

# Columbia University

IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE PLANNING AND PRESERVATION

AVERY HALL

Ms. Kea Tawana  
The New Ark  
Newark  
N. J.

Dear Ms. Tawana,

I am writing to endorse your design of the New Ark as a symbolic monument of public importance, whose design is worthy of public support as a centerpiece of the reconstruction of the new neighbourhood.

I would compare your design for the Ark to the Statue of Liberty. No one would suggest that the Statue of Liberty should conform to housing codes. Everyone recognises that the Statue of Liberty is not a habitation, that it is a symbolic monument of national and international importance which encapsulates important popular and cultural myths. ~~and that~~ It transcends both local jurisdiction and the limitations of time, it speaks through the generations. Everyone also recognised that the Statue of Liberty might also become an "eyesore" during its reconstruction for the bi-centennial, but the symbolic quality of monument made it possible to tolerate this temporary condition.

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I have visited the site, inspected the Ark and spoken to Ms. Tawana about her design and intentions. It is clear that the Ark is conceived both as a monument and as a ship, neither of which categories are covered by local ordinances. It is its design as a ship which raises the issue of public symbolism and makes comparison with the Statue of Liberty possible.

The Ark qualifies as a public monument on a number of important grounds. Like the Statue of Liberty or the Watts Towers in Los Angeles, the Ark is a symbol of personal freedom in the U.S.A, where every one, no matter what their social station, is protected by law and equal under the constitution. The rights and freedom of the individual are given a public expression through the <sup>artistic</sup> works of individuals. The <sup>design of the</sup> Statue of Liberty was a gift by the artist to the public. The Watts Towers were also the product of individual initiative. The <sup>design of the</sup> Ark is also a public and symbolic gift to the people of Newark on the part of its designer.

The construction of the Ark is also comparable to the Statue of Liberty and the Watts Towers. Both of these public monuments were designed as bricolages, assemblies of a variety of different technologies, some old, some new. The Statue of Liberty clads a cast iron frame in hand beaten copper sheets. <sup>The</sup> Watts Towers were created on a metal frame, with a ceramic skin of broken pots, cast into decorative patterns as in Gaudi's work in Barcelona. The Ark

(2)

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has a wooden frame, hand crafted from beams taken from demolished buildings in Newark's Central ward. This is a unique and deeply symbolic structure. It is proposed to clad this frame in plywood and then to add a further layer of diagonal tongued & grooved boarding to form the monumental hull of the vessel. Painted with marine paints this hull would form a unique poetic form in the landscape of Newark, both by its symbolic form and by its giant scale.

Besides construction, the Ark is also comparable to the Statue of Liberty in terms of its poetic intention. Like the Statue of Liberty, or Disney's Magic Kingdom, it makes a bricolage of disparate materials and technologies to create a poetic object which speaks to the popular imagination. The Magic Kingdom draws on myths and symbols from western culture through the ages to create a fantasy land for its millions of visitors. Ms. Tawana's Ark draws on a similar range of myths and symbols from the Judaic-Christian tradition in the design of its interior. This interior creates for its visitors a fantasy itinerary through chapels, ward rooms, museums of industry and culture etc, which deepen the <sup>meaning of</sup> exterior symbolic hull and project the visitor into the history of Newark, the source of many construction materials, as well as into a symbolic examination of American cultural history. The symbolic displays at the base of the Statue of Liberty perform a similar function. I believe that the interior of the Ark could be developed into a fascinating and powerful itinerary through a series of highly symbolic rooms.

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Ms Tawana's Ark thus operates in a highly specialized and highly privileged, symbolic realm. It is not an ordinary structure, but a poetic and symbolic monument like the Statue of Liberty. It may be seen as a symbolic expression of American freedom, a poetic bricolage of fragments from Newark's past or as a symbolic fantasy of Newark's future, reaching deep into the popular imagination for its themes and mythology.

In my judgement the City Council is very ill advised to proceed with injunctions against this monumental and symbolic structure. They would be far better advised to bring in consultants to help design a proper setting for Ms. Tawana's Ark. The national and international recognition of the symbolic power of the Ark's imagery should inspire the Council to create a parklike setting, with the Ark as the symbolic centerpiece of the new neighbourhood. Given the opportunities of the site and the potential of the Ark to attract visitors, the City should consider the creation of a new monumental setting, perhaps using a nearby derelict church as a visitor centre, with tourist services, retail outlets, hotel or motel accommodation, as well as visitor parking, surrounding the <sup>symbolic</sup> magnet of the Ark.

(4)

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I believe that the design of the Ark, its unique poetic form and deep symbolism, ~~make~~ present the city with a unique opportunity to revitalize a new neighbourhood. If the City of Newark was offered the Statue of Liberty today, perhaps the Council might refuse it because while in construction it <sup>also</sup> was an eyesore. Perhaps, also, its public symbolism would be considered unusual <sup>and</sup> threatening. The design of the Ark, like the Statue of Liberty, is deeply symbolic and challenging. This is precisely its power and attraction. The design encapsulates dream and fantasy, myth and eternal truths. I consider it a unique achievement, very much worthy of public support. I would propose the Ark become the centrepiece of the reconstruction of the new neighbourhood.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr David Graham-Shane

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