

Talking Trash

At twice the size of Central Park, Fresh Kills is the nation's largest landfill. **Fred Bernstein** scans a show that marks its recent closing.

City In March, journalists showered the closing of Fresh Kills, the country's largest landfill and the resting place of Gotham garbage for 53 years, with elegiac prose. Now comes the hard part, in which New York City begins to lay the groundwork, literally and figuratively, for the conversion of the 2,200-acre Staten Island site into a park. One plank in the campaign to raise consciousness about the impending public project is a photo exhibition sponsored by the Municipal Art Society, currently on view at the Urban Center in Manhattan.

The tradition of making art from infrastructure is a long one—think of Margaret Bourke White at Hoover Dam and O. Winston Link at the Norfolk and Western Railroad. But Fresh Kills isn't quite ready for its close-up: "They don't want us showing too much garbage," is how Alexandra Brez, the exhibition's curator (and *Architecture*'s photo editor), summarizes the society's approach to the show. But an estimated 108 million tons of Pampers, Evian bottles—and architecture magazines—isn't easy to ignore.

Larry Racioppo, an employee of the city's Department of Housing, Preservation, and Development and one of the five New York-based photographers selected by Brez, described a favorite shot that won't make it into the show: "It was the maw of one of those giant bulldozers, and it was oozing garbage. Really oozing." The show will instead include his touching portrait that captures the emotional content of a throwaway society: a Fresh Kills machine shop, which workers decorated with dolls they rescued from the dump. Meanwhile, Stanley Greenberg, whose series on New York City's underbelly resulted in his *Invisible New York: The Hidden Infrastructure of the City* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), photographed a ship's graveyard on the perimeter of the site.

Victoria Sambunaris, who frequently turns her lens to industrial landscapes, captured scenery that appears surprisingly unspoiled, belying the fact that garbage underlies the undulating meadows. Known for his vivid imagery of urban decay, Andrew Moore focused on the trucks and buildings peppering the site. And Susan Wides, who has been photographing Fresh Kills for years, went, Hitchcock-style, for the landfill's overstimulated birds.

Along with the exhibition, the society is sponsoring lectures, panel discussions, and a competition for proposals for Fresh Kills' future—which will hopefully yield insights into how to handle the thousands of other brownfield sites throughout the country. ■

New York-based Fred Bernstein has degrees in law and architecture, and writes about both subjects.



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Fresh Kills 4 by Susan Wides, from her series *Mobile Views* (2000)

Fresh Kills: The Photographs,
curated by Alexandra Brez,
Urban Center, New York, through July 21