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Can Design Prepare for Disaster?

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With cars, there's a certain accepted risk that at least 42,000 Americans are going to die every year. That's just what happens, and it's O.K. because that's balanced against the measure of free movement that we have, which is extraordinary. And that seems to have found its balance.

Q: In the case of automobiles, it seems as though somebody somewhere has done a good job of selling safety. Safety is now a sales point. Aren't there other spheres of design in which safety could actually be introduced as value?

Ms. Antonelli: Oh, it already is: children's stuff.

Mr. Rogers: When I was a kid, I don't think I even saw a bicycle helmet, ever. Now, it has become absolute de rigueur. Now they've become as much the attire of biking as they are part of the safety.

Q: There are designs for a national identity card included in the "Safe" show. Are they a good idea? If you had to design one, how you would make it effective?

Mr. Pasquarelli: Anything can be copied, anything can be faked, so what value is it? Again, it's that perception of making people think that they're safer than they really are; it's the industry of fear.

Q: Some of the people here who grew up in Europe grew up in cultures where you were expected to have your papers on you and it wasn't considered a fascistic thing.

Ms. Antonelli: I don't feel my rights violated by having an ID card. But I agree that it's probably not useful. You want me to carry an ID card? No problem, if it really helps.

Ms. Kolatan: I think that there's a false focus in the discussion right now that tends to isolate a single issue as a panacea for everything.

Mr. Rakowitz: I'm against it because of the time that it's coming at and also its sort of confluence with the safety advertising that's happening now: "If you see something, say something" - those posters in the subway. I feel like the next show should be called "Trust." Security isn't locks on doors; you can put lots of those on. But it's better to talk to your neighbor eventually.

Q: We have a lot of temporary design solutions in place for spot response to terrorist fear. The police are now searching our bags sporadically in the subways and they've got two officers at a folding table. Should we be accepting reality, and designing these types of new features of our landscape?

Mr. Rogers: Some of it will become permanent because there are some very real, very bona fide threat conditions that exist and need to be addressed. With the accessibility issue in architecture and design, you know, it's taken us 20 years to get curb cuts and do just basically responsible things. Nobody makes a big deal about accessibility any more, you just do it.

Mr. Pasquarelli: The clients are coming around. Now, 80 or 90 percent of our clients come to us and say "We want sustainable solutions. We're willing to spend a little bit of extra money." Some of them are actually rather insistent upon it. Of course, then you get your zoning approval and your plans approved and everything else and then they spin around in their S.U.V. to pick you up. But I

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think that it's really going to be a reality in most of the buildings over the next decade.

Q: Many people talked after 9/11 about being less cynical, and the importance of thinking positively, in its aftermath. Did anyone here see that mood make its way into design?

Mr. Rogers: The idea that there's a big role for design in city situations is more prominent nationally than any time in my career, for sure.

Ms. Kolatan: Also locally I would say. In the whole rebuilding process and the two design competitions that were held, what struck me was that everybody was talking about urbanism and it was such a great thing, being an architect, where people were interested in discussing urban issues. I really thought it was great that there was such an awareness and interest at such a general level with urban and cultural issues.

Mr. Pasquarelli: And I don't think that's waned. It's something that's palpable; the city is almost in its best building days since the Robert Moses era. There's a belief that you can do things again. There's a belief that the city can change itself and that design and people can come together and we can make the city better. And I really think people believe that.

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"Safe: Design Takes On Risk" will open at the Museum of Modern Art on Oct. 16 and runs through Jan. 2. For information: (212) 708-9400 or moma.org.

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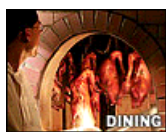
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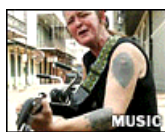
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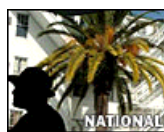
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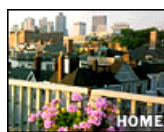
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