STUDIO DESIGN THESIS

Somewhere within the grandeur of America's national parks, the spectacle of place meets the character and complexity of a people. Biscayne National Park is as unique as it is universal. Its ambiguous marine boundaries parallel the vague demographic limits of a city brimming with cacophonous diversity. Miami, like its national park, wears the raw and the refined with equal aplomb. Its natural world harbors its splendor with great subtlety and quiet strength, as much as it bears witness to the powerful transformations set in motion by the forces, the actions and the infrastructures that surround and impact it directly.

The Atlas Mar: Reimagining Biscayne Bay studio re-envisions the future of Biscayne National Park by conceiving it as a place where much of our 21st century relationship with the natural world can be re-examined. As a paradigm for the new national park, the studio will explore how the story of the park can be revealed to its visitors, as much as how its visitors are an implicit part of that story. The meaning and impact of immersion within the natural systems of the park will question to what extent and in what manner the physical immersion of a visitor is necessary. What does it mean to be a "visitor" to Biscayne National Park? To what degree is physical and haptic access to the environment necessary in order to develop attitudes about it, reverence for place, engagement? Is it not more sustainable to be decoupled from physical contact in order to preserve and protect? Or, is the very notion of sustainability one of necessary interdependence, even if it means a weakening of the fabric that connects observer and observed?
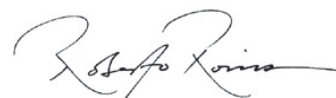
The studio's ambitions therefore include robust mapping and cataloguing exercises aimed at critically situating the user within the context of Biscayne National Park's natural environment. These will parallel numerous site visits. The exercises will help create a healthy tension between a rational understanding of the national park and a poetic interpretation of its ineffable qualities. Developing an ordering system of found objects, for example, will serve as the initial vehicle for developing a design language that will later have to negotiate concrete site constraints and a series of qualitative impressions that will influence tangible design proposals. The process will give the studio a methodology with which to explore the idea of objective observation and determine to what extent and via what means it is possible disengage in order to understand, empower, and initiate the design process.

Whereas Biscayne Bay harbors the untold richness of a vast ecosystem, it also embodies the tension between stewardship and dependence on the environment. Technology provides us with ever more powerful tools with which to understand these tensions, even if its boundless promise often occludes an understanding of its limits. The need for technology to play a significant role in the 21st century national park is a given. What the studio will question is how a new generation of park design will be able to engage technology in a way that acknowledges its limits and reinforces the attributes of a national park that transcends technology. What does it mean to enhance the park experience with technology, for instance, rather than to relinquish the experience to a technologically-mediated fanfare? The studio will therefore engage the voices of poets and artists as a counterpoint that explores the mythopoetic side of Biscayne Bay and the national parks as a whole. We have plenty of

tools that influence the design process from a quantitative, technologically-driven approach, and these will be in evidence in the studio's design process that will produce a series of project atlases throughout. We want to give voice, however, to the ineffable and the non-quantitative, and have that be an important part of the design process. We will explore the mythopoetic as much as the datapoetic–examining the qualitative as much as the quantitive–and complementing our Atlas Mar with both.

Because the marine nature of Biscayne National Park to a great extent precludes clearly outlining all of its boundaries, design must play a critical role in embracing and tempering this ambiguity as an opportunity to reinforce larger design ideas. The studio's ambitions and exercises will therefore look at the idea of location, wayfinding, and navigation, as an important part of the design process and how these respond to the needs of the park's various constituencies. Whereas technology has largely erased the need to develop an intuitive geospatial awareness (we can pinpoint our location to within feet without much technological effort), it calls into question what impact it has on our connection with the landscape itself. The ability to identify ecological patterns that are driven by location, topography, and context, are muddied in the process, notwithstanding our ability to summon our location electronically, on-demand. To what extent should we modulate this experience in a national park? How should wayfinding change when it responds to a broad and diverse demographic that includes both the local and the non-local?

The Atlas Mar: Reimagining Biscayne Bay studio will give us a context with which to reconcile the timeless grandeur of Biscayne National Park with the needs and questions of the 21st century. The design process will serve as a model for other national parks in that the preoccupations of park design in the new century are remarkably consistent across geographies and can all be effectively addressed by the six draft principles of Reverence for place, Engagement of all people, Expansion beyond traditional boundaries, Advancement of sustainability, Informed decision-making, and An integrated research, planning, design, and review process. Biscayne National Park embodies an identity that spans across multiple and non-traditional demographic groups perhaps more than any other national park. As such, it serves as an important paradigm, since it likely reflects the changing nature of users across the country. In many ways, national parks are considered the last example of a pure and timeless natural world whose beauty is profoundly tied to the American identity. Biscayne National Park is no different, though it reflects the changing nature of this very identity and as such gives us an opportunity to envision how it should change and in what ways it should remain the same.

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