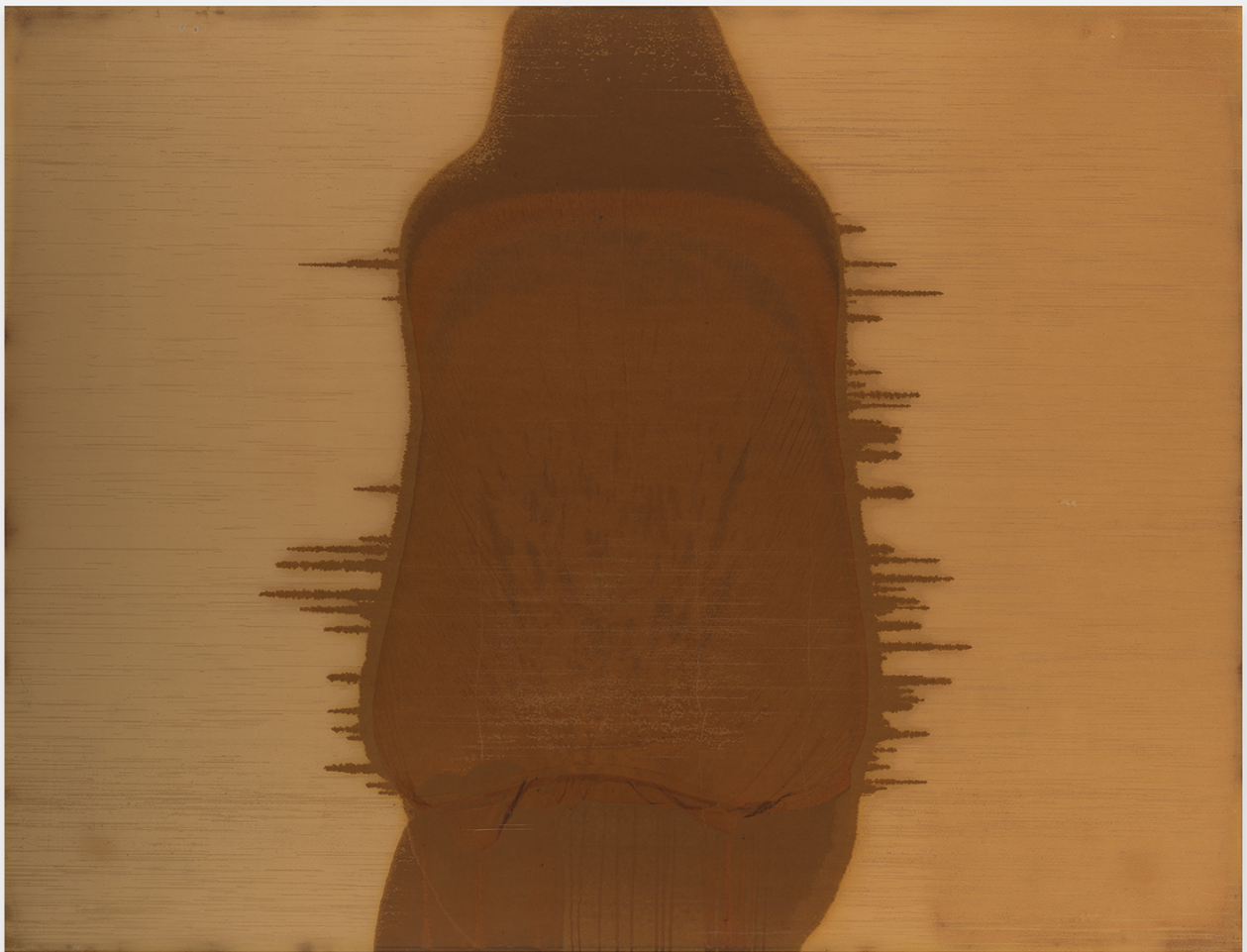


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To Those We Have Lost

People the virus has taken from us



Helène Aylon, *Breaking Form Balancing* (1978) (C) Helène Aylon

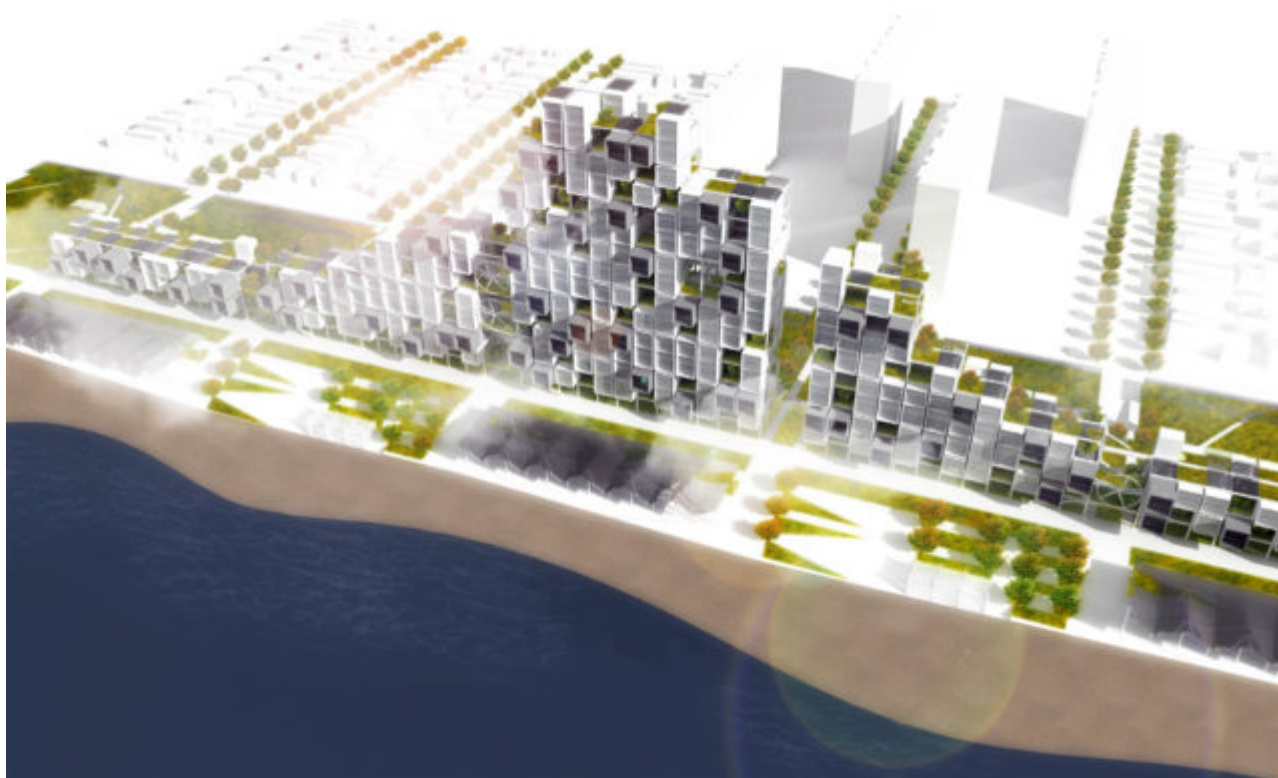
By Allan Schwartzman

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The most immediate consequence of covid-19 is the lives it has taken from us. The virus raging through our communities is every day robbing us of men and women who we can never replace: whose incisive minds and creative energy changed the way we think about the world.

I was especially saddened to learn that the creative world has lost one of our most important voices with the passing of [Michael Sorkin](#), who has died aged 71 from complications caused by covid-19. Many of us read *The Village Voice* throughout the 1980s because of Sorkin's essays as the paper's architectural critic. His was one of the most important voices in the histories of architecture, art and urbanism.

His impassioned faith and resolute activism were equally alive in his architectural practice, most of which exists in unbuilt plans for cities and structures within them. Urbanism and public space, sustainability and daily life were the cornerstones of his practice. Architecture critic [Joseph Giovannini](#) described a design Sorkin made for East New York as "a down-to-earth act of urban acupuncture".



Michael Sorkin's "28+" proposal for MOMA PS1 Rockaway: Call for Ideas. Courtesy of Michael Sorkin Studio

Sorkin was "probably our most impassioned advocate of architecture as a means toward social justice", wrote [Paul Goldberger](#), former architecture critic of *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker*, and one of Sorkin's frequent sparring partners.

In an obituary in *The Washington Post*, [Harrison Smith](#) described Sorkin as "a fiery champion of social justice and sustainability in architecture and urban planning, who emerged as one of his profession's most incisive public intellectuals over a multifaceted career as a critic, author, teacher and designer".

Sorkin's writing was often scathingly critical of architecture that was grand, decorative, institutionalized, and which sanitized the movement of people on the street—the kind of buildings that changed the face and scale of Manhattan in the 1980s, and which embodied the garish excessiveness of the Reagan era.

His writings could slash through you with their resolute ethical grounding and fearlessness—he was perhaps the first to critique the sacred dean of American Modern architecture, [Philip Johnson](#), as having been a Nazi sympathizer. But underneath it all, Sorkin was an idealist and a humanist. His face naturally sported a wise and compassionate smile, which said as much as his words and his work. His was a voice that had profound impact on creative thought to an extent I do not believe we will see again for a long, long time.



Helène Aylon, artist and writer. Photo: Grace Roselli

In memoriam

[Helène Aylon](#), artist, 89

[Maurice Berger](#), art critic and curator, aged 63

[John Driscoll](#), art scholar, 70

[David Driskell](#), artist and academic, 89

[Vittorio Gregotti](#), urban planner and architect, 92

[William Helmreich](#), sociologist and scholar, 74

[Terrence McNally](#), playwright, 81