

# Yoko Ono's "SKY LANDING" inaugurated June 12 2015 on Wooded Island site of the historic Japanese Phoenix Pavilion from the Columbian Exposition in Jackson Park

By Gary M. Ossewaarde

On June 12, 2015 artist Yoko Ono celebrated SKY LANDING, her first permanent installation in the Americas, in a ground-breaking ceremony by the City of Chicago, the Chicago Park District, Project 120 Chicago, and Garden of the Phoenix Foundation. The ground has already been prepared with an elegant u-shaped, now turf-covered double mound designed by WHY LLC that will be landscaped. It will be the site, when dedicated in June 2016, a sculpture to be called SKY LANDING, by artist Yoko Ono and a marker—a space for both congregation and contemplation, according to Mayor Rahm Emanuel. No information was provided about the sculpture except as suggested by the title. The project is being funded with private money under direction of private-public partnership Project 120. The project was given several public and stakeholder vettings.

The project is sited in Jackson Park, Chicago's Wooded Island, on the site of the Phoenix Pavilion, a gift from Japan to Chicago at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 and located next to the later Japanese Garden. SKY LANDING and the Garden together comprise The Garden of the Phoenix.

The ground-breaking event was designated a "Ground Healing," to establish the site as a bridge between sky and earth. The public ceremony consisted of a stirring drum, music and dance performance led by award-winning Tatsu Aoki and his Miyumi Project featuring the Tsukasa Taiko drummers, an ensemble of three saxophones, flute, and bass, and a traditional Japanese fan dance. Any further ceremony after on the hill was perhaps postponed because of weather, but the weather could not dampen the enthusiasm and warmth. Ono said, **"It is almost like Chicago and Japan, that there's an incredible, intense opening of the heart from the Chicago end, and I didn't even know that. It's like, the intensity is almost insane. And I think 'wow, this is incredible'"**. Ono reflected that more Japanese should learn the Chicago-Japan story and give Chicago something back and that SKY LANDING can generate peace.

Context was given by host Robert Karr, and remarks made by Michael Moskow, Vice Chair and Distinguished Fellow, Global Economy of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and Chairman of the Japan Society of Chicago; Toshiyuki Iwado, Council General of Japan at Chicago; Hon. Rahm Emanuel, Mayor of Chicago; Derek R.B. Douglas, Vice President for Civic Engagement, The University of Chicago; and Yoko Ono. Honored guests included descendants of J. Donnersberger, South Parks Board Commission Chairman 1893.

Outlined was the long and deep relationship between Japan and the United States (first treaty March 31, 1854) and Chicago (first visit by a Japanese mission in 1872 with a gift to the fire-ravaged city). The gift of the Phoenix Pavilion to the Columbian Exposition and as a permanent gift to the City of Chicago was carefully worked out, including with Fair designers Daniel Burnham and Frederick Olmsted, then inaugurated--also on a March 31 in 1893 at an elaborate convening of national and Fair officials and notables. The accompanying ceremony of the "landing" of the phoenix on the site helped inspire today's SKY LANDING. The pavilion was modeled on a 12<sup>th</sup> century temple, shipped in sections from Japan, and assembled on the Island. The phoenix is associated with "kanji" (rebirth) and the idea that people and all are reborn on their 60<sup>th</sup> birthday and hence that history moves in cycles of 60 years. The pavilion was a well-used and loved facility in Chicago and by its growing Japanese community for many years. After its destruction by fire, four partially-burned panels were in storage for many years, but are now restored and on view in the Art Institute of Chicago.

SKY LANDING was conceived during an invited visit by Yoko Ono as Project 120 planted over 120 cherry trees as part of an evolving plan to restore and rethink the environs of the Japanese Garden and create ways that would serve as a living history lessons honoring Olmsted, the Columbian Exposition, the relationship with Japan, and the planting in 1913 of the cherry trees in Washington D.C. Cherry blossoms are iconic of spring in

Japan and that appealed to Ono, as well as the site as the location at the Phoenix Pavilion, representing the Japan-Chicago relationship and at the center of major axes of both the park and the Columbian Exposition. Ono, releases state, was immediately drawn to and struck by the power of the place **“I recall being immediately connected to the powerful site and feeling the tension between the sky and the ground. I wanted the sky to land here, to cool it, and make it well again.”**

2013 marked the passage of two 60-year cycles since 1893 (celebrated with giant banners celebrating “120 Years” at today’s ground breaking.) Speakers noted that while the first cycle post-World’s Fair was marred by an era of disastrous relations between the U.S. and Japan; the second has been marked by deepening alliance and mutual reliance. SKY LANDING marks the start of a third cycle and that is celebrated by SKY LANDING, standing in as a reconstruction of the Phoenix Pavilion. SKY LANDING project’ undertaking today conveniently dovetails with the U.S. Army Corps reconstruction of Wooded Island and the lagoons and a larger framework planning to restore habitat and landscape in accord with Olmsted’s vision, but resilient and sustainable. And Mayor Emanuel also took advantage of the event to announce another aspect of the City’s renewal of its commitment to public art, 50 new pieces of art in each of the 50 wards.

Chicago Park District CEO and General Superintendent Michael Kelly said about SKY LANDING in a release, “The City of Chicago was honored to receive such a gift from Japan at the time of the World’s Columbian Exposition. Understanding our past and our relationship today as global partners, we are privileged that the site, with the addition of ‘SKY LANDING’ by Yoko Ono, will teach and inspire us and future generations who visit The Garden of the Phoenix.” It’s an expression of the “enduring legacy of Eastern and Western collaboration” and unity the city press release adds. Mayor Emanuel said, “We will be most honored with the only place in the Americas with her artwork, and I want to thank you for choosing Chicago for that.”

Yoko Ono is an internationally-renowned installation and performance artist who grew up in Japan and has kept her connections to her homeland strong. She has overseen large outdoor installations: in New York City’s Central Park (“Strawberry Fields”) and Reykjavik, Iceland (“Imagine Peace Tower”). SKY LANDING is her first permanent installation in the Americas. A retrospective of is currently on view at the MOMA in New York. Ono is widow of John Lennon, and is devoted to peace, meditation, and mystic powers and significance.