



Meeting Place is a reimagining of a nearly forgotten public fountain through a set of objects that replace its missing ornaments.

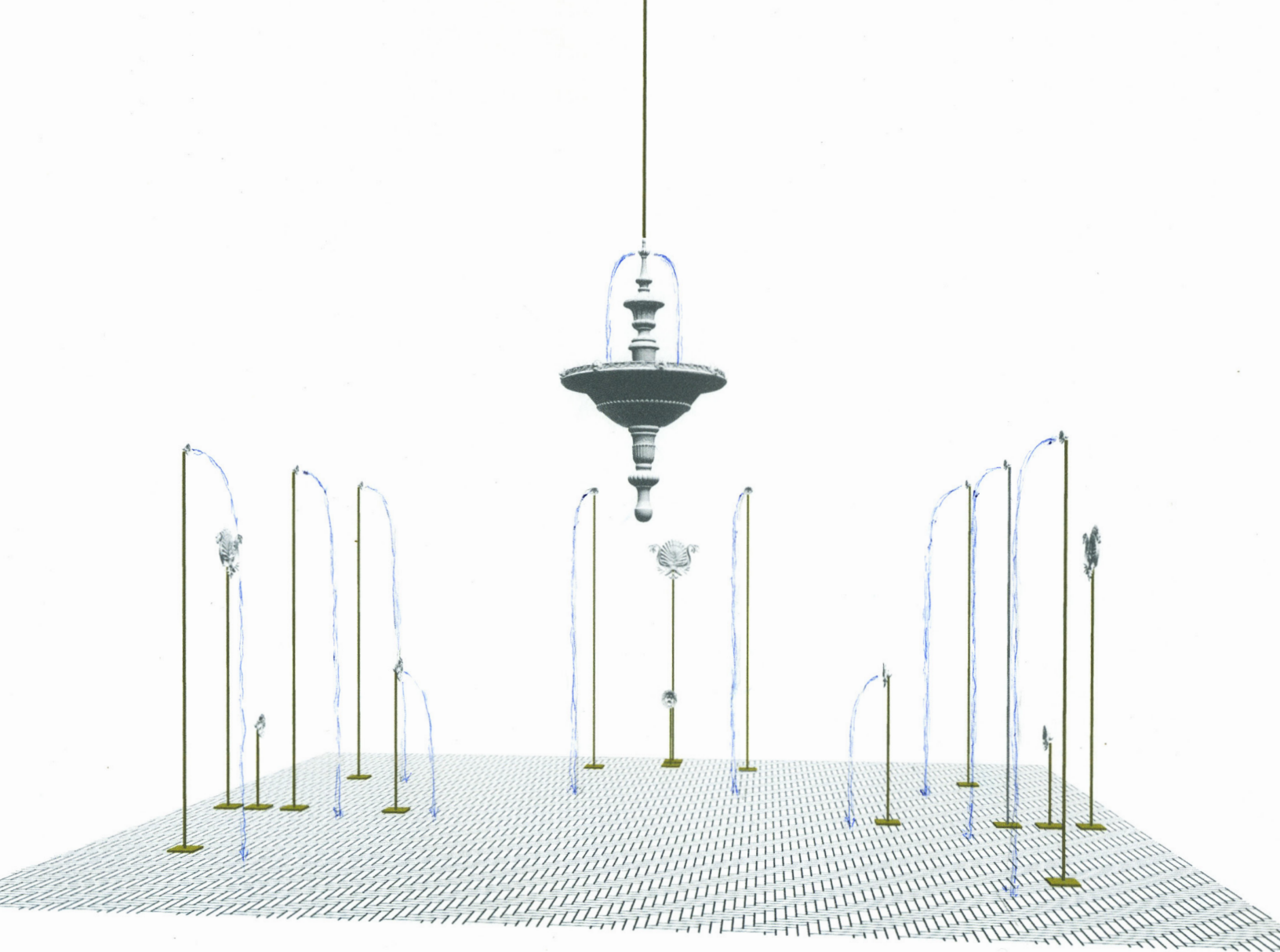


IT'S NOW EASY TO MISS THE SCHIFF FOUNTAIN while walking up Essex Street towards Hester. On the edge of Seward Park, it stands bare after having been denuded of its ornaments twice in its history. In 1894, nearing the end of the Gilded Age, Philanthropist Jacob Schiff donated the fountain to serve as a gathering place for the burgeoning, predominantly Jewish tenement population of the Lower East Side. Architect Arnold Brunner's design featured classically derived, bronze ornaments with lion and aquatic motifs as symbols of both power and regeneration. Inscribed in its granite column is Exodus XVII:VI, "and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink."

Vandalism and theft of the ornaments ensued shortly after the fountain's dedication. Once the municipal water was connected in 1895, the fountain was quickly plugged with banana peels, waste paper, dead cats and other refuse. In 1935, to protect the fountain from complete demolition and to make way for the construction of the subway line from Essex/Delancey Street to East Broadway, it was moved from Rutgers Square to its current location. By the 1990s, the fountain had again been stripped of all decoration leaving nothing but the lower dish, granite column and basin.



SCHIFF FOUNTAIN,
NEW YORK, N.Y.



For *Meeting Place*, the fountain's missing ornaments are remade and installed in an exhibition space in proximity to Seward Park. The original molds/casts from 1894 no longer exist, and the forms from the 1935 restoration are lost, as well. Using photographs provided by the NYC Parks Director of Arts and Antiquities, the ornaments for *Meeting Place* are digitally modeled and then 3D printed. From these prints, mask-like forms are cast in a thin, white resin, signaling a ghostly, transitional state before bronze casting. The casts and their decorative, brass stands, joined together and called *replacements*¹, each have a corresponding double that is missing from the fountain.

¹ A *replacement* is the white resin cast affixed to a brass stand. As they move through different contexts, each traces a dislocation from a particular point on the fountain while its stand grounds it in relationship to that place. The un-edited *replacements* circulate following the logic of the water fountain – flowing in an apparently everlasting supply.

The top basin and column *replacement* hangs like a chandelier from the ceiling of the gallery space, installed at the exact height to twin its missing counterpart on the fountain when it was intact. It spouts recirculating water. Mounted to individual stands, the heights of the shell and lion head *replacements* correspond to their original position on the fountain. Cast in negative form, they are displayed facing “outwards” so that the interior of the *replacement* is visible to the viewer. The ten smaller lion heads function as individual fountains. Arranged symmetrically, they spout water towards the center of the room. This water drains through a grate covering a false floor constructed in the space. The two lion heads that were formerly drinking fountains are also freestanding and spout recirculating water from receptacles located under the false floor. The negative space in the center of the gallery reflects its positive counterpart outside in the remains of the fountain in Seward Park.



With its freestanding and exploded structure, *Meeting Place* reveals a void in the shape of a fountain. Conjuring notions of prosperity and everlasting supply, the public fountain is a destination around which we gather. Located within an exhibition space, this inverted fountain offers a more unstable sense of place. The individual *replacements* may be seen as souvenirs for a philanthropic class, seemingly originating and circulating above the public for which they were intended. Transported from the first Gilded Age to the second, the idea of abundance underlying the *replacements* echoes in their infinitely reproduceable, cast forms. Yet each also puts forth a eulogy of sorts, indexing a specific and real place that is now lost and nowhere to be found.







Images

Page 1: untitled collage, 2022

Page 3: Photograph by Edwin Levick, National Geographic Creative; April 1916

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Page 5: Schematic drawing showing the water pattern of *Meeting Place*

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Page 7: *Replacement*, 2022

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Page 9: *Replacement* (detail), 2022

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