

The Museum of Modern Art

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Two attractive experimental playgrounds in Cypress Hills Houses in Brooklyn will be officially opened this afternoon (May 18) while 2500 yellow, orange, pink and red balloons released by children will float skyward. Representatives of civic groups and a public agency, which worked together for almost four years to make the project possible, will participate in the ceremonies.

The playgrounds in the housing project are the first of three experimental playgrounds sponsored by the New York City Housing Authority, The Museum of Modern Art and its Junior Council, and the Park Association of New York City. The public and private groups commissioned architect Charles Forberg to design the playgrounds. Available city and state funds were supplemented by grants from individuals and foundations to allow the architect more flexibility in his design and use of materials and to absorb additional construction costs.

The circular playground (72 feet in diameter), designed primarily for children between the ages of 3 and 8, has five main play spaces. A "forest-like" area of 7-foot vertical concrete slabs ranging from 1 to 3 feet wide encourages running, dodging and hiding, and provides shade in the summer and shelter in the winter; circular holes and painted designs add variety. A tower that combines a spiral stair and a brightly colored slide is safer and more enjoyable than the conventional straight slide.

For the more adventurous children a group of vaults offers a variety of small-scale covered, enclosed spaces to hide in, climb on, slide over. An embankment encircling the vault group and a spray fountain form a small bridge under which water flows in the summer. Parents may watch all the play areas from benches placed at the entrance and halfway around the playground. Illuminated in the evening by a spherical fixture in the center which throws light radially through all of the vertical slabs, the playground looks like a large sculpture from the surrounding houses.

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The speakers at the dedication will include Donald H. Elliott, Chairman of the City Planning Commission; Arthur Drexler, Director of the Department of Architecture and Design at The Museum of Modern Art; Abe Stark, President of the Borough of Brooklyn; James William Gaynor, State Commissioner of Housing and Community Renewal; Walter E. Washington, Chairman of the New York City Housing Authority; and other distinguished guests, including Mrs. John V. Lindsay. Ira S. Robbins, a Member of the New York City Housing Authority, will preside.

One of the features of the Cypress Hills playgrounds is the original use of color and texture. The slabs, vaults and slide tower are pre-cast, smooth finish, sand-colored concrete with brilliantly colored shapes. The ground is paved with 5 x 12 inch asphalt blocks, laid in a variety of patterns. The fabrication forms for the pre-cast concrete elements can be reused to cast additional pieces, thus serving as a prototype for parks of similar construction. This has already been done as part of the Cypress Hills project in a smaller play area (32 feet in diameter) nearby, where the same shapes were used.

The material used in the Cypress Hills playgrounds explores a new approach to the problem of supervision and maintenance. As the architect, Charles Forberg, stresses: "This design intentionally accepts traditionally rugged and indestructible materials with the belief that these can, in provocative arrangements, provide children with play excitement which does not depend on the materials themselves, but rather on the spaces they create. All of the parts are stationary, but they are intended to intrigue the child to move and to give him rich and varied spaces to be in, run through, climb up...."

In the fall of 1963, with the intent of improving the traditional playgrounds in the city, The Museum of Modern Art and the Park Association, with the assurance of the interest of the Citizens' Committee for Children, approached the New York City Housing Authority with the proposal that it build three experimental playgrounds. From this initial idea came the formation of a five-member committee in charge of the project -- Victor D'Amico, Director, Department of Education, and Arthur Drexler, (more)

Director, Department of Architecture and Design, from The Museum of Modern Art, and Harold Leeds, of the Museum's Junior Council; Mrs. Louis Auchincloss representing the Park Association and Mrs. Adele Mossler representing the Citizens' Committee for Children. In the spring of 1964 the first site, Cypress Hills Houses in Brooklyn, was chosen. Mrs. Lawrence Buttenwieser, President of the Association for Parks and Playgrounds, and Mrs. C. Gerald Goldsmith, both members of the Museum's Junior Council, were instrumental in planning and developing the project from its earliest days. Plans are now under way for the construction of a second park, primarily for teenagers, at Ravenswood Houses.

Funds for the initial design were made available by the New York Community Trust and Louis S. Auchincloss. The cost of preparing the plans and building the playground was financed, with the approval of the State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, by the New York City Housing Authority, with a supplemental grant from the Vincent Astor Foundation.

The dedication ceremonies will begin at 4 p.m.

Note to news photographers and television newscasters: Pictures of children using the playgrounds may be taken after 2 p.m.

Additional information and photographs available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Nancy Sage, Assistant, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. Circle 5-8900.