

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

■ Power of the Word?

Brooklyn's Prospect Park, the only New York City park that hosts new public art each year, gave rise to a highbrow exercise in landscape architecture last June: 14 signposts by sculptor David Schafer, bearing enigmatic quotes from the park's designer, Frederick Law Olmsted.

Headlines like "(PLEASURE)," "(STIMULUS)" and "(HONEST)" appeared on the bright-yellow signs, set on poles up to 22 feet tall. Quotes indicated Olmsted's intentions or philosophy. Yet F.L.O. was no Whitman, Schafer says: his writing was "kind of awkward, with bad grammar and sentence structure and misspellings." Sample quote from *The Master*: "The arches are as short, as narrow, and in all respects as unobtrusive as



**Brooklyn's Prospect Park:
In Olmsted's words**

they can well be made."

"People really incorporated the signs into the way they used the park," says Melissa Benson, curator of the park's visual arts program. Runners leaned on poles to stretch, lovers arranged rendezvous at pole bases and picnicking families strung garbage bags from cable supports.

Less enthused observers irately telephoned the park's office, confused about Olmsted's words, or have complained to Schafer about blocked vistas. Schafer is pleased by the strong reactions. He intended to remind passersby of Olmsted's influence on a place that is taken for granted, to thus "restore authorship to the park."—*Eve M. Kahn*