

Blue Halo Suggested For Wound Downtown

By SHAILA K. DEWAN

The perimeter of ground zero is all chain-link and checkpoints. To visitors seeking a glimpse of the site, it is a cold and confusing obstacle. To downtown residents like Mary Miss, an artist, it is an unwelcome fixture, barring streets with all the grace of a prison wall.

Yet it is the only part of the site where New York City was attacked that people can touch.

Ms. Miss sees no reason that ground zero, where the volume of visitors prompted the city to build a viewing platform, should look more like a crime scene than a place of remembrance.

Metal crowd-control barricades could be replaced, she says, by clusters of celestial blue pipes whose open tops would serve as vases for the bouquets that visitors now lodge in fences. Those fences could be replaced by undulating blue metal screens, topped by cobalt lights that would surround Manhattan's open wound with a soothing halo.

While they have not yet had an answer from the new mayoral administration, Ms. Miss and her collaborators, Victoria Marshall and Elliott Maltby, have the endorsement of Schuyler G. Chapin, the Giuliani administration's commissioner of cultural affairs, and the support of Community Board 1, whose chairwoman, Madelyn Wils, is also on the commission charged with rebuilding Lower Manhattan.

Of course, there are many proposals for ground zero, from towers of light suggestive of the fallen buildings to a permanent memorial for the 3,000 dead. But this proposal, "A Wreath for Ground Zero," is one of only a few that deal with the site in its current state.

Ms. Wils said the community board supported at least the concept of the "wreath" proposal, if not all its particulars. The commission, she said, has met only once and has not considered specific proposals for the short term.

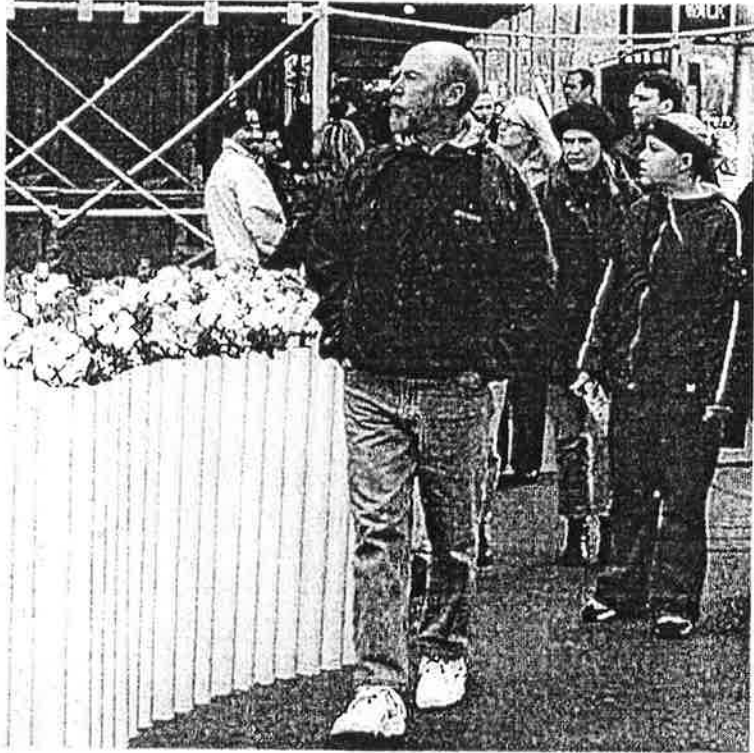


Illustration by Mary Miss

Mary Miss, an artist, digitally inserted a blue metal wall into a picture of visitors at the attack site to illustrate part of the plans for "A Wreath for Ground Zero," to memorialize the events of Sept. 11.

The project would allow the public to participate without interfering with recovery efforts, and "provide a sense of order along a route that has become a pilgrimage," Mr. Chapin wrote.

The plan is a continuation of Ms. Miss's longstanding involvement in the area. In 1973, she created an art piece on the landfill created by the earth removed to build the World Trade Center.

In the 1980's, she collaborated on the design for South Cove, a three-acre section of the waterfront in Battery Park City. (Her work, which she says is "much more about space-making and place-making than object-making," can also be seen in the Union Square subway station.)

On Sept. 11, South Cove was used by people fleeing to New Jersey. "It was meant to be an escape from the density of Wall Street," Ms. Miss said. "Little did I know how much of an escape it was going to be."

Because of Ms. Miss's history and her public art projects, friends nudged her to suggest a permanent project dealing with Sept. 11. But, she said: "It's too

early to think about a memorial. This is something that we really felt had to happen now."

In the plan, the galvanized steel and concrete barriers and fencing would be painted blue, then eventually be replaced with specially designed elements, including benches. With planters of flowering trees and pipes holding flowers left by visitors, a kind of garland would form around the site.

When the rebuilding was complete, the elements would be temporarily rearranged into a figure eight on its side, the symbol for infinity, and then dismantled.

"The idea was, how can we transform this edge, this sort of barbaric edge that's gone up?" she said.

The artists mapped out the components of the perimeter last weekend with a group from New York Cares, which Ms. Miss said had agreed to provide volunteers to do the painting.

Because the perimeter is so forbidding, she said, it makes it difficult for the streams of visitors she can see from her window to be respectful. "I wanted it to be possible for people to mourn," she said.