

# Panorama Fun Facts

**Builders of the Panorama**

The model was conceived by Robert Moses and constructed by Lester & Associates of West Nyack, N.Y. It was paid for by New York City.

Original Purpose of the Panorama: The Panorama was built as New York City's display at the 1964-1965 World's Fair. After the Fair it served as an urban planning tool.

Dates of Construction: July 1961-April 1964

Number of workers: It took more than 100 full-time workers to construct the Panorama.

Cost: \$672,662.69 in 1964 U.S. Dollars

Updates: The Panorama was designed to stay current with the changing city. Complete updates took place in 1967, 1968, 1969, and 1974. Another complete update took place in 1992.

Scale: 1" = 100 feet (1:1200)  
Total Area: 9,335 square feet

Length at Longest Point: 154 feet 6 inches from the Bronx city line at Westchester to tip of Staten Island at Perth Amboy.

Width at Widest Point: 137 feet from the west side of Manhattan to Nassau county line.

**Special Features of the Panorama**

3,172 colored lights showing the location of municipal facilities.

Moving airplanes that land every minute at La Guardia Airport.

**Sizes of the Panorama**

- Approximate size of Manhattan – 70 x 15'
- Approximate size of Bronx – 40 x 40'
- Approximate size of Brooklyn – 50 x 50'
- Approximate size of Queens – 60 x 75'
- Statue of Liberty – 1 7/8" w/base 3 1/4"
- Central Park – 27 3/4" x 11' 3 1/4"
- Verrazano-Narrows Bridge – 5' 11 1/2" x 1", tower height 7"
- Citicorp (Queens) – 6 3/4" (H)
- Brooklyn Bridge – 3' 5 1/4" x 1", tower height 3"
- George Washington Bridge – 4 x 11/16", tower height 6"
- Staten Island Ferry Ride – 22'
- Coney Island Beach – 13' 4 1/4"
- Queens Museum, N.Y.C. Building – 4 1/4" x 2 1/8, Height 1/2"
- Empire State Building – 15"
- Estimated Weight: 45,000 lbs.

Number of Buildings: When the Panorama was originally completed in 1964 there were approximately 830,000 buildings; as of 2013 there are approximately 895,000 buildings.

Material Used: The base of the Panorama is constructed out of urethane foam mounted on Formica flakeboard framed by pine boards; the bridges are brass.

**Panorama Trivia**

The Panorama is constructed in 273 sections. Because of size restrictions, the section showing Far Rockaway was never installed.

Two workers left their names spelled in shrubbery. Look for Bill and Ed on two islands in Jamaica Bay.

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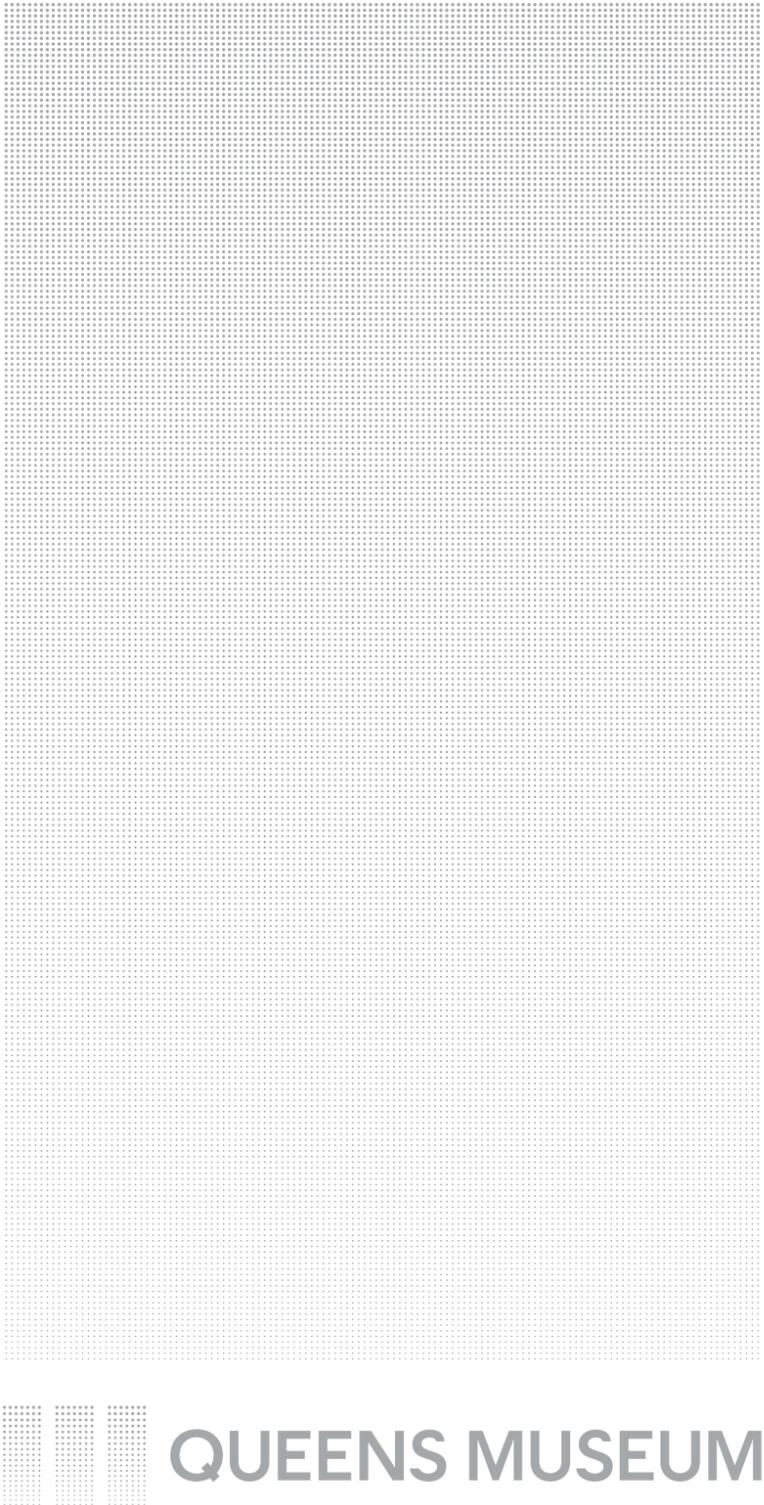
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# Panorama of the City of New York

# On Long-Term View

Right: View from second floor facing south on the Panorama of the City of New York, overlooking The Bronx, Upper New York Harbor, Queens, Manhattan and Brooklyn. Photo by Max Touhey

Below: Original sign for the 9 minute Helicopter Ride encircling the Panorama of the City of New York at the New York City Exhibit. Photo by Phyllis Bilick



# Panorama of the City of New York

## On Long-Term View

This brochure has been organized by Louise Weinberg, Registrar, Archives Manager and Curator, with assistance from Wendy Jimenez, Van Lier Curatorial Fellow for Collections, and Meghan Wilcox, collections intern.

View of midtown Manhattan and Central Park. Photo by Max Touhey

*“...The closest thing to a full-blown portrayal of the city in a work of art that is also a singularity unto itself is called simply The Panorama of the City of New York, housed in the Queens Museum of Art since 1964. This 9,335-square-foot model, a relic from another era made of wood, plastic, fake shrubbery, Formica and whatnot, is the only way to see the entire city all at once. It is a theatrical cabinet of cartographic curiosities, a topographic dinosaur in the age of Google Earth.”*

— Jerry Saltz, *New York Magazine*

The Panorama of the City of New York is the jewel in the crown of the collection of the Queens Museum and a locus of memory for visitors from all over the globe. Conceived as a celebration of the City’s municipal infrastructure by urban mastermind and World’s Fair President Robert Moses for the 1964/65 Fair, the Panorama was built by a team of more than 100 people working for the great architectural model makers Raymond Lester & Associates over the course of three years.

Lester was familiar with building larger-than-life model environments, having worked with Norman Bel Geddes as an artist, designer and fabricator for the 1939/40 New York World’s Fair, and later, on other large scale models of civic projects for Moses. In planning the model, Lester referred to aerial photographs, Sanborn fire insurance maps, and a range of other City material as the Panorama had to be accurate, with the initial contract demanding less than one percent margin of error between reality and the “world’s largest scale model.” Comprising an area of 9,335 square feet and built to a scale of 1:1200 where one inch equals 100 feet, the Panorama is a metropolis in miniature. Each of the city’s 895,000 buildings constructed prior to 1992 and every street, park and some 100 bridges are represented and assembled onto 273 individual sections comprising the 320 square miles of New York City. In this miraculously scaled cityscape, the borough of Manhattan measures a seemingly vast 70 x 15 feet and the Empire State Building is a towering 15 inches tall



Overview of Lester & Associates workshop, 1962. Collection of the Queens Museum; Gift of Lester & Associates

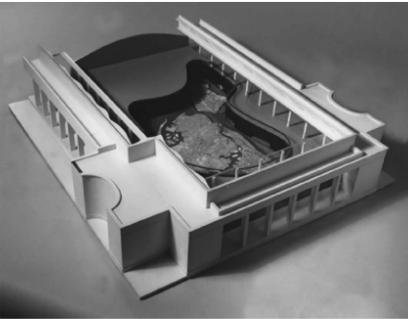


while the Statue of Liberty is only 1–7/8 inches in height. Long Island and New Jersey peek onto the model as black shadowy masses to the east and west.

When introduced in 1964, the Panorama’s special features included a continuous lighting cycle that went from dawn to dusk to night. In addition, an automated program of 3,172 colored lights highlighted the City’s municipal buildings: police precincts, firehouses, schools, hospitals, courthouses, libraries, public housing projects, as well as water, gas and electric stations. Black light fixtures mounted a few feet above the surface of the model illuminated trees and grounds of the City’s parks and the windows of Manhattan’s skyscrapers, all painted with phosphorescent paints that glowed green in the “night” cycle. Other special effects in the Panorama included moving airplanes that took off and landed at LaGuardia Airport every few minutes.

The original materials used to construct the Panorama itself are a sign of the times in which it was built—sculpted urethane foam on Formica flakeboard mounted on wood. The buildings were constructed of wood, plastic and hand painted paper, and the bridges of etched brass. Ongoing building additions are made by architectural model makers of laser cut/etched acrylic generated from computer aided designs.

The Panorama was one of the most successful attractions at the ‘64 Fair with millions enjoying what was billed as an indoor helicopter tour of New York. The 9 minute ride provided a “God’s eye” view of the complex topography of the five boroughs and their waterways, allowing sight-seers to view the city at sea level and from a simulated 20,000 foot elevation. The “helicopters,” molded plastic tracked cars that encircled the model, also came with a guided tour, “The City of Opportunity,” read by broadcast legend Lowell Thomas. The ride was a bargain at 10 cents per person while the design and construction of the entire Panorama cost \$672,662.69 in 1964, the equivalent of approximately \$5 million today.



Model of the New York City Pavilion with the roof removed to show the location of the Panorama, 1961. Photo by Lester & Associates

Original Helicopter Ride encircling the Panorama of the City of New York at the New York City Exhibit. Photo by Phyllis Billick

After the Fair the Panorama and helicopter ride remained open to the public through 1967, its originally planned use as an urban planning tool seemingly forgotten. To keep up with the rapidly evolving development of the city, updates were accurately recreated in the model by Lester’s team in 1967, 1968, 1969 and 1974. Though the Queens Museum opened in 1972, only sporadic changes were made in the intervening years solely due to donations from architects and developers. During the 1980s boom in construction, models of the AT&T (Sony), Citicorp and other buildings were donated and placed on the model, though most public works and city projects were not included.

In 1992, Lester & Associates was again enlisted, this time to bring the entire model up to date. While the Museum itself was closed for a two-year renovation designed by Rafael Viñoly, the entire model was removed, with each of the 273 4 x 10’ sections updated using 5,000 maps, 109 aerial photographs and site field trips to determine current conditions. In the end, more than 60,000 buildings were replaced before each panel was reinstalled in time for the Museum’s November 1994 re-opening. At this time, the helicopters, having exceeded their expected lifetime, were removed and replaced with a series of glass balconies and gently sloping ramps that mimicked the original tour of 1964. By revealing the open space and soaring vaulted ceiling of this massive “room,” the Viñoly design embraced the viewers’ need to experience New York City on a personal block by block level as well as the grand, overarching vision of Robert Moses the planner/builder and his achievements.

In the spring of 2009, the Museum launched its Adopt-A-Building program aimed at securing the future of the model. For as little as \$50, real estate on the Panorama can be “purchased,” with property owners receiving a deed in exchange for their donation. Hundreds have commemorated first date locations, elementary schools, first homes, and parents’ businesses by adopting a building. Funds raised support the overall upkeep of this treasure and education programming that brings the magic of New York to thousands of children each year.

