Paper / Proposal Title:
The American Front Yard in a Changing World

Authors' Names:
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Company Affiliation:
Place It!
Prairieform

Presentation Method. I would like to:
   i. present in person without a written paper

Abstract (300 words):
This presentation and hands-on workshop will explore the ubiquitous American front yard and how cultural and environmental changes are unsettling what was once primarily a decorative space. The primary historical force that has influenced the early form and function of the American front yard is the idyllic cottage in the English countryside, whose influence can be seen in almost every region of the American
urban and suburban landscape. Yet this longstanding underpinning of the front yard is in some ways starting to crumble.

As such, the first part of our presentation and workshop will look at two case studies: 1. The influence of Latino immigrants on the front yards of Los Angeles; and, 2. The influence of climate change on front yards in Minneapolis. As the cities represent both diametrically opposed climates, geographic regions, and cultural landscapes, we will be able to add both greater depth and richness to our exploration of these changes. Additionally, through these case studies we want to look critically at the notion of heritage vis-à-vis the front yard: Is the front yard as a purely aesthetic space worth preserving at all? If so, how do we do so? If only certain elements are worth preserving, which ones are they and how?

After the presentation, we will lead a hands-on workshop in which participants will be able to design their ideal front-yard space given the new cultural and environmental realities we are facing. Using found objects, each participant will construct a mock yard and then will be given 30 seconds to present on what they have come up with. We will close with an informal discussion and reflection on recurring themes within the models and whether people chose to retain certain elements of the front yard or decided to start completely afresh, and why.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

James Rojas is an urban planner, community activist, and artist. He has developed an innovative public-engagement and community-visioning method that uses artmaking as its medium. Through this method he has engaged thousands of people by facilitating over 500 workshops and building over 50 interactive models around the world—from the streets of New York and San Francisco, to Mexico, Canada, Europe, and South America.

Rojas is also one of the few nationally recognized urban planners to examine Latino cultural influences on urban design and sustainability in the US. He has written and lectured extensively on how culture and immigration are transforming the American front yard and landscape.

Rojas has lectured and facilitated workshops at MIT, Berkeley, Harvard, Cornell, and numerous other colleges and universities. He has collaborated with municipalities, non-profits, community groups, educational institutions, and museums. His installation work has been shown at the Los Museum of Contemporary Art, The Institute of Contemporary Art / Boston, the Venice Biennale, the Exploratorium, the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Bronx Museum of Art, and the Getty. His research has appeared in The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, Dwell, Places, and in numerous books.
John Kamp is a landscape designer, urban planner, and urban designer. He holds a master's degree in urban planning and design from UCLA, and a bachelor's degree from Wesleyan University. He has an extensive background in ecology and has worked as a city planner and designer for the City of Los Angeles. He grew up in Minnesota but has lived in Los Angeles, France, and Mexico, and has spent considerable time in Sweden. His varied educational background and his diverse travels have helped him to formulate a unique approach to landscape and urban design that is at once accessible and singular.

Through his design practice, Prairieform, he works to create new approaches to landscape and city creation that minimize resource inputs but maximize aesthetics and habitat for both humans and wildlife. To these ends, he has designed and installed irrigation-free, wildlife-attracting, and boundary-pushing landscapes in cities such as Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and San Francisco.

Aside from the array of landscapes and urban design projects he has designed and produced, Mr. Kamp has lectured and written extensively on issues surrounding front yards, circumstantial urbanism, and the role culture and immigration have played in the evolving urban form of the United States.