2017 MERIT

Alan Brooker

LYCEUM
A traveling fellowship in Architecture
Library Site Contains Rare Manhattan Schist

The rare and expensive rock is a treasure for designers: it’s rich with a lot of shimmery, almost metallic, veining. Historically, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in Morningside Heights was built from rock recovered when the 1 subway line was excavated in 1904. The Schist is an inspiration for design.

The library site is to be treated as a quarry. Cut stone will be transported into the surrounding community to create micro libraries near the metro stations. The resulting negative space at the site will become the library. A façade of untouched stone will be preserved with only a simple opening cut through for entry. A central core of polished stone reveals the transformational potential of the natural resource.

The rock face of the excavation will act as the backdrop for the main reading room space. The opposite wall of the excavation (beyond the extent of the Schist) will be constructed of soldier piles and lagging. The library elements will be constructed of finely finished materials in stark contrast with the roughness of the surroundings. The upper terrace will extend over the excavation as a garden space. The community room will hover above the public garden as a counterpoint to the groundedness of the library below.