



Spirit House

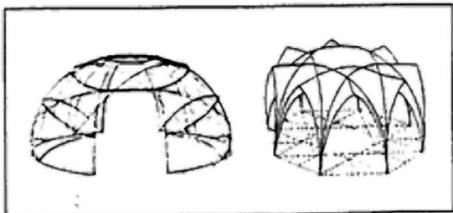
Public Spaces for Private Thought

Two projects in Brooklyn by environmental sculptor Hera (she renamed herself after the Ancient Greek goddess) could help redeem the bad rep public art has recently acquired (P/A, April 1985, p. 29). Vaulted Arbor was installed in 1984 at the Glenwood Houses project in the Carnarsie section, while Spirit House will occupy Cadman Plaza, a small park in Brooklyn Heights, until late fall, when it will be transferred to a permanent site at Laumeier Sculpture Park in St. Louis. Both works were sponsored by the Brooklyn Botanical Garden and funded by New York State and City Agencies.

The pieces are constructed of galvanized steel tubing and are intended to serve as arbor frameworks. Each shape has its precedent; Vaulted Arbor, octagonal in shape with pointed arches and a central dome, adapts cathedral elements. Spirit House, on the site of an old Marewiewick Indian trail, is a beehive shape, like a wigwam. When the frames are finally covered with vegetation, the works will become outdoor rooms. Vaulted Arch has been planted with four different flowering vines and English ivy to ensure thick foliage all year. Spirit House is currently bare, its morning glory vines having been trampled into the ground by local children who enthusiastically use the piece as a jungle gym.

Hera had specific social as well as aesthetic agendas in mind for each piece when she designed them. The residents of Glenwood Houses are mainly elderly; Vaulted Arbor is intended to encourage their participation, as gardeners and occupants, in the life of the work. Spirit House arouses a sense of history, recognizing the original inhabitants of the landscape, who are seldom officially acknowledged by the current residents.

These works combine a number of qualities: meditative space, nostalgic allusions to formal 19th-Century garden arbors, the pure pleasure of being outdoors, and the serenity of formal geometry. They are not just to gaze at, but to walk through, stand in, climb on, smell, touch, and—if only metaphorically—to inhabit. *Joanna Wissinger* ■



Spirit House and Vaulted Arbor