In 1981, Morris Lipschultz purchased Hunt's "Outgrown Pyramid" and loaned it indefinitely to the park.

Ads announcing completion of "Field Rotation" and "Flying Saucer" in *Art in America* and *Art Forum* stirred national and even international attention, as did an article on the Miss sculpture in *GEO*, September 1982.

In May 1982, the Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park was invited by Art Expo '82 to display at Navy Pier. This exhibit resulted in two new works being offered for loan by artists Ed McCullough and Terry Karpowicz. "Argonaut III" by McCullough and "Art Ark" by Karpowicz were sited in June. The Karpowicz sculpture is located on the site formerly occupied by "The Mohican," which was withdrawn from the exhibition when it was traded by its owner in 1970.

Acquisitions in late 1982-83 completed the stage of the park's development funded by the 1978 land sale. John Chamberlain's "A Virgin's Mile" (commissioned earlier by the Park Forest South Cultural Foundation) arrived and was sited in the Fall of 1982. An untitled work by Joel Shapiro was acquired in April 1983 and Bruce Nauman's "House Divided" in August 1983.

In 1984, the Park Forest South Cultural Foundation deeded title to all its holdings, i.e., "For Lady Day," "Icarus," "Falling Meteor," and "A Virgin's Mile," to the Governors State University Foundation.

The park has experienced substantial activity in the past few years despite the fact that it has not commissioned additional works. Ed McCullough's "Argonaut III" was purchased by the University of Illinois. Now exhibited on its site is Clement Meadmore's "Spiral," a gift from the Art Institute of Chicago. Morris Lipschultz has not only donated Hunt's "Outgrown Pyramid" to the park but Karpowicz's "Art Ark" as well. In 1985 the park received a loan of "Sysiphus Aviary" from artist Dan Yarbrough. "For Lady Day" was

loaned to Storm King for its di Suvero retrospective in 1985. In the Fall of 1985, the park hosted its first one-man exhibition, a collection of eight sculptures by Canadian artist Jeffrey Rubinoff. In 1986, the Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park published a catalogue of its permanent collection, and in 1988 the park received Vito Acconci's "House of Cars II," originally on a two-year loan.

In 1992 the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden offered di Suvero's "Isis" to the Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park on a seven-year loan. The GSU Foundation gladly and gratefully agreed to the loan. Today, then, this wonderful and massive work (42'x50'x33') has a new though temporary residence in the midwest.

Unlike the collections at Storm King and Laumeier, the Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park is open year round. These sculptures are as stunning under a blanket of snow as they are in the brilliant sun of summer.

Indeed, names such as "Prairie Chimes," "Illinois Landscape #5," "Field Rotation," and "Bodark Ark" suggest that, in the Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park, nature and art may well be revealed in a new and evocative environmental synthesis.

February 1996

University Park, Illinois

For information about the park and to arrange group tours, call (708) 534-4105.

