Hirshhorn Museum: Public Spirit

Hirshhorn, Ontario: A Modern Utopia in the Wilderness of Canada

Offset on paper, 12 pages, 20.2 x 13.8 cm

Published for *Terence Gower: Public Spirit* at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC, 2008

This exhibition brochure takes the form of a promotional prospectus for Hirshhorn, a town that was planned for a wilderness site in western Ontario in 1955, but was never built.

Related Project: Public Spirit

directions

Terence Gower, Public Spirit: The Hirshhorn Project

Related Programs

In Conversation
November 7, 12:30 pm, Ring Auditorium

Artist Terence Gower with Curator Anne Ellegood discuss the issues raised by the exhibition

Friday Gallery Talks
12:30 pm, Meet at the Information Desk

February 13
Curator Anne Ellegood

March 6
Architect Diane Cho

March 20
Curatorial Assistant Al Miner

For more information, visit **hirshhorn.si.edu**

hirshhorn

Directions: Terence Gower, Public Spirit: The Hirshhorn Project is made possible in part by Trellis Fund and the Peter Norton Family Foundation.

The artist wishes to thank the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, the Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship program, and Sticky Pictures for their support of this project.

Smithsonian
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

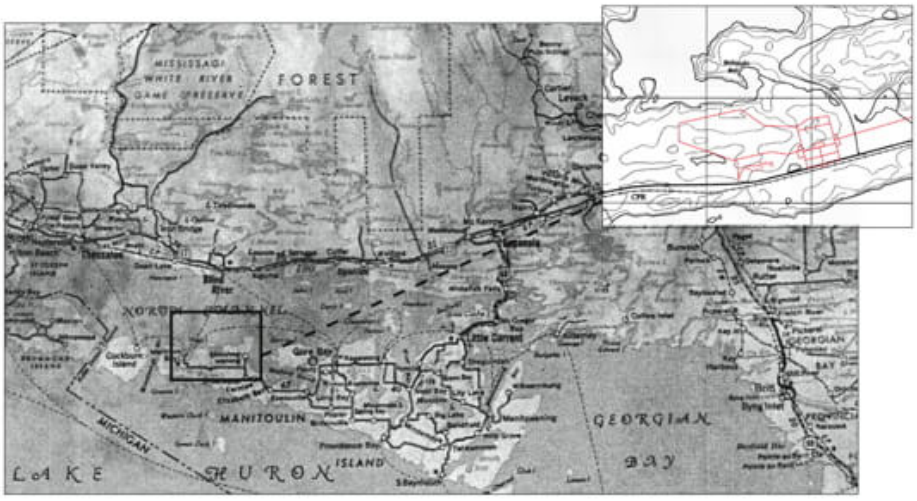
HIRSHHORN, ONTARIO

A Modern Utopia in the Wilderness of Canada

WELCOME TO HIRSHHORN, ONTARIO

Hirshhorn is located between Sault Saint Marie and Sudbury, Ontario, a stone's throw from the beaches of Lake Huron. This model town is named after Joseph Hirshhorn, who came to the region in 1953 to search for the uranium that made the area so famous. It is Mr. Hirshhorn's uranium mines (with names like Pronto, Pater, and Peach) that brought prosperity to this beautiful corner of Canada. In fact, so many men and women came to work at these mines that a new town had to be built. It is a town like no other—a town planned around culture and aesthetic harmony.

The man who conceived of this town is, of course, Joseph Hirshhorn. But his contribution did not end there, for it is Mr. Hirshhorn who purchased the land and financed the construction of the town's roads, parks, and public buildings, its school, concert hall, and art museum. Hirshhorn, Ontario, would never have been realized without the boundless public spirit of its founder.



Map showing the location of Hirshhorn, Ontario

The Financial Post

Vol. XLIX — Member of Audit Bureau of Circulations — Publication Office: Toronto, July 30, 1955 — Twenty Cents an issue, Six Dollars a Year — No. 31

Picasso Finds New Home In Ontario Wilderness

Millionaire Mine-Maker Hirshhorn Plans $35 Million Town and Art Centre

This Is Hirshhorn's Dream Town

SUDBURY

SAULT STE. MARIE

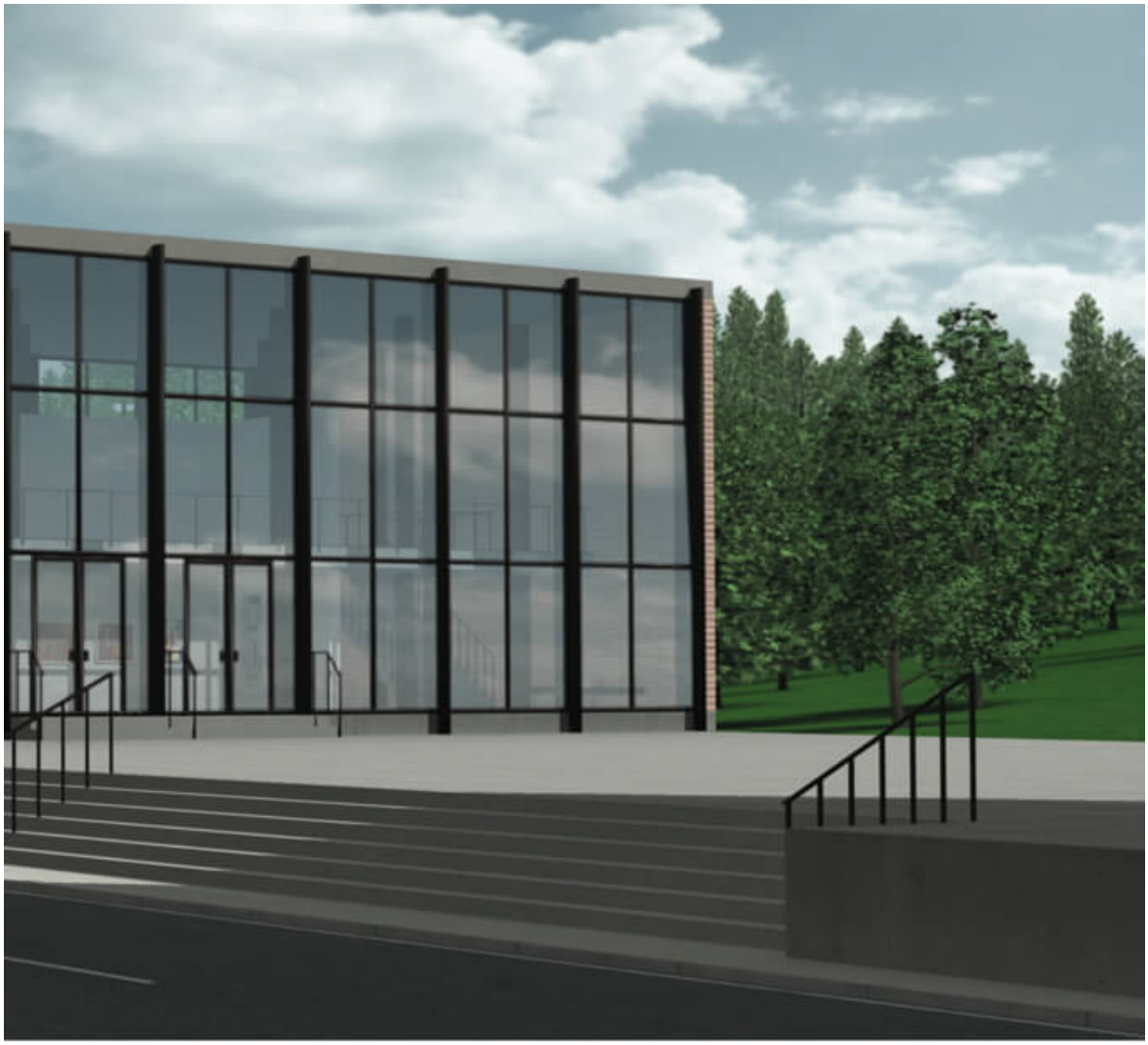
Above, clockwise from top: *Financial Post*, July 30, 1955; view of the West Plaza showing library and concert hall; plan of Hirshhorn town center; opposite: the Hirshhorn offices with shopping center in foreground

Hirshhorn, Ontario, is laid out along two principal axes, one running north from Hirshhorn Station to the Central Plaza, and a second running from the West Plaza to the public school across town. The parks and public squares are dotted with old-growth trees whose prior claim to this landscape has been respected.

The West Plaza is fronted by the public library, the concert hall, and the headquarters of the *Hirshhorn Daily News.* Across the street, you will find the elegant Hirshhorn Hotel.

A ten-story office tower soars over the town's main intersection. When seen from afar, the building rises out of the landscape, acting as a beacon. This tower houses the head offices of Joseph Hirshhorn's mining enterprise. But this is by no means a single industry town: allotments just outside the city center are occupied by a range of industries, from light manufacturing to warehousing and shipping.

IRISH CORN MUSEUM



The Hirshhorn Museum is situated across the Central Plaza from the office tower. It is the true heart of Hirshhorn, Ontario, in that it celebrates its founder's great passion: contemporary art. The museum collection comprises works by leading international artists of our day. The permanent exhibition *Abstract Art from the Hirshhorn Collection* features works by avant-garde masters Victor Vasarely, Irene Rice Pereira, Vaclav Vytlacil, and many others.

Above: The Hirshhorn Museum; opposite, left to right: Victor Vasarely's *Mindanao*, 1953; Irene Rice Pereira's *Bright Depths*, 1950; and Vaclav Vytlacil's *Machine Abstraction*, 1936. All works are from the Hirshhorn's collection.

Above: Hirshhorn Hotel; below: Hirshhorn Public School

The town also prides itself on its public amenities. The municipal buildings—fire and police stations, clerk's office, and clinic—stand opposite the town's state-of-the-art public school, where the youth of Hirshhorn are educated by the best teachers. Physical fitness is also a priority, and students are encouraged to take advantage of the natural setting of the town, whether it be hiking in the jack-pine forest or swimming in nearby Lake Lauzon.

Evening view of Hirshhorn's public housing complex

The Hirshhorn community places special emphasis on mental health. The Mental Hygiene Center, just across the street from Hirshhorn Public School, attracts leaders in the field of psychotherapy to its research and training programs.

Additionally, affordable public housing is situated just outside the town center, where twelve-family apartment buildings dot the landscape, conveying an air of order and harmony. Individual apartments are furnished with all the modern conveniences. Collective units like these reduce the effects of sprawl on the town's pristine natural environment.

We hope you will visit Hirshhorn, Ontario. This well planned community is easy to find: it stands proudly at the crossroads of private enterprise and public spirit.

Published on the occasion of Canadian artist Terence Gower's *Directions* project, this brochure and the accompanying video take the form of fictional prospectuses for the town of Hirshhorn, Ontario. This town was never built, but great effort was put into its conceptualization and planning by Joseph Hirshhorn, who left a model, plans, letters, and press statements about his intentions for its design and function.

The materials related to this little-known project were uncovered by Gower during intensive research last year as a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellow. Gower became intrigued when he learned that when Joseph Hirshhorn set out to create a home for his collection, long before he considered Washington, DC, he had planned to build not just a museum, but an entire town in the Canadian wilderness. The town, designed by architect Philip Johnson as a model for modern living, was structured around an arts center and according to the latest principles of urban planning.

While Gower presents a great deal of factual information in the form of archival materials, other aspects of the installation blur the boundary between archive and art. His animated video, sculptures of the museum and office tower, and texts for this brochure and the display cases interpret and embellish his findings, adding fictional elements and conjecture, as well as a specific formal sensibility about what the town of Hirshhorn, Ontario, would have looked like.

Mid-twentieth-century modernist architecture was explicitly connected to an ideology of social progress. While Hirshhorn, Ontario, would have been funded by a private source, it was very much intended for the public good. This effort to create symbiosis between private and public and to provide a positive working environment and cultural life for the working classes on the part of private industry is a fascinating ideological subtext to the exhibition and constitutes the "public spirit" that informs any ambitious social project. The artist's presentation of the town, with its promotion of civic harmony and exaggeratedly lush surroundings, may inspire regret at the demise of the project. And yet, had Hirshhorn, Ontario, been realized, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden as it stands today on the National Mall would not exist.

Anne Ellegood, Curator