

Spatial Memory and the Cultural Agency of Inhabitation

Recent Work by Michael R. Allen

Michael R. Allen works as an academic researcher, historian, teacher, design critic, public artist, critical spatial tour guide and heritage conservationist in private practice. His practice is interdisciplinary with multichannel output. The binding ties in his research are investigation of the ideological and political constitution of architectural and infrastructural space, a commitment to studying material heritage and its conservation, and advocacy for the forms of liberatory agency that realize the potential of the modern metropolis to distribute wealth, knowledge and shelter.

Current research interests:

Political economy of architecture; architectural and cultural theory; modernism in US and European city planning and architectural production; traditional settlement and vernacular architecture; public/social housing history, US and Europe; historic preservation; critical heritage study; metropolitan urbanism and the politics of inhabitation rights; modern segregation and the metropolis; “right-sizing” and shrinking cities theory; collective design practices; nationalism and spatial production.

More information:

<http://michael-allen.org>

Heritage Practice



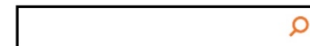
St. Luke's Hospital [St. Louis, Missouri] 2016 - present

Leading the team that prepared a successful but challenging National Register of Historic Places nomination for a mid-century modern hospital. Currently principal historic preservation consultant to \$90 million conversion of hospital into affordable apartments and St. Louis' first non-profit co-working center.



Chouteau Greenway Design Competition [St. Louis, Missouri] 2017-8

Participant in interdisciplinary design team led by Object Territories, TLS Studio and [dhd] design. Team advanced to one of four finalist position and received honorarium to develop a full proposal. Designed entire cultural heritage and placemarking program, and created the concept for an urban archaeology museum beneath a freeway ramp shown here.



Our family goal should be to search for the realization of an ideal society, knowing it is a quest that always eludes man but one that he must compulsively seek.

— Jacob Merrill Kaplan

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WHAT WE FUND ▼

THE J.M.K. INNOVATION PRIZE ▼

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2017 INNOVATION PRIZE AWARDEES

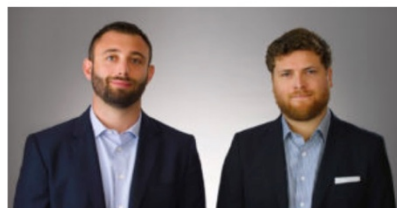


SARA CHESTER & MOLLY HEMSTREET

THE INDUSTRIAL COMMONS
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Connecting cultural heritage, youth retention, and economic revival, The Industrial Commons helps small to mid-size manufacturers convert to worker-ownership.

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CORAL VITA
WASHINGTON, D.C. AND SAN DIEGO, CA

Seeking to restore imperiled coral reefs, Coral Vita is leveraging for-profit tools to build a network of high-tech coral farms.

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VICTORIA HERRMANN

RISING TIDES
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Rising Tides brings expertise on climate adaptation and cultural heritage directly to vulnerable communities to save America's histories, traditions, and cultures.

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J.M. Kaplan Fund [New York, NY] 2015, 2017

Served as reviewer for the J.M. Kaplan Fund Innovation Prize in two biennial rounds. Responsible for reviewing all grant applications in the Heritage area and making recommendation to the Board of Trustees for conference of \$175,000 in startup funding.



The Ville Cultural Resources Survey and Historic Districts [St. Louis, Missouri] 2009-10

Co-investigator of the first comprehensive cultural resources survey of The Ville, an endangered historically black neighborhood in St. Louis. The neighborhood has faced declined investment as well as building depletion, making it ineligible as a single national historic district. Funded by the City of St. Louis, the survey documented over 700 vernacular resources and led to the designation of the first three residential historic districts in the neighborhood ever listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Scholarship



What Can Historic Preservation Learn From Ferguson?

2016

Critical essay included in the edited volume *Bending the Future; 50 Ideas for the Next 50 Years of Historic Preservation* (University of Massachusetts Press), edited by Max Page and Marla Miller. The essay presents the nature of object indeterminacy as history is inscribed, and the implications for contemporary historic preservation practice in the United States.



THE LANDSCAPE OF FRAGMENTS AND MEMORIES: INTANGIBLE HERITAGE ON THE AMERICAN BOTTOM MICHAEL R. ALLEN

HOW ARE INTANGIBLE PLACES / HOW ARE PLACES INTANGIBLE

This itinerary presents a long tour across historic sites in the American Bottom whose physical forms have changed over time. These sites are not categorically lost or abandoned or erased, although those attributes describe some of them. Instead, these are sites whose composure possesses obvious indeterminacy. Hence the title adopts the cultural resources management term *intangible heritage* as a conceptual anchor. While all of these sites retain elements of infrastructure, altered landscape, and architecture, their conditions offer only partial evidence for past forms.

The geographer and artist Trevor Paglen reframes the art critical question *What is art?* into *How is art?* Those who follow this itinerary may also find that rephrasing the question *What is a site?* into *How is a site?* provides better ontological support to understanding and appreciating these places. A trail of fragments, ghost buildings, ruins, and puzzles ought to provoke endless wander, rather than perpetual confusion. However, the person who judges the extant forms of these places against the assumed image of their authentic, full historic appearances will return from this tour dejected. These sites fail to "reproduce the cosmic scheme and correct history," in the words of J.B. Jackson. Instead they challenge fixed views of geographic and architectural history, and may mean more across time as their physicality becomes more readily historic. (The fact that these sites also possess semiotic indeterminacy seems like a strangely congruent historic element, since the first Europeans to settle the American Bottom, the French, were largely illiterate.)

Route 3.
Photo by Jesse Vogler



***Charting the American Bottom* 2016**

Contributed both a monographic critical itinerary of erased and intangible heritages and site entries to the online geographic compendium *Charting the American Bottom* (edited by Matthew Fluharty and Jesse Vogler), funded by a Mellon Foundation Divided City grant. The project documents the the American Bottom, the alluvial landscape along the Mississippi River in southwestern Illinois. (theamericanbottom.org)



Critical Heritage Book Review, *Buildings and Landscapes* 2018

Published a thorough comparative review of Daniela Sandler's *Counterpreservation: Architectural Decay in Berlin Since 1989* (Cornell University Press, 2016) and Caitlin DeSilvey's *Curated Decay: Heritage Beyond Saving* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017). The essay examines the intellectual impasse in preservation around questions of authenticity, instability of form, dark heritage and the production of authority.

Public Practice



Past Program

Order, Autonomy, and the City

Sep 7–28, 2016

This program is part of the series:

[Urbanist-in-Residence: Michael Allen](#)

This multi-week class organized by Michael Allen explores the history of power structures that seek to contain the elements of American cities—real estate parcels, neighborhoods, buildings, and even people—that have been perceived as disorderly or otherwise unruly. Readings and discussions will present a counter-narrative suggesting that change, emergence of alternative economies, and community autonomy are often mistaken for disorder—and that the quest for order often destabilizes urban systems.

Urbanist in Residence, Pulitzer Arts Foundation [St. Louis, Missouri] 2016

Completed residency at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation in support of raumlabor's *4562 Enright Avenue* project. Programs included a public four-week class on the politics of urban order, a long-form interview published in the show catalog, a bus tour organized with Amanda Williams and Andres Hernandez and a panel discussion on the politics of demolition in St. Louis.



Department of Walking [St. Louis, Missouri] *2017-present*

The Department of Walking is a platform for critical spatial tourism that I have developed. The first tour occurred as part of Critical Spatial Practices St. Louis, a seminar, and narrated the next fifty years of urban change in St. Louis' art district. Subsequent tours explored the removal of the historic oak tree allee at Washington University and the removal of the urban forest growing at the Pruitt Igoe site in St. Louis. The next phase of the project is development of an on-call tour service that will provide guidance of the city's liminal spaces. (dptwlk.org)



Waste Not Want Not [St. Louis, Missouri] 2017

With artist Carlie Trosclair, marked several sites of urban erasure with a message-laden caution tape. The most prominent site was a building owned by the Pulitzer Arts Foundation demolished to make way for open space. *Waste Not Want Not* continues to explore the relationship between an arts institution and its public, and its obligation toward urban stewardship. The work critically engaged my own residency exploring demolition in the previous year. *Art in America* included *Waste Not Want Not* in a review of St. Louis landscape art practices.



Pruitt-Igoe Now [St. Louis, Missouri] 2011-12

With architect Nora Wendl, created and managed an international ideas competition soliciting management ideas for the forested vacant site where the housing project once stood. The competition netted 346 entries leading to 31 finalists and three prize winners. Funded by submission entry fees, the competition led to three exhibitions, a conference presentation and a journal article – along with a small political firestorm. (pruittigoenow.org)

Critical Writing

No, Historic Preservation Does Not Inhibit Urban Growth

BY MICHAEL R. ALLEN | JUNE 26, 2014



La Samaritaine was once Paris' most famous department store. Photo credit: Wikipedia

There is perhaps no city in the world where the tension between historic preservation and the drive to modernize plays out more vibrantly than Paris. That tension was throw into sharp relief last month, when the French capital was rocked by a **court ruling** protecting the last façade of landmark department store **La Samaritaine**, by now already demolished, situated on the Seine across from Pont Neuf. Easily Paris' most famous department store, La Samaritaine was founded by businessman Ernest Cognacq in 1869 and came to epitomize the fast-growing world of French consumerism and wealth in the 20th century. Its 1933 remodeling by architect Henri Sauvage gave the building a beloved Art Deco form punctuated by a series of setback floors.

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Next City 2011-2014

Wrote several short and long-format critical articles on historic preservation, urban right-sizing and racial justice for this online urban affairs magazine.



Susannah Lohr

St. Louis: 2068

MICHAEL R. ALLEN / SUSANNAH LOHR SEP 7, 2018

A historian from the future reminds an audience of city leaders about the past that haunts them.

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SEPTEMBER 7, 2068—At a public lecture inside the Jack Dorsey Center for Civic Innovation at Washington University in St. Louis, a historian decides to recount the past 100 years of St. Louis's history in order to help spur new urban leadership. Once the fourth-largest city in the U.S. and the scene of a World's Fair, it finds itself in an intractable soft decline—stagnating in the face of massive poverty, land vacancy, privatization, austerity measures, and accelerated climate change.

But city leaders are still hopeful that St. Louis can regain some vitality and distinguish itself among a growing class of similar cities. The historian addresses the assembled government officials, academics, designers, and business executives:

St. Louis: 2068 2018

Published a speculative essay in *CityLab* on the future of St. Louis that examines dynamics of population loss, vacancy, gentrification, transportation systems, racial equity and climate change.

Teaching



Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts, Graduate Architecture

2016-present

As the only faculty member in the graduate architecture programs not trained in architecture, I have developed seminars that have connected design practice to crucial contingent aspects. Seminars have included The Unruly City, American Cultural Landscapes, Citizen Space and Anti-Development: Vacancy, Wilderness, Ruin. This teaching has allowed me to reconcile my own research concerns to the demands of a design education.