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TRULY EPHEMERAL

Meet the artists who draw in sand and snow

IDS

\$16.00 USD



Where People Gather

Maya Lin's work on the Confluence Project honors the past, and the project's new executive director reaches out to the public on behalf of the future.

BY JACQUELINE WHITE

Back in 1999, when Vancouver, Washington, nonprofit leader Jane Jacobsen first learned of a potential \$500,000 gift to fund a public art project commemorating the upcoming bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery Expedition, the bare outline of how to spend the money was immediately obvious. "Let's start in the West, where Lewis and Clark first saw the ocean," Jacobsen remembers thinking, "and look back." Rather than taking as its starting point St. Louis, the city from which the expedition set off in 1804, installations at multiple sites along the Columbia River in the Northwest could explore what "discovery" meant to the Native people who were already on the land, as well as for the land itself.

Given that the expedition paved the way for subsequent settlers who eventually forced the Native people onto reservations, Antone Minthorn, who was then chair of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation in Oregon, had been seriously questioning whether participating in a bicentennial "celebration" made any kind of sense at all. But after considering his tribe's success in restoring self-governance, as well as salmon and water to the Umatilla River which had been drained by irrigation, Minthorn came to see a bicentennial public art project as an opportunity to

"show the American people what the tribes have done on their own with their sovereignty."

Jacobsen, who eventually became the first executive director of what would become the Confluence Project, and Minthorn, who is currently the project's board chair, joined forces with the city manager of Long Beach, Washington, who was also casting about for a public art bicentennial project to mark the spot where Meriwether Lewis and William Clark finally saw the Pacific.

It turned out all three had set their sights on the same artist: Maya Lin, who is most famous for creating the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which Minthorn, a Marine Corps veteran, had once visited in Washington, D.C. Jacobsen had also seen *The Women's Table*, created by Lin to mark the advent of coeducation at her alma mater, Yale University, but which also pointedly acknowledges the previous absence of women.

FOUR DOWN, TWO SITES LEFT TO GO

Now, 15 years later, with four sites finished and two more scheduled for completion in the next two years, Jacobsen laughs at her initial budgetary naiveté. The total capital goal for the Confluence



TOP: The Cedar Circle at Cape Disappointment. Shown here in a 2006 in-progress photograph, the circle has since been completed. ABOVE LEFT: A "before" image of the original fish cleaning table at Cape Disappointment State Park, where the Confluence Project began. ABOVE RIGHT: An "after" image of the permanent fish table designed by Maya Lin. PREVIOUS PAGE: Maya Lin reviewing potential driftwood materials for her design at the Cape Disappointment Cedar Circle.

Project ballooned to \$38.17 million. (A seventh site, a research facility to investigate pollutants threatening fresh water, was put on hold after the economic downturn.) The funding sources break down approximately into thirds, divided between government sources, foundations, and private donors. The most expensive site, at \$12.7 million, includes Land Bridge, which crosses over a highway and reconnects the historic Klickitat Trail and Fort Vancouver with the Columbia River in Washington.

“We don’t want to tell you how to interpret the art, but we can tell you more about the history and the place where you are.”

– Colin Fogarty, Confluence Project

The other completed sites include a fish-cleaning table inscribed with the Chinook origin legend with a boardwalk and viewing platform at Cape Disappointment near Long Beach, Washington, on the Pacific Ocean; Bird Blind at Sandy River Delta, Oregon, which references the flora and fauna that would have been present 200 years ago; and Story Circles at Sacajawea State Park, Washington, featuring text from tribal stories, tribal elders, and Lewis and Clark’s journals exploring themes of salmon, people, trade, coyote story, geologic history, and time.

The next site on the docket is Listening Circle at Chief Timothy Park, Washington, sculpted out of a natural amphitheater.



LEFT: Celilo Falls is a sacred site for many Native peoples who came together there for fishing and gatherings. Lin has been in dialogue with tribes about an installation to mark this historic site, which was submerged by The Dalles Dam in 1957. RIGHT: After discussions with Maya Lin, Jones and Jones Architects designed the Land Bridge, recreating an important historic path from Fort Vancouver and the Klickitat Trail to the Columbia River, previously separated by a highway and railroad.

Depending on the osprey nesting migration season, creation of the earthwork, along with the full restoration of native grasses and wildflowers, will be finished in either fall 2014 or spring 2015. The final public art piece, scheduled for completion in spring 2016, is at Celilo Falls, Oregon, which was the oldest continuously inhabited community in North America until the falls, a bustling hub of commerce at one of the best fishing sites on the continent, were submerged by the construction of The Dalles Dam.

Minthorn recalls fishing at Celilo Falls in 1956, the last year that Native fishers speared the plentiful salmon or caught them in dip nets. “Tribes came from all over. That’s what a confluence is,” he says, “where people gather, where they work and trade.”

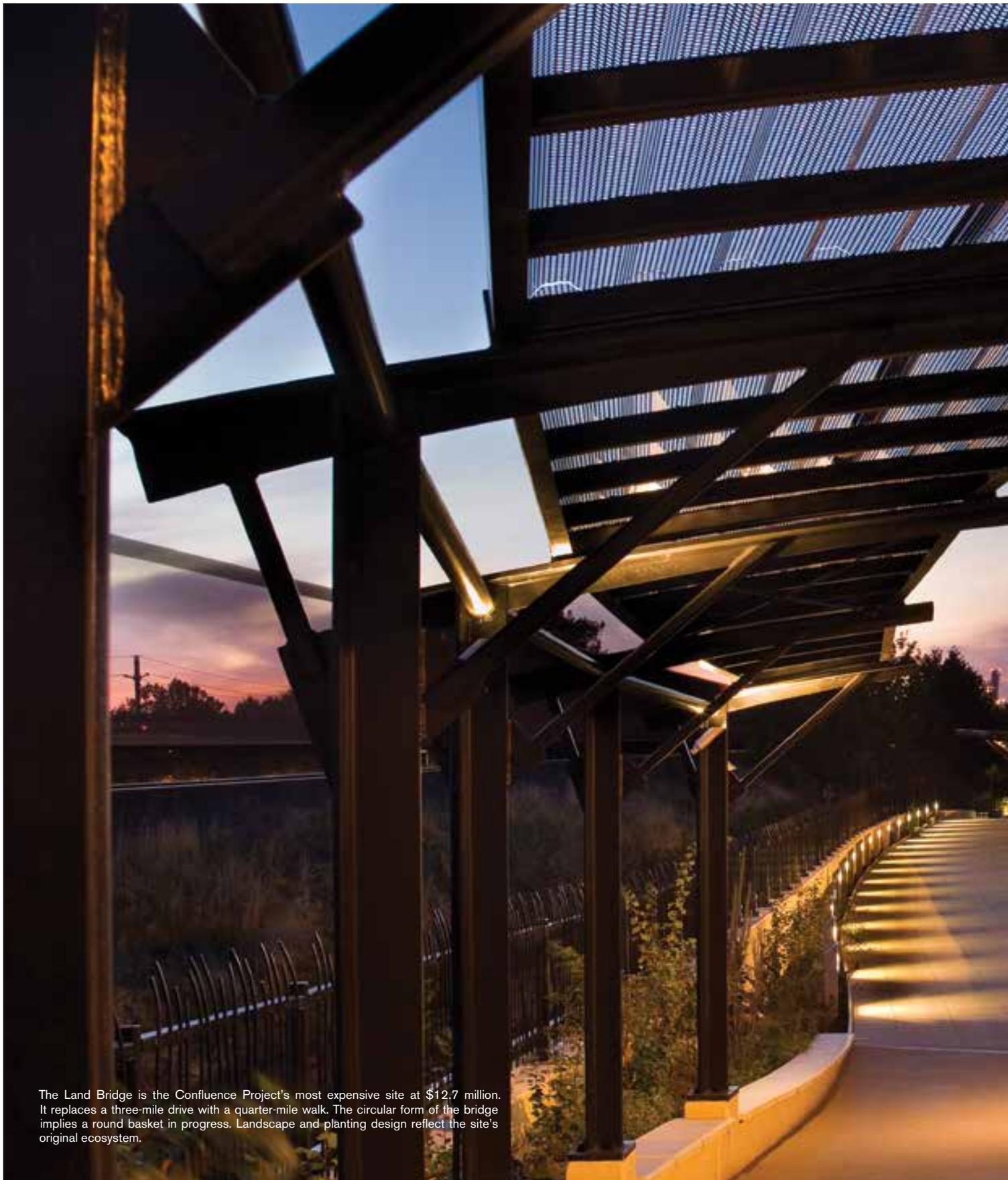
But now what used to be a dramatic torrent is a slack pool of water—and a place of such deep hurt for Native people that even marking the place with an artwork was initially deemed too painful. The tribes eventually reconsidered: Lin’s plans call for a graceful walkway that recalls the wooden scaffolding once built by the Native fishers and which ends overlooking what had once been the rushing waters.

A SEVEN-GENERATION PERSPECTIVE

Now, with the end of the construction phase in view, the ambitious Confluence Project, with sites spanning nearly 400 miles along the Columbia River, is facing an issue that confounds many public art projects after their dedication ceremonies: Who will steward the art from now on?

Enter the Confluence Project’s new executive director, Colin Fogarty, who will be guiding the organization as it considers not just how to maintain the installations, but how to create opportunities for the public to interact with them. A self-described “history nerd,” Fogarty describes his previous award-winning journalism career as “telling stories on the radio and the web,” which he sees as apt preparation for his new task, transitioning the Confluence





The Land Bridge is the Confluence Project's most expensive site at \$12.7 million. It replaces a three-mile drive with a quarter-mile walk. The circular form of the bridge implies a round basket in progress. Landscape and planting design reflect the site's original ecosystem.

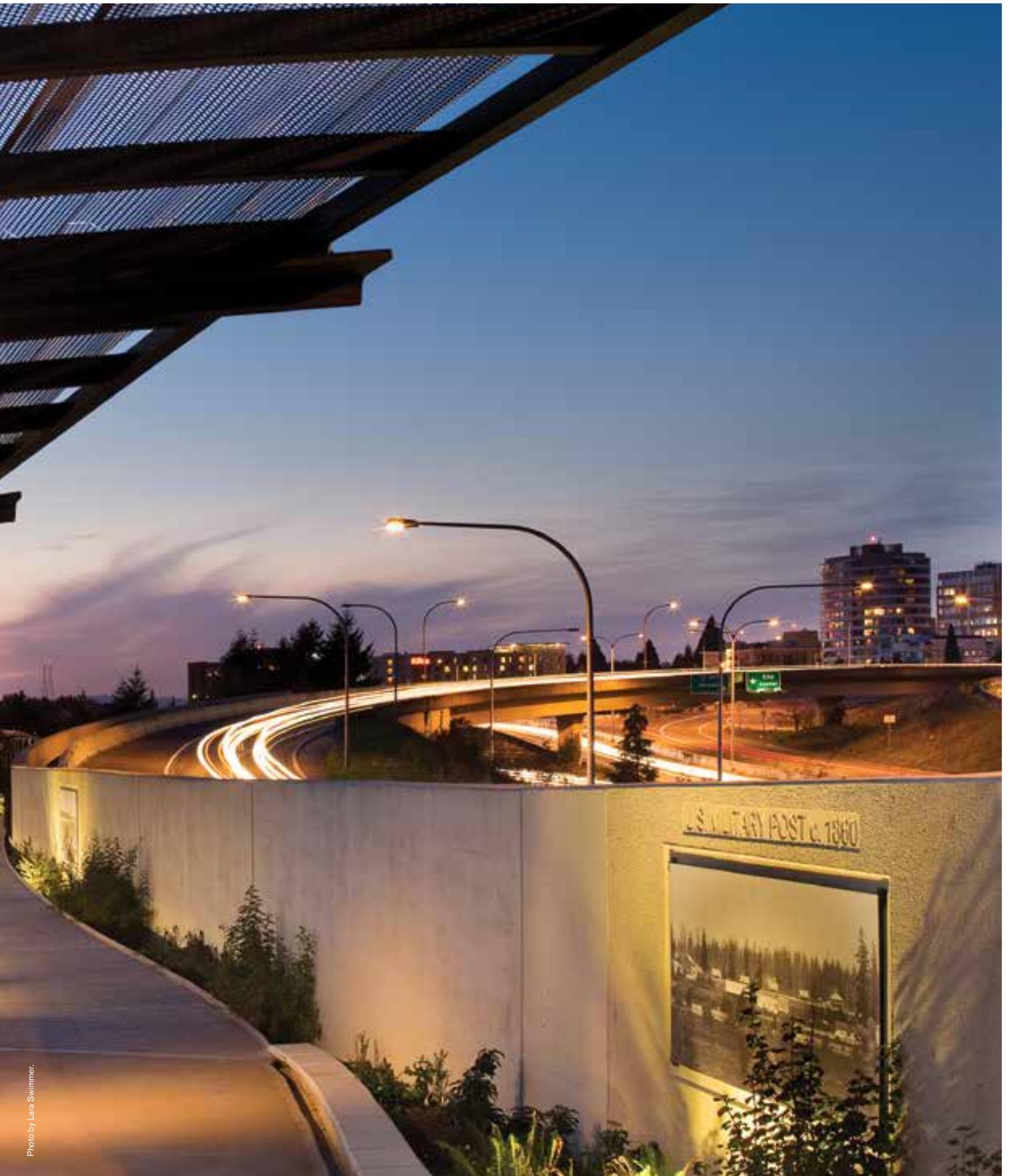


Photo by Lara Swimmer.

ON LOCATION

Project to more of a public media organization, in order to “tell stories in the landscape.”

“We can transform the ‘heritage experience,’” Fogarty says, describing the potential for the public art sites to become “museums without walls.” Yet Fogarty makes a careful distinction: “We don’t want to tell you how to interpret the art, but we can tell you more about the history and the place where you are.” To that end, Fogarty will be leading the effort to revamp the Confluence Project’s website so that visitors can access “a rich digital experience” on mobile hand-held devices at each of the six public art installations.

“The tribes have a presence, a culture, a history, and a story that needs to be understood,” says Minthorn. “But the strategy behind the Confluence Project also looks to the future through the seven generations to consider the natural resources of the region and Mother Earth, so that the children that are yet to come will see that their world will be made better for them.”

JACQUELINE WHITE is a Minneapolis writer.



ABOVE: Maya Lin with Nez Perce elder Horace Axtell at a blessing ceremony at Chief Timony Park. RIGHT: Each slat of the Bird Blind at the Sandy River Delta is carved with the names of birds and animals noted by Lewis and Clark.

