

Cosmetic Spectacular

There are so many places for good intentions and hard cash in New York, and so many potential ways to beautify the city while improving the human condition—considerations inseparably linked today—that it is tragic to see \$300,000 literally go down the drain. Philanthropist George Delacorte's gift of a 600-foot *jet d'eau* for Welfare Island is an unfortunate misdirection of generosity and misinterpretation of urban needs. It is even a questionable interpretation of beauty. In New York the old adage has never been truer that beauty is more than skin deep. The last thing this city requires is a cosmetic spectacular.

Even more remarkable than the wrongheadedness of this extravagant exercise in esthetic *juvenilia* is the permissiveness of the city officials who gave it their blessing. It has proceeded smoothly to near-completion in a city where far more critical undertakings are routinely torpedoed by protest, political bureaucracy and red tape. It is instructive to realize that making a monumental foolish gesture is apparently the one thing that is easy to do in New York.

It is not easy to design a better building, put up better housing or plan a better city. It is not easy to finance or construct the vest-pocket parks that could bring some spark of beauty to areas locked in decay. It is difficult to fund and build the plazas and playgrounds that revitalize neighborhoods where the esthetic vistas are of littered lots and despair. It is impossible to find money to maintain the handsome parks and few green sanctuaries that exist. It is hard to save the city's heritage. These are places where private generosity would be beautiful, indeed.

A *jet d'eau*, measured against genuine environmental opportunities for beautification, is a lot of water, and not much else. It will be, of course, highly visible. And it may memorialize the well-intentioned donor in a way he never thought of: as the wrong-way Corrigan of New York philanthropy.