

Presentation of the artist and designer Michael Singer's work.

As part of the inauguration of the termination of the workshop The Edge, arranged by Michael Singer, Jason Bregman and Joachim Hamou and hosted by Anette Holmberg, leader of the Yard Gallery at Refshaleøen. March 25 2012.

For many of my colleagues inside and outside Denmark and myself it was really very fascinating to discover that, already by the late 1960s, the innovative and forceful artist Michael Singer had demonstrated - in his installations and in his inventive outdoor and indoors sculptures - a great concern for the environmental consequences of the destruction of nature by modern development. And done in a very artistically convincing way. Art as process and experience became characteristic of his creative practice.

He is among the seminal figures of the “Environmental Art Movement” working in the 1970s in remote delicate, natural area like the Everglades, threatened Long Island salt-water marshes, as well as the bogs and forests of New England. His intention was, he emphasizes, that the projects should appear “as if they were nature’s own work.”

He considers art as the process and experience of ritual interaction. It is carried out in a precise and balanced visual dialogue with the conditions found at the locality - as seen in *First Gate Ritual Series 4 /79* (1979).



This work is made of bamboo and phragmites and has been placed in DeWeese Park, Dayton, City Beautiful Council, Ohio. The ritual element of his artistic work processes out in nature is later carried over to his indoor sculptures, for example *Cloud Hands Ritual Series 80-81* (1980-81) in the collection at Louisiana Museum, Humlebæk, Denmark.



Michael Singer has chosen the term “ritual” because his artistic work builds bridges between nature and culture, and is created in a deep respect for nature and its forces. Diane Waldman, Former Associate Director of the Guggenheim Museum and curator of his one-man exhibition there, has correctly stated in 1984 “through his arresting evocative sculptures and drawings Michael Singer gives significance and form to both life and art.”¹ Singer’s drawings, collages on paper and sculptures are first and foremost "about nature itself and about Man's relationship with nature". They are born by the attempt to "coexist with nature, metaphorically and quite literally."²

The continuous development in Singer's production up to this day with its many interconnected byways is primarily visible in his drawings and sculptures. Categories of form

¹ Diane Waldman, "Michael Singer", article in the catalogue to the exhibition *Michael Singer*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1984, p .24.

² Bebjamin Forgey, "Art out of nature which is about nothing but nature", *Smithsonian*, January 1978, vol. 8, nr. 10, p. 69.

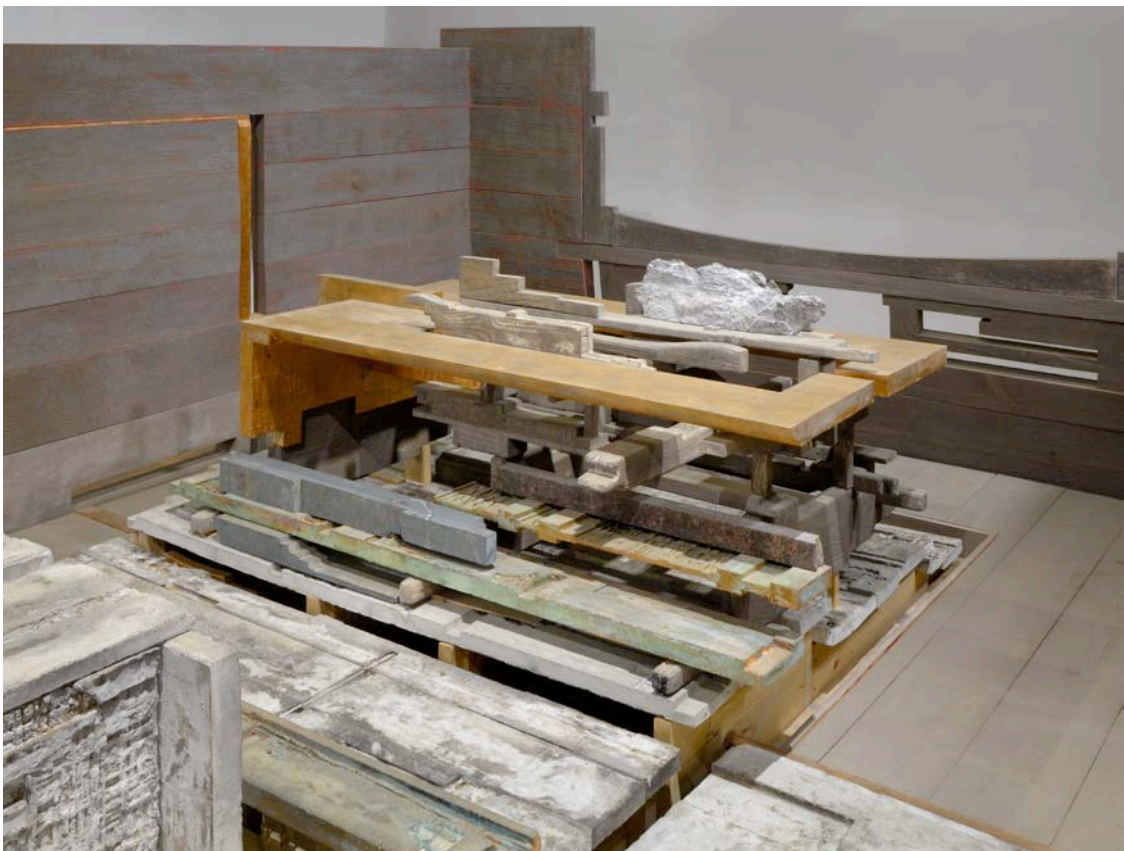
and principles of composition found in the various collages on paper become transformed to the three-dimensional sculptural space.



In the collage *Ritual Series Retellings 94* (1994) one can see sketches for the very different forms and the rich textures in the sculpture *Ritual Series. Retellings* (1999-2010), “which has been in process for most of the past 20 years.”



The wood and the stones tell and retell the story from Michael Singer's homeland in Vermont. But its system of interrelationships, its many openings and its complexity is visualization of our surrounding world and of our folded space.



There is here and elsewhere in Michael Singer's works a visual dialogue between the local and the global.

And there is still a closer relationship between this sculpture and Michael Singer's architecture, especially with *Parker Huber House* (1998) Brattieboro, Vermont ³.



Since the late 1980s Michael Singer's often large projects outside the realm of galleries and museums are also well recognized and distinguished for their creative force and innovative practices addressing such diverse areas as public art, architecture, landscape and infrastructure along with urban planning and policy.

Many of his impressive projects are the collaborative work of the multifaceted *Michael Singer Studio* and his interdisciplinary team of environmental planners, naturalists, engineers, scientists, social anthropologists, historians, economists and other professionals collaboratively working to propose and realize innovative environmental, social, political and economic solutions. He has two studio project managers: Jason Bregman in the Studio in Florida and Jonathan Ferguson in the Studio in Vermont in the North.

Singer has created the structure of his integrated sculptural gardens from many viewpoints, watching nature's own rhythm, responding to diverse environmental conditions. The

³ See Else Marie Bukdahl, *The re-enchantment of nature and urban space, Michael Singer projects in art, design and environmental regeneration*, Utzon Center, Aalborg, p.65, fig.10. ([Www.utzoncenter.dk](http://www.utzoncenter.dk)), 2011, p. 65.

variations in the rhythms and in the formation of spaces within his gardens are endless. Together with the colors and fragrance of flowers, the flowing water and the many green plants and trees, an intense atmosphere has been created that draws us into a magical sphere and stimulates us to experience with the entire body and all its senses.



In *Woodland Garden* Wellesley College (1990-1992), Michael Singer has planted over hundred native trees to support the natural environment and the contemplative character of the site. The director of Wellesley College has observed, “that by integrating sculpture within

actual built form in a unified design within a natural landscape, a complex web of visual and conceptual associations is created.”

In *Eco Tarium* - New England Science Centre (1996-2000) Worcester, Massachusetts - the “Emerging Garden” and the “Four Season Water Wall” are the focus of the central courtyard. The garden at one season is in summer bloom and in the winter season it embraces the snow and ice. The summer season's water wall gently flowing down its patterned grid in winter becomes an impressive ice sculpture.



In 1994 nature took over the 650 square meters *Concourse C, Denver International Airport*, Colorado and transformed an anonymous airport in a dramatic and evocative way.



Michael Singer created a very large indoor garden from a disused area. There is, on the whole, a multitude of intense connections between the non-linear natural growth elements and the more linear structures in the sculptural forms. A hidden watering system ensures the garden is always fresh and green. Singer has remarked that “he took what would have been an usually antiseptic airport zone, made it smell, made it wet, and made it grow; and gave life that you don't get in places like a airport.”

There are probably not many architects, if any at all, who dream of building a waste transfer and recycling enter. Nevertheless, the Phoenix Arts Commission selected two artists - Michael Singer and Linnea Glatt - to finalize the architectural concept for the design of *Solid Waste Transfer and Recycling Center* (1989-1993) Phoenix, Arizona.



They have rotated the main building's orientation on the site to reduce bad smell and noise. They have also added an education centre. The two artists have likewise arranged for a colorful cover of desert vegetation for the inviting, elevated terraced landscape, which separates visiting pedestrians from the truck traffic below. Singer and Glatt have in fact created a beautiful amphitheater where groups of school children and other visitors have direct views of much of the active sorting machinery and other processes. There is no doubt that Singer and Glatt created something quite unique - a recycling centre that have both aesthetic qualities and teach us something about a world we know little about and they have at the same time solved the environmental problems in a surprising and new way.

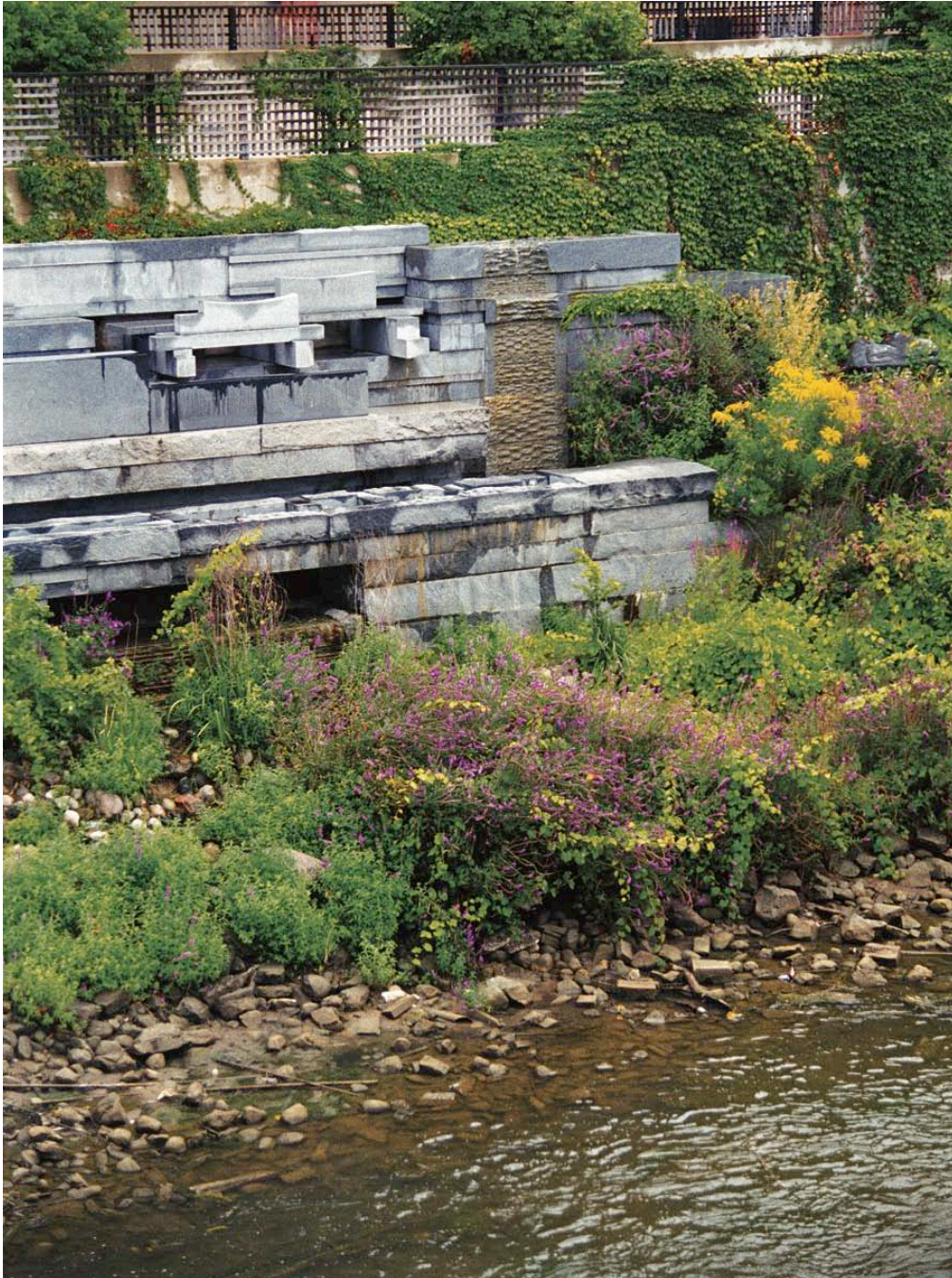


The *TGE Cogeneration Power Facility* (2002) has green roofs, greenhouses and planted terraces. They create an artistically formed green environment, which also works as a system to collect and filter on-site storm water. The main facility building is designed with a transparent, colored, textured skin to break up the monolithic mass and facades typical of such facilities. The climbing and cascading plants also soften and even make the facades beautiful. The environmental, functional and aesthetic requirements are united in an almost organic artistic way.

Michael Singer demonstrates through his impressive work on infrastructure - what is also evident in his evocative drawings, sculptures and gardens - that the connectedness of human systems to the environment and natural systems is, again, essential to our lives. U.S.A. infrastructure policy expert Nancy Rutledge Connery has stated that the *Michael Singer Studio* has succeeded in transforming big facilities “into enthralling and fully functional works of art that strengthen adjoining neighborhoods and ecosystems.”⁴

Michael Singer has created many impressive, ecological and original waterfronts. *Grand Rapids Riverwalk Floodwall* (1988-95) Grand Rapids, Michigan, is a project for a portion of the Grand River in Grand Rapids.

⁴ *Infrastructure and Community. How can we live with what sustains us?* Published by Environmental Defense and Michael Singer Studio, 2007, p. 39.

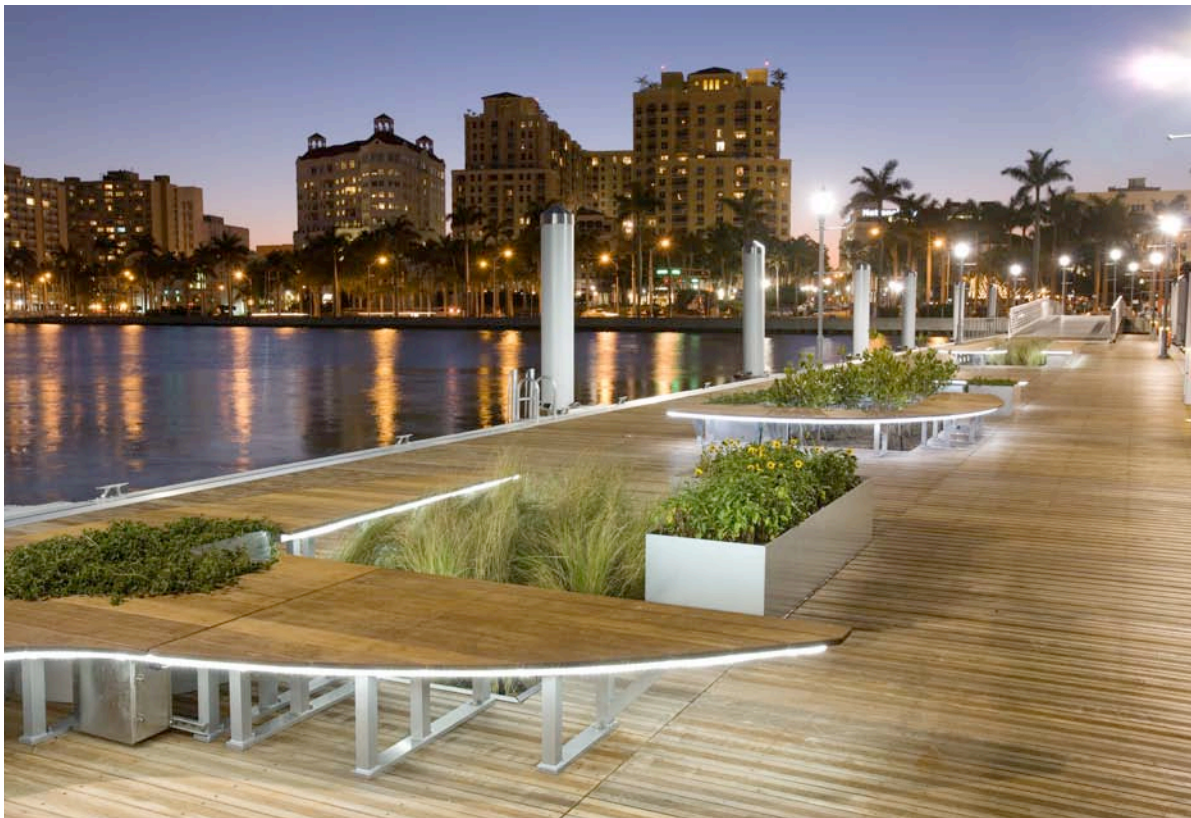


Michael Singer has accentuated the unique character of the place with a heavily planted sculptural floodwall. In this way he has connected the city and the natural environment. Singer explains that this functional " flood wall is a public art sculptural element consisting of granite and other stone combined with patterned and formed concrete as well as plant material. This floodwall sculptural element, like the architectural structures of the city, appears to change hourly, as daylight moves around the space, marking subtle changes in color, shadow, mass and form (...) This floodwall sculpture becomes an apparatus for focusing on the site and understanding the relationship between a built environment created to withstand natural forces and the awe surrounding a natural site capable of producing both

destructive and peaceful events.”⁵ The sculptural wall serves to also mediate storm water coming from the streets and paved areas above it, filtering this water through its many planter systems before it can flow into the river.

The regenerated and transformed *West Palm Beach Waterfront Commons* (2004-2010), Florida, which was officially opened in 2010, now exist as a large inviting open paradise. Both Mayor Lois Frankel and the local citizens have expressed great satisfaction with the project: “We are fortunate to have artist and designer Michael Singer’s many special elements for our new Waterfront Park. Michael with the planners, engineers and landscape designers has provided us with an active and vibrant downtown waterfront that will distinguish our city as a world-class destination.

This visionary collaboration has resulted in the design of an incomparable sensitive waterfront and public gathering place that will become our *City Commons*.”⁶ Among the highlights of the project is the *Living Dock* that extends the city street promenade out onto the water. This central floating dock is large enough to function for public events and provides numerous shaded seating areas.



⁵ Citeret af Else Marie Bukdahl i *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁶ Citeret af Else Marie Bukdahl i *op. cit.*, p. 76.

The dock also functions as a living system that filters and cleans the intra coastal waterway through small habitat pockets within the human-made estuarine structure. *The Living Dock* includes in-water planters containing native mangroves, spartina grasses and an impressive visible oyster reef all set into the dock's surface.



The *Michael Singer Studio's* many projects in the public realm have had extensive coverage in architecture, landscape design, planning and public works infrastructure circles. They are very human and inviting.

Michael Singer attributes the success of these projects to what he describes as, “an artist's questioning mind” and his collaborative artist-led team processes. And his grounding as an artist includes constant questioning, which results in the originality and innovation of these many large-scale works. He hopes to be perceived as an artist producing the unexpected and offering new possibilities “as a problem-solver, someone who raises questions about commonly held assumptions on anything, literally anything,” and “his ability to ask questions and challenge assumptions gives us new possibilities for the human connection with the

earth.”⁷ That is the first of several sources of inspiration we can find in Michael Singer's projects.

I am also convinced that because the aesthetics of his large-scale projects are in opposition to rational infrastructural facilities and because his numerous climate installations are pensive projects, they can allow for individual empathy and collective engagement. Urban projects - like *Solid Waste Transfer and Recycling Centre* - promote participation and address the psychologically experienced and contain also a new layer of learning and meaning. Here we have the second source of inspiration in Singer's large-scale projects. The third source of important inspiration for the cultural world and society as such is to be found in the impressive influence he has had with regards his interconnecting art and architecture, art and nature or urban environment, aesthetics and sustainability. And he continuously makes new work that recognizes these dynamic interactions. The fourth source of inspiration is the collaborative work of the multifaceted *Michael Singer Studio* and its ability to create environmental, artistic, social, political and economic solutions. Further, its ability to realize that such work is very important today in the cultural world and in society in general.

I have discussed Singer's projects with some of my former students, who are now outstanding artists and who have been interested in his work for some time. They have told me that it was inspiring for them to study an artist - like Michael Singer - who in his sculptures has had such a convincing, artistic interpretation of nature and of mankind's relationship to nature. For them Michael Singer has a stimulating way to show us how artists can bring their energies to address the environmental crisis. And for them it was also stimulating to study how art for Michael Singer is a process and an experience of nearly ritual interaction. I have had similar response from art historians and architects both in Denmark and beyond our borders. And I have noticed that his large-scale projects have also had a great impact on the contemporary art world and our culture as such, because artistic and ecological goals are united and realized in a very convincing way. My Chinese artist-colleagues have been very interested in hearing from me about Michael Singer's projects in public space. They had not considered that infrastructure architecture could be inviting, beautiful and “good neighbors”. And in China so many people from different areas are working very hard in so many ways to solve ecological problems and make the environment greener and more beautiful. Michael Singer's works and projects can be a great inspiration for them. An interview with Michael Singer done by John Grande written in English and Chinese will soon appear in China. And an article on Michael

⁷ Rebecca Krinke, *Map of memory, an interview. Michael Singer and Rebacca Krinke*, 2005, p. 77.

Singer written by myself will also be published in Chinese.

In the Yard Gallery, led by Anette Holmberg, all of us have had the wonderful opportunity and the great pleasure to be able to study in and be part of the impressive workshop that Michael Singer has just finished with Jason Bregman and Joachim Hamou. We have seen how he has been working with a group of different people who are always asking stimulating questions and how he together with this group have found new and surprising solutions. It has been an inspiring experience. The workshop has succeeded in creating a new plan for Refshale-Island, especially for the waterfront. This plan is a contemporary urban regeneration project and can transform the site to a dynamic new civic place, which will include visual and aesthetic qualities and becomes a positive force in the community.

Michael Singer has always stressed “the projects I'm working on are collaborative, integrated design processes, where professionals respectfully challenge each other. It's much richer to be challenged and so much better for the project.”⁸ It is indeed precisely this ideal that he has utterly and completely realized during the workshop here on Refshale Island.

Else Marie Bukdahl D. Phil. Former Rector of The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts' Schools of Visual Arts.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Michael Singer and Jason Bregman for all the valuable information, fruitful collaborative efforts and inspiration from many fields they always have given me.

Illustrations :

1. Michael Singer: *First Gate Ritual Series 4 /79* (1979). Outdoor project. - *Cloud Hands Ritual Series 80-81* (1980 - 81). Sculpture. - *Ritual Series Retellings 94* (1994). Collage on paper. - *Ritual Series Retellings* (1999 - 2010). Sculpture. - *Ritual Series Retellings* (1999 - 2010). Detail.

Designed by *Michael Singer Studio: J. Parker Huber House*. 1998. - TGE. *Cogeneration Power Facility* (2002) Greenpoint, New York. - *West Palm Beach Waterfront Commons*. (2004 - 2010). - Oyster bed in one of the docks in *West Palm Beach Waterfront Commons* (2004 - 2010).

Designed by *Michael Singer Studio and Linnea Glatt: Solid Waste Transfer and Recycling Center* (1989 - 1993). Phoenix, Arizona.

⁸ Quoted by Else Marie Bukdahl in *op. cit.*, p. 36.

Designed and built by *Michael Singer Studio*: *Woodland Garden* Wellesley College (1990 - 1992). - *Water and Ice Wall* at the *Eco Tarium*. 1996. - *Concourse C, Denver International Airport*. 1994. - *Grand Rapids Riverwalk Floodwall* (1988 - 95).

Photographic credits:

Michael Singer (1), David Stansbury (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10,), Vern Cheek (7), Daniel O'Connor (9) renderings by Michael Singer and Trevor Lee (11), Victor Sidy (12), Tom Hurst (13, 14?) (vær. sød at slette spørgsmålstegn)

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THE EDGE / MICHAEL SINGER OPEN WORKSHOP 20TH-25TH OF MARCH



"The Edge" is where the Refshaleøen connects to Copenhagen Harbor. The goal of the workshop is to demonstrate the potential interactions between nature, human systems, environmental sustainability and functional necessities. Singer has worked extensively with urban sites all over the world, and he views this dynamic interface as a primary place to ask the question: *How can we live with what sustains us?*

YARD THE SHIPYARD GALLERY CPH

PROGRAM AT YARD GALLERY / FREE AND OPEN TO ALL!

Tuesday 20th of March

12.00-12.30 Welcome by Else Marie Bukdahl / Dr. phil. + curator
& Joachim Hamou / Visual Artist
12.30-13.30 Presentation by Michael Singer
13.30-15.00 Site inspection
15.00-16.00 Discussion forum

Wednesday 21st of March

12.00-13.00 Refshaleøen tour by Annette Skov / artist + guide
13.00-15.00 Production and design workshop by Michael Singer

Thursday 22nd of March

12.00-13.00 Presentations by artists and architects from Refshaleøen
13.00-14.00 Lecture by Maria Beyer Skydt / Project Manager at Grøntmij A/S
Sustainable urban development from a cross-functional point of view
15.00-16.00 Discussion forum with Michael Singer

Friday 23rd of March

12.00-15.00 Production and design workshop by Michael Singer

Sunday 25th of March

Exhibition of "Work in Progress"
12.30 Speech by Else Marie Bukdahl
13.00 Presentation by Thomas Hartung - *Urban Agriculture*
13.30 Final presentation by Michael Singer + Site inspection

+ Lecture by Michael Singer:

Regenerative Design For Landscape, Architecture and Infrastructure
Projects In the Public Realm

Wednesday 21st of March

16.00 Royal Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture

Thursday 22nd of March

17.00 University of Copenhagen, Forest & Landscape

++ Performances at Café Teatret every evening by LAND
more info at www.landdrama.org

More details: www.yardgallery.dk

