



**External
Space**

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A Proposal for Ontario Place

Ryan Ferko

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The Ontario Place theme park opened on May 22, 1971. Built on three artificially constructed islands, it ran as a theme park until 2011. After its closure a request for proposals (RFP) was put out asking designers and architects to consider the revitalization of the site. Ryan Ferko's *A Proposal for Ontario Place* is a response to this request.

Recognizable for the Cinesphere, a geodesic dome like structure built in 1971 just after the Montreal Expo 67, Ontario Place harkens back to a historical moment in time where architecture was built to inspire and shape the society of tomorrow. Futuristic manifestos for an ideal shifting space, the Cinesphere becomes a remnant of a particular site and time, where a space that was considered futuristic now comes across as dated. The ideals of those designers, looking to a bright and idealistic future, have fallen by the wayside. An example of this was Habitat, the site of Expo 67, designed as a way to bring affordable housing to increasingly crowded cities, largely failed as the construction of the building proved too expensive to make it truly accessible in the way that architect Safdie envisioned.¹ Similarly, Ontario Place was intended to revitalize Toronto's waterfront, making it a more people friendly place to combat the heavy industrialized and unappealing location.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Habitat_67

Fast forward to its closure, the request for proposals that Ferko is responding to, asks designers and architects to consider ways to revitalize an area of the city that is still largely unappealing and underused. The expectation that consideration of site should also take into account the use of that site is absurdly circumvented by Ferko's proposal. Here, the proposal obscures rather than revitalizes. The process that is documented is an attempted obstruction of a detailed pencil drawing of Ontario Place, including the geodesic dome of the Cinesphere. Paint is smeared along one edge of the image, and dragged across the image by a jerry-rigged paintbrush attached to an overhead crane. Ferko controls the movement of the brush attached to the hoist of the crane using a remote. The swinging of the brush is only partly under his control. Each relatively small movement of the machine causes a jerky swinging motion that can, at its best, be only somewhat intentional. As the video goes on more paint is added, and then smeared across the image.

The video was actually sent in as a response to the RFP, along with the painting documented in the video. The failure of Ferko's proposal to actually suggest a use for the site is embedded in its creation. At the same time, it also considers the history of the site itself as a failure. In the same way that Ferko fails to successfully propose a use for the site, the original proposal for Ontario Place, with all its idealism that architecture had the capacity to shape our future, has largely been obscured. Whitewashed over with a new future plan that could see the legacy of the site as it was originally intended all but wiped out.

- Amber Landgraff