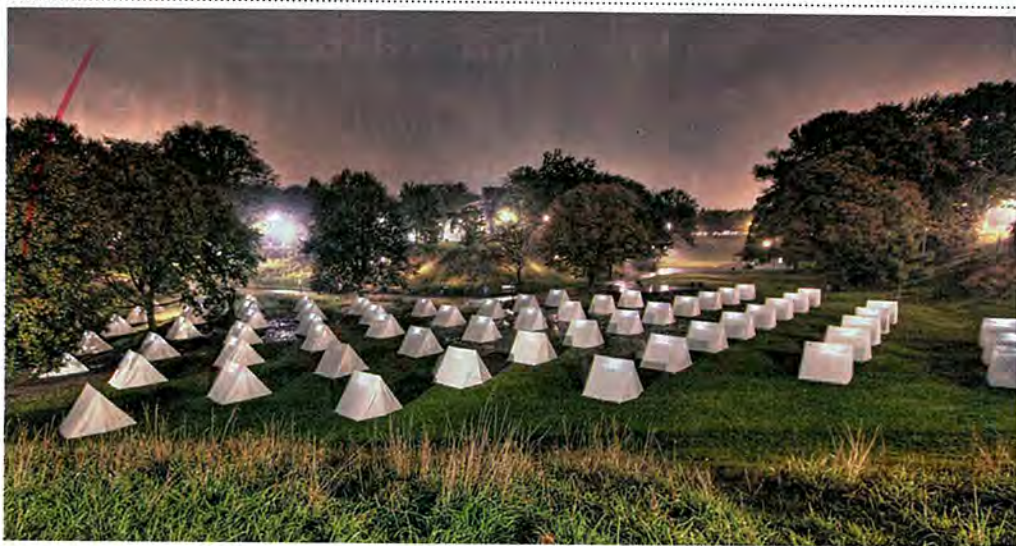




Tent control



Decoding the artspeak of a new public installation.

Don't feel bad. We didn't get it at first either—"it" being the explanation behind Toronto-based artist Thom Sokoloski's "The Encampment," a Christo-esque public art project that will turn the southern tip of Roosevelt Island into an IKEA-lighting-department clone in early October. From afar, it'll look like a grid formation of 100 glowing tents. But peel back the flaps and you'll find myriad installations that explore RI's sordid history of criminals, orphans and the mentally ill.

An army of artists and amateurs (namely history buffs and hospital patients) have already designed 40 of the tents, but Sokoloski needs New Yorkers' help in creating the other 60. Here is a step-by-step

translation of his art-school-damaged mission statement:

"The Encampment" represents a fragile yet powerful glimpse into a community's understanding of its history.

Don't know jack about the people of RI? Neither did Sokoloski when he first started. That's the beauty of "The Encampment": It's one part AP History and two parts Christmas. (When asked if he's worried about an influx of stoners, Sokoloski says, "There's a very large gate leading to the premises.")

Each tent is an intimate installation, a display of an individual's testimony and the historic context in which that person lived.

Because of his theater background—he's produced plays for the past three

decades—Sokoloski insists that each tent "becomes a character." In other words, he doesn't want onlookers to say "Oh, cool" and walk away. He wants them to go home and dream about the Crazy Asylum Lady who spent years sewing an escape rope.

The formal perspective works from a distance in relation to the position and movement of the viewer.

This one's easy: The shit looks different depending on your vantage point. Suggested lookout spots include the Queensboro Bridge, the Roosevelt Island tram and the East River. (Get out your kayak!)

—Andrew Parks

Want to be a part of a "large-scale public participatory art installation?" Of course you do. Visit theencampment.net to sign up.

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DAILY NEWS

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Tent art pitched for Roosevelt Isle

A CANADIAN artist plans to turn part of Roosevelt Island into a sprawling tent city.

Taking a cue from Christo's wildly popular project "The Gates" in Central Park, Thom Sokoloski plans to erect more than 100 white tents that will be illuminated at night and visible from both sides of the East River.

The installation on the south end of the island is set to be unveiled in October as part of Open House New York, the country's largest architecture and design event.

On his Web site, www.theencampment.net, Sokoloski says he was attracted to Roosevelt Island because of its history as the site of the city's smallpox hospital and a lunatic asylum.

Sokoloski wants the project to hearken back to "a time when no one resided on Roosevelt Island but rather was confined."

The tents will be modeled after Civil War-era dog tents and filled with lights and objects that recall the island's past.

"The Encampment" represents a fragile yet powerful glimpse into a community's understanding of its history," Sokoloski says on the Web site.

He hopes to recruit local collaborators to help fund and erect the project.

"The Encampment" is scheduled to be open to the public from Oct. 5 to 7.

Bill Hutchinson



Thom Sokoloski's "Encampment" on south end of Roosevelt Island would include more than 100 white tents illuminated at night. Artist's rendering