

# Famed architect's vision links Sept. 11 and the Shoa

## In Rutgers program, Libeskind reflects on design and memory



At the first program of the Bildner Center's "Art in the Public Space" series are, from left, Daniel Libeskind, James E. Young, Yael Zerubavel, and Leonard and Barbara Littman. Photos by Roy Groething of Jersey Pictures, Inc.

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A week after the 10th anniversary of 9/11, architect Daniel Libeskind told a Rutgers audience how his master plan for the former World Trade Center site and his design for the Jewish Museum Berlin aimed to fill the voids left by the almost unimaginable loss of life.

The Polish-born son of Holocaust survivors spoke on Sept. 18 at "Memory, Monuments, and Museums: Remembering 9/11 and the Holocaust," sponsored by the university's Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life. Libeskind was joined in the discussion by James E. Young, professor of English and Judaic studies at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and an authority on public memorials.

Libeskind expounded on how he transmitted human tragedy into the designs for Ground Zero as well as the Jewish Museum Berlin, which was completed in 1999.

"After the Shoa, the Holocaust, the world changed," Libeskind told the crowd of about 400 gathered in the Douglass College Center in New Brunswick. "We all talk about how the world changed after 9/11, but the world changed after the gas chambers because of the destruction of Jews in Europe."

The program kicked off a new "Art in the Public Space" series for the Bildner Center, said its director, Yael Zerubavel.

In introducing the speakers, Barbara Littman of Highland Park, who helped underwrite the program with her husband, Leonard, said she had suggested "Memory, Monuments, and Museums" because architects help "to create common spaces for memory."

Young said Libeskind's "deconstructionist" architecture for the Berlin museum — a jagged, "broken" interpretation of rectangular forms and a star of David — was ideally suited to depict "the terrible breach" of humanity that was the Holocaust.

Young said Libeskind's vision also lent itself to the Ground Zero site, which, in Libeskind's original conception, called for a 1,776-foot "Freedom Tower," a memorial with waterfalls, an underground museum, a visitors' center, retail space, a transit hub, and four additional office towers.

Young recalled being taken aback by one of the first questions asked by a journalist after the plans were unveiled: "Isn't this another Holocaust memorial?"

### **'Sense of intimacy'**

Libeskind said such structures reflect his "humanistic values" through architecture and have the ability to form how the world views these tragedies.

He described the designs as being like "a human heart" whose sense of loss is reflected in steel and concrete. His plan for the Berlin museum, he said, paid homage to composer Arnold Schoenberg, who fled Berlin for the United States after Hitler came to power.

Libeskind, who was an award-winning pianist before becoming an architect, said he viewed the history of Berlin's Jewish community as a piece of Schoenberg's unfinished music.

Likewise, Libeskind's vision for the World Trade Center site also contained a void representing lives lost. Its two large public places were meant to convey a feeling of "sacred space" that would serve as a "public piazza" speaking to the multitudes living, working, or passing through lower Manhattan and "creating something positive without cheapening the memory."

Libeskind's original vision for the Manhattan area underwent numerous changes after it was unveiled in 2003, and he battled publicly with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which owns the site. Still, he worked with other winning designers of various parts of the site, including Michael Arad, the Israeli-born architect who designed the "Reflecting Absence" memorial around two deep pools in the footprint of the fallen towers.

In the end, the completed area will encompass many components of Libeskind's original design, including the exposed concrete "slurry wall" from the original towers' foundations and the flowing waterfalls that muffle the cacophony of Manhattan.

"You will be able to talk and laugh with the person next to you," he explained. "I thought it was important to be able to create a sense of intimacy in New York City."

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