

Transcending Boundaries
By STEVE A. FURMAN
Chicago CORRESPONDENT

Lawrence Halprin, born in Brooklyn, N.Y., in 1916, is one of the most celebrated environmental designers because he has transcended the boundaries traditionally imposed in his field. Mr. Halprin's work strikes a delicate, yet powerful balance between community and nature by designing spaces that function ecologically for the good of people. He literally creates environments through his art, engaging the participant by applying a sensorial and compassionate design on conventional urban landscape.

He works on a huge and diverse scale ranging from rapid transit systems and civic redevelopment projects to inner-city parks and private gardens. Among his works are the Sea Ranch on California's Central Coast that blends town-planning principles with a sensitive rural landscape design; Seattle's Freeway Park, an inspired remaking of a freeway into recreational space; and most recently the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial in Washington, D.C.

SF: How do you decide which projects to take on?

LH: Most of them come to me because of my behavior. Somehow people tend to gravitate to me when they have a need for design in their environment. I like to take on things that are important on a public level to large numbers of people. I prefer projects that have the potential to enrich people's lives, or where people express a desire to relate to their surroundings. I think of myself more as rearranging things for them in order to make their lives more fulfilling.

SF: What's the distinction between landscape and architecture?

LH: There isn't one, really. Architecture tends to make objects in space, that take up space, while landscape is more cavelike. Like walking around within a space.

SF: At what point in the creative process do you begin to think about the people who will experience your work?

LH: From the very beginning. I observe very carefully the level of quality required, and how the project can improve the lives of people. Then I do it. The challenge is not to simply use natural materials, but use them, or a form of them, in a natural way. It has everything to do with people, not just inert materials placed in space. I try to figure out and study very deeply the natural results of normal processes — how people interact with one another and with the objects in their environment. I use the processes observed in these interactions as the core of my design. This is different than focusing on the end product.

SF: What were you trying to communicate through the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial?

LH: I was trying to show that FDR was a humanist in the purest sense. He was working to enhance people's lives instead of trying to make them fit into a mold. During the period he was president, he changed the whole attitude of what the government should be for people. He completely shifted government's role into one that served the people, and he was interested in people as individuals, not groups. I wanted to help people realize that our

culture was threatened by sheer evil during those years. The war and depression were very difficult and hurtful. But the struggle was necessary for growth. I wanted to link it together by the words FDR used through radio. He talked to the people personally, not in broad, generalized terms. He talked to *me* personally. It was not abstract.

SF: In experiencing the FDR Memorial, all my senses were engaged. How does one control all these elements?

LH: Orchestrating that was difficult. Part of it was helped by how I selected the various artists. I chose artists who resonated with the same point of view toward the project. I felt there was a harmony between us. I selected them for their natural approach to the project, and how their expression meshed with mine. The memorial is a piece of sculpture that people can walk around in. I think it's the most complete and most integrated work of art I've ever done. It stands on its own as unique. Essentially it's about growth and change choreographed through time. It goes on and beyond.

SF: Is there a prime point or thread that runs through your creativity?

LH: If there is a thread, it is that I want these places that I create to help people live long and enriched lives.

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