



# The Grand Concourse Turns 100

Courtesy of The Bronx Museum of the Arts. © 2008 Daniel Hauben

## The Bronx Kicks Off A Year of Celebration for the Grand Concourse & Boulevard Borough's Most Famous Street Turns 100



The work of noted artist Daniel Hauben is on display at the Bronx Museum of the Arts as part of its centennial exhibit titled *Intersections: The Grand Concourse at 100*.

When the Grand Concourse officially opened in November of 1909, it was a grand boulevard indeed, complete with a European pedigree. French engineer Louis Risse based the Concourse on the Champs-Élysées, a Parisian thoroughfare famous for its elegant design and vibrant street traffic, and the Concourse gracefully ferried Manhattanites to parks and farmlands in the northern Bronx.

A century later, the Grand Concourse retains much of its original grandeur along its four-mile, south/north trajectory stretching from 138th Street to Van Cortlandt Park. Along the way are some of the borough's most well-known sites, including the Bronx Museum of the Arts, Hostos Center for Art & Culture, Edgar Allan Poe

Cottage, the Bronx Central Post Office with Ben Shahn murals in its striking lobby, the Bronx Supreme Courthouse Building, the Bronx Walk of Fame, and the country's largest collection of Art Deco residential housing.

The borough's year-long celebration of its most beloved avenue actually began in December of 2008, when major improvements were unveiled by the New York City Department of Transportation at a ribbon-cutting ceremony at Lou Gehrig Plaza on 161st Street and Grand Concourse. The transformation included replacing an underpass arch structure at E. 161st Street, adding urban landscape design elements to the plaza, and incorporating new roadways, traffic patterns, sidewalks and dedicat-

ed bike lanes to improve mobility and safety for pedestrians, motorists and cyclists.

"The Grand Concourse is the beating heart of The Bronx; the Concourse's vitality reflects the community which embraces it," says Congressman Jose E. Serrano, who provided early funding for the revitalization project.

Leading the borough's centennial celebration is the Bronx Museum of the Arts (1040 Grand Concourse at 165th St., (718) 681-6000, [www.bronxmuseum.org](http://www.bronxmuseum.org)) which in March opens the first of three exhibits detailing the past, present and future of the Grand Concourse with a focus on design and urban life.

"Just imagine, when it was designed there were no buildings,

culture that grew up around avenue. By 1935 it had become a shopping hub lined with Deco apartment buildings—area residents referred to as "Avenue for the middle-class." The exhibit will also include photography, paintings and other artwork inspired by the Concourse.

On August 2, *Intersections: The Grand Concourse at 100* will open, focusing on two artists, Katie Holten and Jeff Leatham, whose work was specially commissioned for the centennial. The exhibit will feature a collection of Leatham's photographs depicting the Concourse along the Concourse today, and Holten will mount a special outdoor exhibit called *Tree Museum* exploring the area's greenery. Bessa sees these two exhibits as a con-



The Concourse north of Belmont Avenue dated Oct. 1904.

just farmland. The sheer magnitude of it was so ambitious," says Sergio Bessa, Director of Programs at the museum. "It allowed the borough to grow around the Concourse in a very neat way. The Concourse serves as a main artery with the Bronx, one that has changed with time and development."

The first portion of the museum's centennial programs, titled *Intersections: The Grand Concourse at 100*, will detail the

nation of the Concourse's current attributes. "After Robert Moses the Concourse became more of a highway, a quick exit from Manhattan to the suburbs," he said. "Today it's more of a mix. With the growth movement I think we'll see even more trees and pedestrians along the Concourse in the future."

The Museum's year-long tribute to the Concourse will culminate with *Intersections: The Grand Concourse Beyond 100*, an in-

active exhibit that will include seven designs for the future of the Concourse, co-sponsored by the museum and the Design Trust for Public Space.

Events for school kids, teachers and families are planned for the duration of the three exhibits.

Bessa sees the design contest in particular as a way to cultivate a

sense of curiosity about the Bronx and about urban planning as a creative force. Through an exploration of the Grand Concourse the museum will engage visitors in a larger conversation about the intersection between life and design in an urban setting. "This is a way to trigger the interest of people of the area, and the world, to envision the

future of the Bronx."

Even institutions which aren't located on the Grand Concourse are saluting the famed street. Wave Hill, for example, a public garden in the Riverdale neighborhood, is marking the centennial with a series of cabaret performances featuring composers with Bronx roots. And another major Bronx

artery, the Bronx River, will celebrate the milestone birthday with spring events hosted by the Bronx River Alliance and its partners.

This year's Bronx Week celebration, hosted by the Bronx Borough President's Office and produced by the Bronx Tourism Council, will also pay tribute to the Grand Concourse, with events highlight-

ing the iconic boulevard.

For a list of Concourse Centennial events as they are scheduled, see The Bronx Tourism Council's Calendar of Events at [ilovethebronx.com](http://ilovethebronx.com).