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**CIVIC
ACTION**

WITH

**THE NOGUCHI MUSEUM AND
SOCRATES SCULPTURE PARK**

CIVIC ACTION

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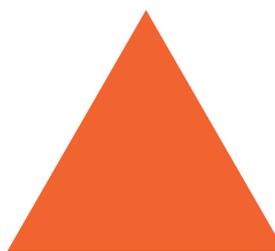
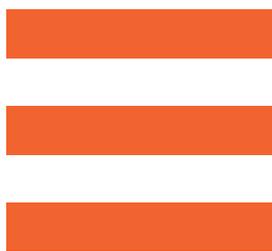


TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 2 Foreword**
Jenny Dixon and John Hatfield
- 5 Introduction**
Jenny Dixon
- 12 A Conversation**
Alyson Baker and Claire Weisz
- 20 Seeding Potentials**
Julie V. Iovine
- 27 Curator's Statement**
Amy Smith-Stewart
- 29 NATALIE JEREMIJENKO**
UP_2_U
- 47 MARY MISS**
R/CaLL: If Only the City Could Speak
Ravenswood / City as Living Laboratory
- 65 RIRKRIT TIRAVANIJA**
Greenway and Community Kitchen
- 83 GEORGE TRAKAS**
Shoreline Access: Queensbridge,
Ravenswood to Astoria
- 101 What Do Artists Have to Do With It?**
John Hatfield
- 105 Museum Activism**
Laurie Beckelman
- 107 New Models for Planning**
Claire Weisz
- 110 Civic Action Charrette**
The Architectural League of New York
- 118 Epilogue: City Dialogue**
Hugh Hardy
- 122 Acknowledgements**

Aerial of Long Island City and the surrounding area



Soeratas



Sculpture Park

F O R E W O R D

The Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park have joined together in partnership to produce a project about community, real estate development, and the built and natural environment of Long Island City, New York. The impetus for the project began with the recognition of our common histories as art organizations founded out of the visions of two internationally recognized artists, Isamu Noguchi and Mark di Suvero, and a mutual sense of urgency about our future role as cultural anchors in an increasingly active site of speculative development, environmental stress, and urban master planning. Situated along the northwestern edge of Long Island City, The Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park, and the neighborhood as whole, face challenges, including a lack of public transportation, isolated wayfinding, overstressed infrastructure, and competing interests for private and public land use.

For over 25 years, Socrates and Noguchi have been presenting art to a devoted local, national, and international following and shaping the identity of this part of Queens. Given this history, our missions, and our beliefs in the power of artists, both organizations felt it only appropriate to call on artists as our shared neighborhood is being reconsidered. For The Noguchi Museum this project marked a first foray in inviting contemporary artists to engage in such dialogues whereas for Socrates such engagement is at the core of their mission.

The partnership between Noguchi and Socrates was established in early October of 2010 with the invaluable contribution of Alyson Baker, the previous Executive Director of Socrates. It was at this time that the project's themes began taking shape and it was decided that four artists were to be invited to participate in what emerged as the project title, *Civic Action: A Vision for Long Island City*. Each artist was to develop a team—from an architect/urban planner to a scribe to document the process—and be responsible for inviting a range of contributions. The team's ideas and findings would be presented as an exhibition at The Noguchi Museum and then produced as large-scale projects at Socrates Sculpture Park. The third part of *Civic Action*, and arguably the most significant, would be the present cumulative publication, for which Julie V. Iovine has so masterfully served as editor. In December 2010, the artists Natalie Jeremijenko, Mary Miss, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and George Trakas were invited and accepted the challenge put before them. Amy Smith-Stewart was engaged as the curator to work with the artists and Claire Weisz became an impresario and advisor to the assembled collaborative teams. Mindful of Mark di Suvero's and Isamu Noguchi's realized visions, the artists' charge was to re-envision a discrete area of Long Island City—however they might conceive of this endeavor. Though artists were provided with a specific geographical area to focus on, few teams stayed within these parameters for reasons that will unfold within the pages of this publication.

From October 13, 2011 to April 22, 2012, The Noguchi Museum presented works produced by the artists and their respective teams of historians, urban planners, scientists, and architects in the form of objects, plans, texts, models, and renderings. At Socrates Sculpture Park, these artists produced and exhibited site-specific installations in the landscape from May 13 to August 5, 2012.

Support for the project materialized in many ways among the funding community and corporate supporters. Demonstratively, they have encouraged *Civic Action: a Vision for Long Island City* and have appreciated the goals that The Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park set out to accomplish, as idealistic or ambitious as they may have been. The Rockefeller Foundation was first to understand the importance of what we hoped to achieve and provided the initial funding to make the project possible. Rockefeller Foundation support was followed by support from The National Endowment for the Arts, Agnes Gund, The Ford Foundation, The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation and TransCanada. A great number of people have made this project possible: the artists, the advisory teams, and our extraordinary staffs at Noguchi and Socrates. The public programs surrounding the exhibition, the outreach to planning and design colleagues involved in the New York City's architecture, urban design, and civic community have resulted in long-lasting partnerships for our neighborhood. Queens Council members Peter F. Vallone Jr. and Jimmy Van Bramer have embraced components of these projects. So, too, have Queens Borough President Helen Marshall and Assemblywoman Marge M. Markey, along with our City partners from New York City's Departments of Transportation, Parks and Recreation, and City Planning. The Municipal Art Society, the Architectural League of New York, and The AIA Center for Architecture have also provided wonderful forums for the extension of this project and we are so grateful for their expertise and guidance.

Additionally, both The Noguchi Museum's and Socrates Sculpture Park's board of trustees have been particularly supportive, and brave, in allowing both institutions to go beyond their normal purview of traditionally defined "art" projects and have heartily embraced this civic endeavor and unique collaboration of cultural neighbors. We thank them all for their extraordinary enthusiasm.

Finally, the following essays, contributions, diagrams, illustrations, images, and charrette will reveal the complexity of the challenges ahead, what ideas emerged from the project, and how four fiercely passionate artists and their collaborators have addressed some of the most compelling issues of our time about our urban environment and City. We are confident that within these pages are solutions, previously unthought-of concepts, strange and naïve ideas, and nuggets of practical wisdom. As Isamu Noguchi and Mark di Suvero did over 25 years ago, artists are taking up the challenge and we are most grateful to them.

Jenny Dixon Director, The Noguchi Museum

John Hatfield Executive Director, Socrates Sculpture Park



Isamu Noguchi garden, circa 1970



Isamu Noguchi garden, today

INTRODUCTION

The garden wall at The Noguchi Museum was built to keep something in, not out. One can conclude this from Noguchi's own statements in the March 1986 *Art News* interview Milton Esterow conducted with him. When asked what he hoped people from the local Queens communities would take away from The Museum, Noguchi responded, "...that this [the museum] is their place. They can come whenever they want to; this is a place to reflect and see an alternative existence to the one they have now."

When one is in The Museum's magical garden space the essence of The Museum that Noguchi envisioned is revealed. The sculptures in concert with the plantings, and the frequent sounds of birds and rustling leaves, define the garden in its sparse beauty as a quiet contemplative oasis for all who venture in to enjoy.

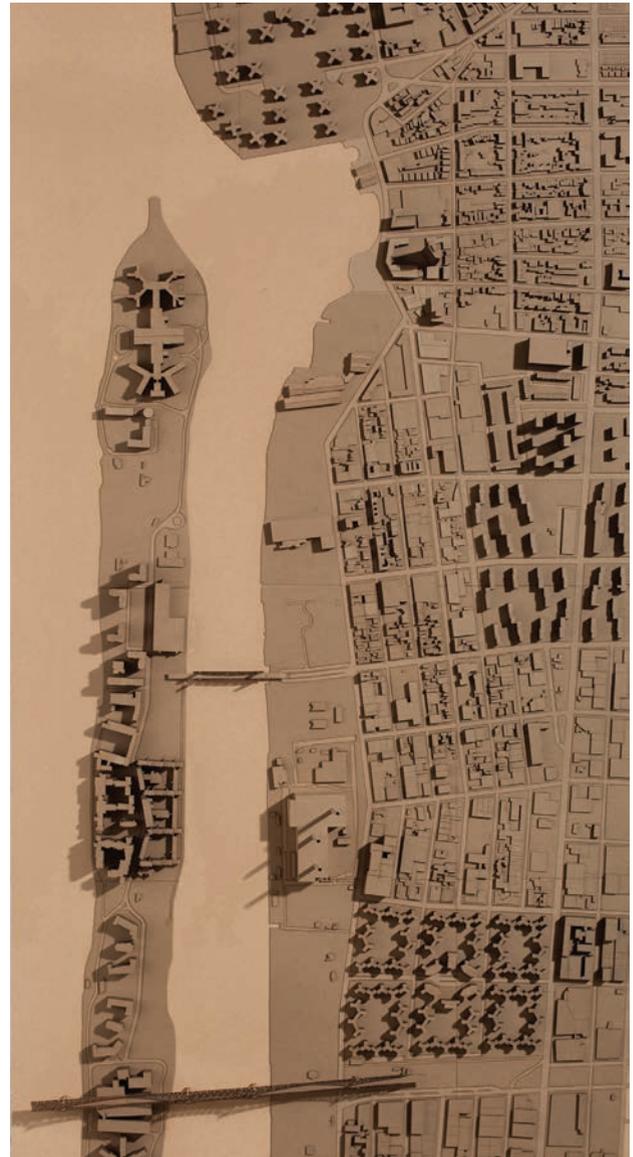
In the 1960s, when Isamu Noguchi first came out to the northern part of Long Island City just at the edge of Astoria (Ravenswood), the area was very much off the beaten path. The same holds true when Mark di Suvero some ten years later became Noguchi's neighbor to the north. Here both artists established studios and, as can be seen from the earliest plans for Socrates Sculpture Park, got to know and respect each other. Beyond their own immediate practices, their visions resulted in the creation of The Noguchi Museum (1985) and Socrates Sculpture Park (1986).

In 2007, Queens Community Board 1 contacted Directors of both The Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park as the owner of the block long storage building directly behind The Noguchi Museum was proposing to replace their current building with an apartment complex. Within the plans presented to the Community Board, the owner/developer placed two square garden lots, one titled Socrates and the other

Noguchi, news to us. But more and most apparent was the imminence of development and its impact on the neighborhood and directly on The Noguchi Museum. Though Noguchi and Socrates had collaborated on numerous projects, it is here where a shared commitment to find alternatives to what was being proposed for the building behind The Noguchi Museum, where Socrates' offices are housed, was affirmed.

Working closely with Noguchi Board members Donald Elliott and Hugh Hardy as well as with Museum colleagues, Amy Hau, George Jurgens, and Peter Scibetta, short of being able to purchase the property, strategies to mitigate the inevitable were discussed, debated and considered in numerous conversations with the Queens City Planning Office, elected officials and the ever-helpful Community Board. The economy tanked and the inevitable was no longer so inevitable. Among those consulted was the architect Diane Lewis. From this conversation, the idea to take the lead itself for a solution from Isamu Noguchi and the ways in which he considered and addressed public space was born. Moving on from this premise, the idea of both Isamu Noguchi and Mark di Suvero as visionaries who worked outside of constraints and confines of sculpture alone was what took hold. Alyson Baker of Socrates and Ivana Mestrovic of Spacetime, with the support of Mark di Suvero, became partners in the effort.

Toward that end, urban planner Claire Weisz, well versed in the community through her fine work with the Long Island City Cultural Alliance (LICCA), the master plan she completed for The Noguchi Museum's physical plant, and her graduate urban planning course at Parsons focusing on Socrates Sculpture Park and its link to the greater LIC/Astoria community was invited to serve as the urban strategist on the project to link all together. In this same manner, we engaged Laurie Beckelman as an advisor to help in making sure an expanded awareness of the project took hold throughout the City. Claire's and Laurie's work



Model of Long Island City produced by Claire Weisz and Parsons School of Design

framed the project and was supported by a very engaged Advisory Board comprised of people who had direct affiliations with Socrates and/or Noguchi and/or the LIC community: Landscape architect Diana Balmori, architect David Childs, former Chair of NYC Planning and Attorney Donald Elliott, architect Hugh Hardy, principle in real estate firm Greiner/Maltz Richard Maltz, and architect Richard Meier.

New zoning regulations were introduced in the spring of 2010 on the north side of Broadway, the

major east-west artery leading right into Socrates Sculpture Park and just immediately to the north of The Noguchi Museum. Simply put, the zoning prior to the spring of 2010 allowed buildings 35 feet in height to be built; now 80-foot buildings are able to be built on the north side of Broadway. Yet it was before the zoning actually changed that The Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park joined forces in consideration of what both Isamu Noguchi and Mark di Suvero had done to affect a neighborhood; the new regulations added a sense of urgency.

With a keen awareness of Mayor Bloomberg's extraordinary commitment to design excellence and public art and artists, the conviction was to elevate the conversation beyond being anti-development NIMBYs (Not in My Back Yard). As the Bloomberg administration has been unprecedented in its commitment to the cultural life of the City, and by extension to the artists and health of the organizations responsible for such, the administration also has been very active in encouraging redevelopment of numerous communities. How to engage an extremely receptive administration to consider alternatives to traditional development became a goal. The thought was that perhaps we could introduce something out of the ordinary: artists' visions for a community. Knowing that any such development would prove more viable sooner rather than later, timing was key for us to take the germ of an idea and put a framework around it.

With these key components in place, Noguchi and Socrates affirmed, four artists were to be invited to participate in what emerged as the project title, *Civic Action: A Vision for Long Island City*. Each artist was to develop a team. At minimum they would be responsible for assembling a team composed of an architect/urban planner and a scribe to document their process. The objective being to, through a process, be able to present the team's ideas and findings in an exhibition of prototypes to be held at The Noguchi Museum

between late October 2011 and late April 2012. Envisioned proto-types from the Noguchi exhibit would be actualized by the artists and realized in the summer 2012 at Socrates marking the Park's 25th anniversary. A cumulative publication would result, for which Julie V. Iovine graciously agreed to serve as the Editor.

Initial discussion among the artists and advisors resulted in consensus points that informed the larger conversation. Noting that Long Island City's boundaries are parallel on the south to Grand Central Terminal and on the north to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, participants began to grapple with the span of the neighborhood. Soon they appreciated the fact that the distance from MoMA/PS1 to The Noguchi Museum was similar to the distance between The Museum of Modern Art and The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Thus it was noted that the immediate Noguchi-Socrates neighborhood in northern Long Island City, southern Astoria should have its own identity. The historic name of the immediate vicinity, Ravenswood, was adopted by the teams, but there was a growing sense that the neighborhood needed a name of its own. Noting the markers to the neighborhood, such as the smokestacks on the nearby power plant, "big Allis", owned and operated by TransCanada, a natural beacon was identified.

In December of 2010 Natalie Jeremijenko, Mary Miss, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and George Trakas were invited to re-envision the immediate Noguchi-Socrates neighborhood. These four artists were selected, in part, based on their potential to complement one another. Each had a history of engagement and consideration of the public realm. Natalie Jeremijenko, an artist/scientist, looked at the area as a place for ideas and experimentation in terms of energy, health, and transportation. Rirkrit Tiravanija considered the visual disconnect between the institutions and public transportation, while he addressed the high water table. Underscoring his commitment to social

engagement was his proposed community kitchen within Socrates Sculpture Park, the terminus at the end of Broadway. Both Mary Miss and George Trakas, and their respective teams came up with wonderful ways to re-appropriate the TransCanada towers. Mary's ideas flowed from her City as Living Laboratory with the smoke stacks functioning like a vertical barometer—reporting on the health of the City from the vantage point of the air quality and amount of electricity consumed, moment to moment. George's interest was focused on lighting the stacks. TransCanada listened carefully to these ideas and provided a most memorable tour of the power plant for the artists and their teams.

Accepting involvement with the project, each team was expected to attend monthly meetings with the advisors and other guests to learn about one another's work, the project, the community, the zoning, the challenges, and the opportunities. Briefing books were provided to each artist and subsequent team members. Claire Weisz with the work of her students from Parsons' Graduate Program in the School of Constructed Environments generously provided the bulk of the materials within the briefing books including historical uses, the demographics, zoning, and maps of the area. Augmented by Noguchi and Socrates staff, a list of approximately 75 people from the community who agreed to serve as resources to the artists was part of these books. The monthly meetings led by Claire Weisz launched a process in early February 2011. Followed by a community reception where the teams were introduced to those who had agreed to serve as advisors. The last meeting was hosted by Mark di Suvero where he spoke of his own vision for the area and what it had been like when he first established his studio, Spacetime.

Beyond transportation—which was anticipated to benefit from the City's "bike-share" program—four concepts with overlapping themes were presented for the area. The artists looked at the problem posed as a mechanism for generating

integrated rather than competing ideas. Consensus emerged and all agreed that:

The area should be considered and receive designation as some type of special district.

The waterfront and access to the area should be maximized.

Ideas for a greener environment and for testing ideas to benefit the City's infrastructure could occur in this area, whether as methods for capturing energy, creating transportation alternatives, or lessening water runoff.

Since *Civic Action* opened in 2011, three very ordinary eight-story apartment buildings have risen on the north side of Broadway, a stone's throw from The Noguchi Museum and just east of the entrance to Socrates Sculpture Park. Also, announced since the project began is the CornellNYC Tech development on Roosevelt Island, which also will have an impact on the immediate area.

Those involved with *Civic Action: A Vision for Long Island City* continue to hope for synergies emerging with the new science campus that will help to influence local development. In early June, under the leadership of Rosalie Genevro, The Architectural League of New York organized a design charrette and brought together some thirty architects and planners to consider similar challenges as encountered by the *Civic Action* artists teams. Their inspired discussion and thinking bodes well for the area and for what the four artists and their teams who participated in *Civic Action* had begun to think about, discuss, and resolve. May what they began, and the visions they offered, indeed prove to be a catalyst for the imminent change that greets, and challenges, the shared Noguchi-Socrates neighborhood.

Jenny Dixon Director, The Noguchi Museum



Isamu Noguchi in his Studio



1



2



3



4



5



6

- 1 H3 offices, Civic Action working meeting
- 2 Civic Action working meeting, Natalie Jeremijenko
- 3 The Noguchi Museum, Civic Action opening, Rirkrit Tiravanija
- 4 Civic Action meeting
- 5 George Trakas, on site-visit along LIC waterfront
- 6 H3 offices, Civic Action working meeting



7



8



9



10



11



12

- 7 Civic Action working meeting, George Trakas
- 8 Long Island City, Civic Action meeting, Rirkrit Tiravanija and Alyson Baker
- 9 Civic Action working meeting, Mary Miss project matrix, detail
- 10 The Noguchi Museum, Civic Action opening, George Trakas and Jenny Dixon
- 11 Spacetime, Mark di Suvero's studio, Civic Action, meeting
- 12 Civic Action working meeting, Mary Miss

A CONVERSATION

Claire Weisz, urban strategist for *Civic Action* and Alyson Baker, then Executive Director of Socrates Sculpture Park discussed the history of the Park and the important role that artists and arts organizations have in defining a community.



Socrates Sculpture Park site, pre-1986



Community members working on-site at Socrates Sculpture Park, circa 1986

Claire Weisz (CW): Can you talk about the Park's history and describe what you knew of the history and what you first encountered in terms of a community at Socrates?

Alyson Baker (AB): I joined the Park in 2000. The story that's told and that has become part of the fabric of Socrates' history is that Mark di Suvero, along with his nephew, Enrico, founded the Park in 1986 and that it started out as an opportunity to use fallow land—land that had been an illegal dump site and was a space in a neighborhood that already had issues with crime and was a symptom of the neighborhood at the time.

CW: Was it actually a Parks Department site in the first place?

AB: No, it was under the jurisdiction of the Department of Ports and Terminals.

CW: But it was publicly owned?

AB: At that point, it was under the City's jurisdiction because it had been a ferry landing. The real trick at the very beginning was that Mark

needed to get a lease, but in order to get a lease you had to first have insurance and in order to have insurance you needed a fence around the property, but you couldn't put a fence up until you had a lease. So, it was one of those things that creates an impossible cycle and I think ultimately Mark di Suvero had a fence installed.

CW: Is any of that fence still in existence?

AB: Yes, in bits and pieces, and as part of the history it's always there. The incredible wall that surrounds the Park along Vernon Boulevard is part of its history, too, because that was built by members of the community over the same time period.

CW: So the adage "Good fences make good neighbors" applies here. Is it part of the Park's history, that regular business owners, people in the community, helped build the fence?

AB: Yes, it was done in an ad hoc way just in order to get the lease in place. But the bigger story is that it took a lot of sheer will and determination.



Early movie night at Socrates Sculpture Park



Artwork being installed at Socrates Sculpture Park

CW: When you became director of Socrates, were people already using Socrates as their neighborhood park?

AB: Absolutely. From the beginning, the people who ran Socrates realized that the audiences were very much event-driven, and so every time that there was a public event, an opening, a festival, or film screening going on in the Park, it attracted larger and larger audiences.

CW: Based on what you have described, when you first came to Socrates, there was already a sense of community—and particularly, a community of artists. I remember your speaking a little bit about all the different suppliers who worked with artists in the neighborhood. Can you describe this network and the supply-chain system supporting the arts?

AB: A large part of the reason Isamu Noguchi moved to the neighborhood, and also this is true of Mark di Suvero, was that there was so much industry and so many suppliers in the area. Whether it was metal or stone or masonry, there were source materials there, and I think that was and continues to be a big part of the success of Socrates—its ability to support artists as they're making work with the relationships that the Park has built up over all of those years. Those

suppliers are a big part of the collaboration that occurs at Socrates; the collaboration is not just with the staff and the people who are on site, but with the neighborhood as a whole.

CW: Obviously there are still a lot of fabricators and then there's the whole life of agencies and community boards. Has that evolved over time, from when you started?

AB: I think the main difference that occurred during that time period is a growing appreciation for what arts organizations and artists can bring to a neighborhood. So much work has been done to educate public officials and even fellow community members about the assets that art organizations bring to a neighborhood. Of course, there is always gentrification rather than just a simple humanizing of a neighborhood, which I think is one of the stories that Socrates played out really well. The fact is that Socrates evolved at a similar pace as its neighborhood and didn't outstrip it or create a situation where people were priced out quickly. It's been the constant—the Park is now celebrating its 25th anniversary. It's been a long, slow, even, measured change, not the sudden change that can happen sometimes when new development or a larger-scale type of gentrification occurs throughout an entire area. I think that one of the key lessons learned is that notion of a more measured pace of evolution. I



Socrates Sculpture Park site, pre-1986

do see it happening more quickly right now, but until last year it was still at a pace that I felt the neighborhood could handle.

CW: In terms of the development of the Park where structures have been added on over time, what are some of the other, future dreams and aspirations Socrates and the community share?

AB: A lot of things haven't really happened yet such as better public transportation, allowing people to move through the neighborhood more efficiently.

One of the best examples of positive growth is the gardens in the Park. From the beginning there was a desire to have beautiful, well-maintained gardens that were inviting and that were another

attraction for people to come to the Park, but that was a very slow process as well. It happened over the course of many, many years. When I first arrived and was working at the Park, all of the perimeter gardens were weeds and, frankly, we were happy to have them because they were green. Now there are spectacular gardens, which are a fantastic example of a company in the neighborhood coming and helping, in this case, Plant Specialists.

CW: Plant Specialists is the landscape design and horticulture company just right down the street on Vernon Boulevard?

AB: Yes, and the nature of that relationship is fascinating because they have plant materials—either over-orders, extra samples, plants rejected by a client, or that they didn't need for a project—



Socrates Sculpture Park landscaping, circa 2010



Community members working at Socrates Sculpture Park, circa 1986

that they bring over to Socrates. At the beginning this worked reasonably well, but there wasn't very much horticultural expertise among the staff or the crew at Socrates. When Plant Specialists co-owner Graham Hubbard joined Socrates' Board of Directors, he began to partner more closely with the Park, and provided a staff member from Plant Specialists to work at Socrates. Suddenly we had the expertise that we needed in order to take full advantage of these donations of plant material.

Unemployment is very high, especially in the Astoria Houses, which is right nearby and to be able to do on-the-job training in something like landscaping is a natural. It should be happening more. Once Plant Specialists came on the Board of Socrates and had staff members on site, the members of the Community Works Initiative Program were able to get formal training and the skill sets they needed to be marketable elsewhere.

So, although on a very small scale—we're talking only about three to five people a year—Plant Specialists is able to conduct training, see how people take to the work and how dedicated and interested they are in it, and are able to hire from our part-time temporary crew to work with them full-time permanently, which is a fantastic opportunity for people in the neighborhood to find employment in the landscaping and horticultural business, and get the job and the on-the-job training at the Park. That's a fantastic model and could certainly be used in other parks.

CW: Do you have a sense that more artists have moved into the neighborhood, or that younger adults who may not have been interested in art, have become more culturally engaged because Socrates is there?

AB: What's unusual about Socrates is that it's one of the few places that publicly presents the process of artmaking as much as it presents finished product. In other words, because the studio is on-site and artists are working on-site to create pieces for the Park, anyone who visits the Park regularly actually sees artists working. They see and they come to understand the amount of thought, energy, attention, and dedication that goes into making something, and all of the processes and materials are often things that they

can relate to, even if they don't necessarily relate to the finished product. So, it's almost like Socrates is a place where sculpture is grown and not just presented.

CW: That's a pretty interesting connection, of why, very early on, *Civic Action* was interesting to you, based on the fact that artists' work is exposed as part of the process of thinking about and planning the neighborhood. Looking at both the *Civic Action* exhibitions, at The Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park, could you talk a little bit about how you related what I'll call the "Socrates method" and this idea of process to what you saw the *Civic Action* artists doing?

AB: Certainly a big part of this process was research, which was probably more than what you normally see as an artist is getting ready to present a work at the Park, but there's always a component of that. I think that, throughout its history, every artist who has approached Socrates has had some knowledge of the story of the Park, its place within the community, and its relationship to the landscape beyond the perimeter of the Park—if nothing else, its relationship to the river and the skyline. With *Civic Action*, though, there was a much longer time frame, which allowed for much deeper research and there was a mandate that really required the artist to think about the entire area holistically.

CW: It's interesting that the term "site-specific" comes up. Socrates has had that combination of what you just described, which is exposing the process, but also every work out there, even when an artist decides to be intentionally not site-specific, is in dialogue with the Park's natural and urban environments.

One thing that struck me looking at the work in *Civic Action*, especially at both

Rirkrit's Community Kitchen and Natalie's biochar area, was how very much their projects speak to the world of environmental innovation and approach blackwater and graywater, the Park, and the neighborhood in a much more experimental way. Do you see in some small part a potential for this process to actually change some of what people expect cities and neighborhoods to do?

AB: I believe so. Socrates leads by example and I think that right from the beginning there were innovations on a very small scale that people are now starting to recognize work. This goes back to something that I was saying earlier about the measured pace of Socrates' growth. Human power made it happen. It was wheelbarrows and shovels, not earth movers that got things going. So, from that point of view, of course it was absolutely ambitious and it required the strong vision of one person, and that person was Mark di Suvero. His vision was strong enough and infectious enough to get other people behind it because it wouldn't have happened otherwise. That kind of model, of being able to start in one place and create a pilot that others can follow, is incredibly powerful, and to be able to sustain it over 25 years and have it reach various benchmarks and accomplishments along the way that can be celebrated and recognized is also very important.

CW: We, who have been involved with *Civic Action*, use the phrase "artist-initiated" or "artist-led" team, but I think the idea of the balance between an individual and their capability to lead and bring a group together is also something you saw experienced a great deal of at Socrates. I think you would say that one person couldn't have created any of those projects by him- or herself, that they require curators and an organization to help them. Can you reflect a bit on how community planning processes work now

and compare how these worked during your time at Socrates, and what you think the ideal process might be?

AB: I started to talk about that in terms of Mark di Suvero and his ability to motivate and excite people to get behind him in order to create Socrates, and in the same way, I was talking about how the *Civic Action* teams distilled the Socrates process and methods in which artists learn about the site and its history. I think the same thing is true of every artist who works at the Park on a scale that's beyond his or her own needs. Artists, if they are going to be successful in realizing their project in the way that they're envisioning it, have to be able to motivate a whole team of people to work with them, which is not the way most artists work, especially at a young age. So, they have to learn how to get people excited, people from the neighborhood, other companies, and businesses that we might introduce them to, their own friends and family. There have been multiple instances where artists have needed the help of many, many people in order to pull a project together. Not every artist works that way. Not every artist tries and is successful at it, but it's an incredible learning process and that can then be translated into the way that an institution like Socrates can operate in the world beyond its borders—by going to a City councilman's office, or going to the State Assembly and being able to articulate what it is that's important about Socrates.

The hard part is getting that started. What Socrates has done is roll on for 25 years successfully, moving forward, moving all of these things into a direction that has swept a whole group of people up with it. There's sort of this group notion of where it's headed and I think the history and the culture of our organization are well articulated. People can understand it, get on board with it, and share our vision for where it will go in the future, and that, again, is another perfect small example of what needs to be done on a larger

scale in order to move an entire community or entire city forward. I think that if there is enough of a sense of the identity of the organism that is the City or is the organization such as Socrates, then people get to know it almost like they would know a person and know where the trajectory of that project is going.

It's not always easy. Some of the greatest challenges I had when I was working at the Park were in trying to describe that Socrates is more than the sum of its parts. If I tell you it's a five-acre lot on the East River in western Queens where this and this and this happens, you don't get it. You need to see how all those things come together and form something that is more than those individual components, and that magic that occurs is all because of the people who are there interacting together and the fact that they all can have a sense of that identity and that place.

CW: When you describe that, it becomes really clear; that Socrates is not the kind of place where you just go look at something.

In a way, that's why people live in cities and that's why they are so engaged in cities. For some of the same reasons, Socrates needed its community to turn it into what it is, and the community needed Socrates to become who it is.

AB: "The Park pulls you in."

Claire Weisz Urban Strategist for *Civic Action* /
Principal, WXY Architecture + Urban Design

Alyson Baker Former Executive Director,
Socrates Sculpture Park



Socrates Sculpture Park, FLOAT 09.
Lone Wolf and Cub performance



Socrates Sculpture Park, Outdoor
Cinema, audience, 2006



Socrates Sculpture Park, 2007

E S S A Y

SEEDING POTENTIALS

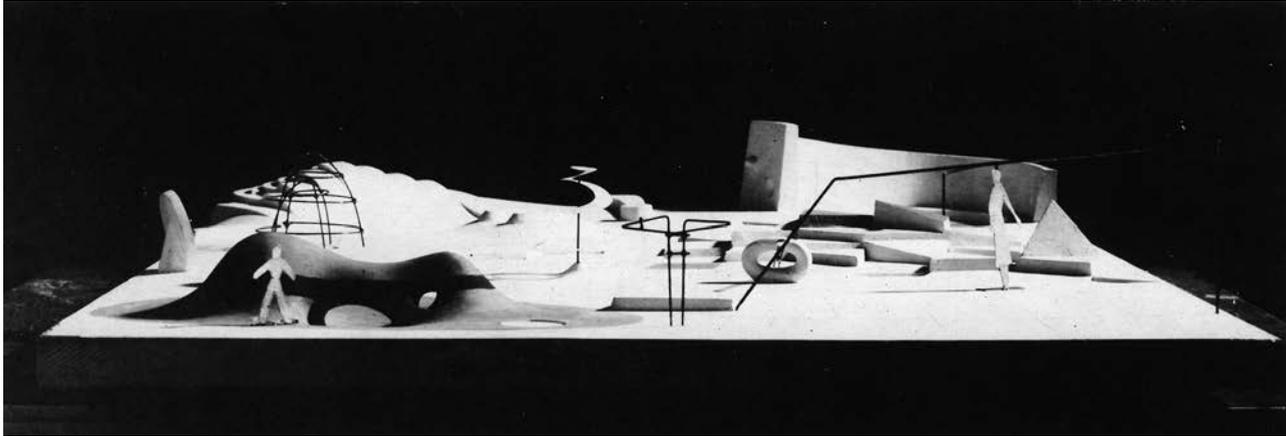
Urbanism is in transformation. A profound reversal of how cities are made, sustained, and experienced is underway. Through the creative rethinking of local conditions presented by the artists participating in *Civic Action*, The Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park are joining a much larger process of reorientation now in progress in cities across the United States and abroad. Key to this movement is engaged, rather than superimposed, urban planning.

Historically, urban plans have come down from above. Emerging out of a simple need to organize societies as they grouped together, urban planning at its most fundamental, the grid, goes back to 2500 BC where, for instance, it was used to make sense of the labor camps for slaves building the pyramids of Giza. In 1600 BC, Hammurabi, who ruled ancient Babylon, took it a step further, integrating an irrigation system and public buildings into the grid.

Quickly, urban planning evolved beyond simple organization to top-down control. The master plan is a double entendre. The need and desire of the ruling class to provide military defense, hygiene, and segregation were easily layered onto the basics of street crossings. In 1791, George Washington commissioned Pierre L'Enfant to create a plan for the new capital of the new democracy. His instinct was to create a defense plan for Washington, D.C., based on the grid intersected with diagonal avenues and punctuated with circles where armies could muster to block invaders.

Baron Haussmann was likewise empowered by Napoleon III to transform a Paris where narrow medieval alleys and open sewers still existed well into the 19th century. Haussmann's magnificent, wide boulevards (plus a functional sewage system) achieved Napoleon's imperial dreams while more lastingly controlling the spread of disease by ventilating the city.

By the 20th century, the modern city had moved past dominance by sovereign, mercantile, or industrial interests (although vestiges of all remain) and the ruling force turned out to be the car. The general destruction of city fabric wreaked by expressways slashing through neighborhoods and cutting off waterfronts, mostly as envisioned and executed in New York by Robert Moses, is still being felt. There was a greater toll, still, in the thinking of the so-called "city efficient" as a place one wanted to get into and out of as speedily as possible. In fact, Isamu Noguchi's experience with expedient urbanization was firsthand. His United Nations Playground, an effort to raise the aesthetic standards of play equipment used by city kids, was canceled by Moses in 1952. The bitter experience remained with Noguchi for years and he included in his 1968 autobiography an *Art News* review by Managing Editor, Thomas B. Hess who described the project as "a thing of beauty as the modern artist has found beauty in the modern world. Perhaps this is why it was so venomously attacked ('a hillside rabbit-warren') by the Cheops of toll bridges (Robert Moses)."



United Nations Playground Model, New York City, 1952. Proposal by Isamu Noguchi

Within this degenerating post-industrial, pro-auto urbs tenacious pockets survived, even flourished, powered—as residents, City officials, and developers soon noticed—by artists happily homesteading the derelict, the abandoned, and the decrepit stock of buildings in SoHo and other urban fringes. Cultural historian Sharon Zukin in her 1982 classic, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*, describes how quickly the powers that be—often realtors—exploited the added value that artists in residence brought to neighborhoods in transition. Gentrification remains one of the more subtly pernicious forms of top-down, deceptively laissez-faire urbanism where, as Zukin notes, pioneering artists are almost always the first to be displaced by rising prices.

In 1960s and '70s, Noguchi and Mark di Suvero took advantage of an earlier manufacturing phase of urban development, following light industry to Queens where they could continue working with fabricators and material shops. Other artists actively courted, commented on, and even celebrated the short-term nature of their impact on the visual and intellectual environment of SoHo. Artists such as sculptor and architect Gordon Matta Clark who bought up “gutterspace” sites in Queens at city auction; choreographer Trisha Brown whose staged *Roof Piece* (1977) posed dancers amid the water towers for the rare bird—or well-placed photographer—to see; and Robert Smithson with his *Floating Island* (1970–2005) and his preferred sites of “reckless urbanization” were among the catalysts of a kind of urbanism as “Happening.” As John Hatfield writes in his essay for this volume (SEE PAGE 101), provocateurs and conceptual artists both defined themselves as outsiders well positioned to see value where others did not. Their relationship to evolving urbanism, however, was incidental to their work. Even as triggers of change to the City, they tended to remain outside the process itself.



Trisha Brown's *Roof Piece*, 1973.
53 Wooster Street to 381 Lafayette Street, New York City, 1973.
© Babette Mangolte

Both in his hilariously seminal *Delirious New York* (1978) and weighty *S,M,L,XL* (1995) in which he borrowed liberally from manifesto art, architect and urbanist Rem Koolhaas perceived the seismic shift underway in placemaking:

If there is to be a “new urbanism” it will not be based on the twin fantasies of order and omnipotence; it will be the staging of uncertainty; it will no longer be concerned with the arrangement of more or less permanent objects but with the irrigation of territories with potential; it will no longer aim for stable configurations but for the creation of enabling fields that accommodate processes that refuse to be crystallized into definitive form; it will no longer be about meticulous definition, the imposition of limits, but about expanding notions, denying boundaries, not about separating and identifying entities, but about discovering unnameable hybrids...

S,M,L,XL (The Monacelli Press, 1997), pg 969.

Three decades on, urbanism has indeed seen a transformation. The paradigm shift away from top-down planning and “fantasies of order” is toward a more sustainably aware if not entirely boundary-free approach. Significantly, cars are no longer prime shapers of the urban landscape. Even one of Moses’s own highways, the Sheridan Expressway, has been decommissioned and a \$1.5 million federal grant awarded to develop alternate uses for

the highway, which residents of the South Bronx blame for higher asthma rates, general congestion, and an inaccessible waterfront. In ways unanticipated even 15 years ago, barriers have been breached and new urban modes have emerged. It is hard to imagine an urban planner in the Giuliani administration having embraced the idea of locating farms on rooftops (although Trisha Brown might have thought about it); today urban agriculture is far more likely to be municipally funded than a new highway.

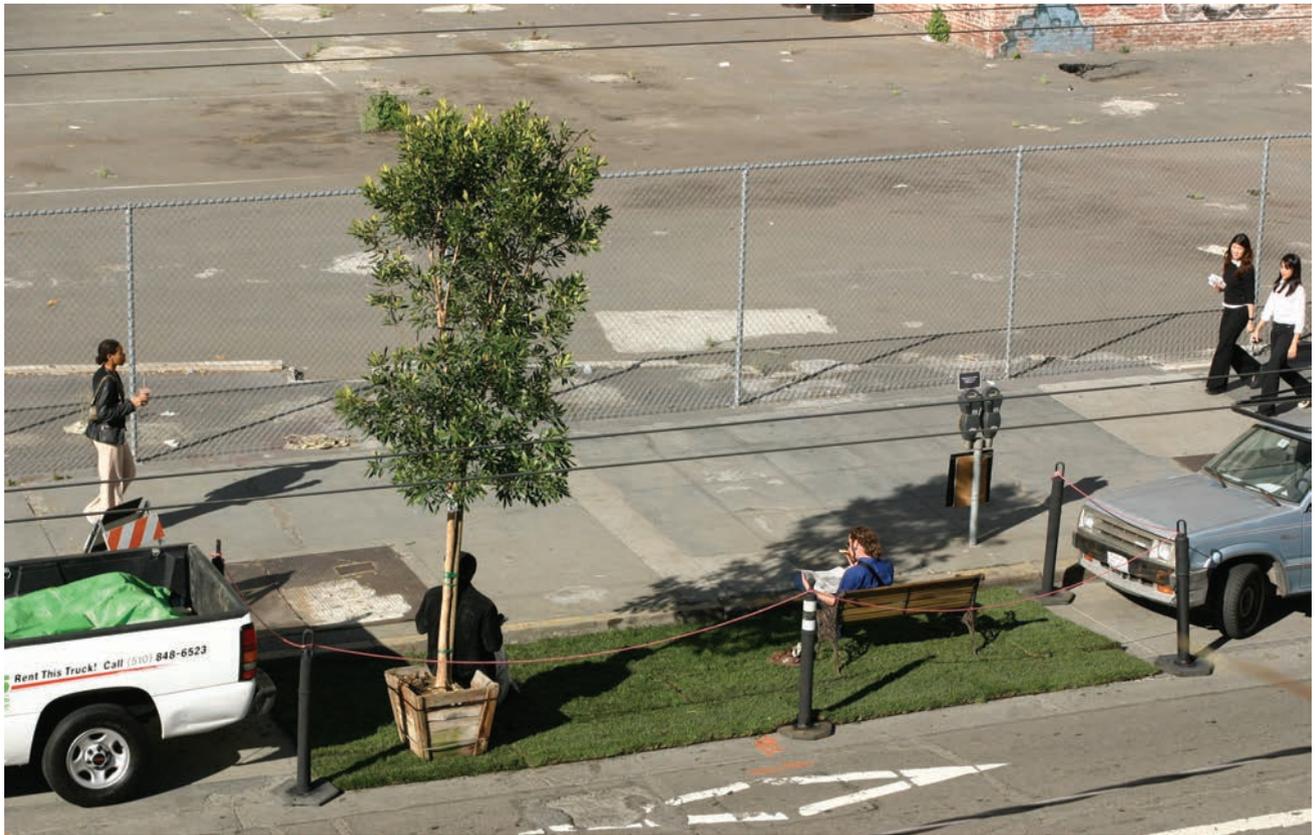
Generally considered developer-friendly, the Bloomberg administration has in fact made a point of supporting community-driven urbanism focused on quality of life, walkability, and sustainability. Instead of assuming that upward mobility means moving to the Connecticut suburbs, a new user-friendly City aims at enticing people to stay put. In his 2002 book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Richard Florida termed the inhabitants of this dynamically local city scene, the creative class. Handily, Florida reshaped the economic limitations that force many city-dwelling artists into sub-par living conditions as a desirable principle for development: “Everything interesting happens at the margins.”

When the economic crisis hit in 2009, Florida was forced to retreat from the notion that any city could revision itself as an artist-flavored mecca through a focus on the three Ts: technology, talent, and tolerance. The strategy of urban planning to attract the creative class has given way to an urbanism that is more spontaneous, proactive, and authentically rooted in place.

Tactical urbanism, also called guerrilla urbanism, DIY urbanism, civic economy, and city repair grew out of a frustration among city dwellers across the country (and abroad, in fact) with governments focused on the large-scale fix. The premise is that improvements start at the street level, neighborhood by neighborhood, sidewalk to sidewalk: In place of vast urban renewal makeovers, window boxes filled with flowers. As simplistic as it sounds, the movement has caught on, clearly tapping into a widespread interest in participatory placemaking and a bottom-up determination to effect positive local change.

Since 2005 when the San Francisco art and design studio Rebar hosted Park(ing) Day by filling a single parking space with sod and some lawn chairs (Artist Bonnie Ora Sherk did something similar back in 1970 with her Portable Architecture Project), some 140 cities—including Teheran, Paris and Hangzhou—in six countries have sponsored Park(ing) Day events.

Though centered on urban reclamation not creative expression, the movement uses strategies recognizable to artists working in the public realm. Tactical urbanism favors experiment, transformation, and participatory collaboration. In Windsor, Ontario, Broken City Lab, an artist-led collective, was hired by local government to design installations and interventions, including turning a billboard into a swing set, to draw the public’s attention to needs and opportunities in the community.



Rebar Group, *Park (ing)* Day Downtown San Francisco

Crowd sourcing and information sharing on the Internet has been instrumental in spreading the word and educating the public about how to adapt tactics to their own communities. Chair Bombing turns salvage materials into public seating that is then located in desolate and underserved communities, while “weed bombing” (at least in Miami) acts out against unwanted development by spray painting weeds in bright colors to draw attention to samples of negligent maintenance in areas slated for large-scale projects. DoTank, an interdisciplinary group of urban planners, engineers, and architects in Brooklyn, recycles pallets into Adirondack chairs set up in empty parking lots and alongside blank building walls.

Guerrilla gardening, pop-up cafés, food carts, de-paving, phone booths as bookshelves, and Open Streets, which are barred to traffic, all demonstrate how the public can take action to improve their immediate built environment. The operative mantra of tactical urbanism is “lighter, faster, cheaper” and even with an emphasis on the transitory, real change has happened.

In Dallas, Build a Better Block events—where swarms of mobile vendors, portable planters, painted-on bicycle lanes, and insta-café transformed forbidding empty parking lots and

boarded-up storefronts—were so successful, they forced the local City government to make permanent street improvements. The New York City Department of Transportation’s pilot project to turn Times Square into a public plaza with paint and 376 \$10 folding chairs has spawned pavement-to-plazas programs elsewhere around Manhattan and in other cities as well.

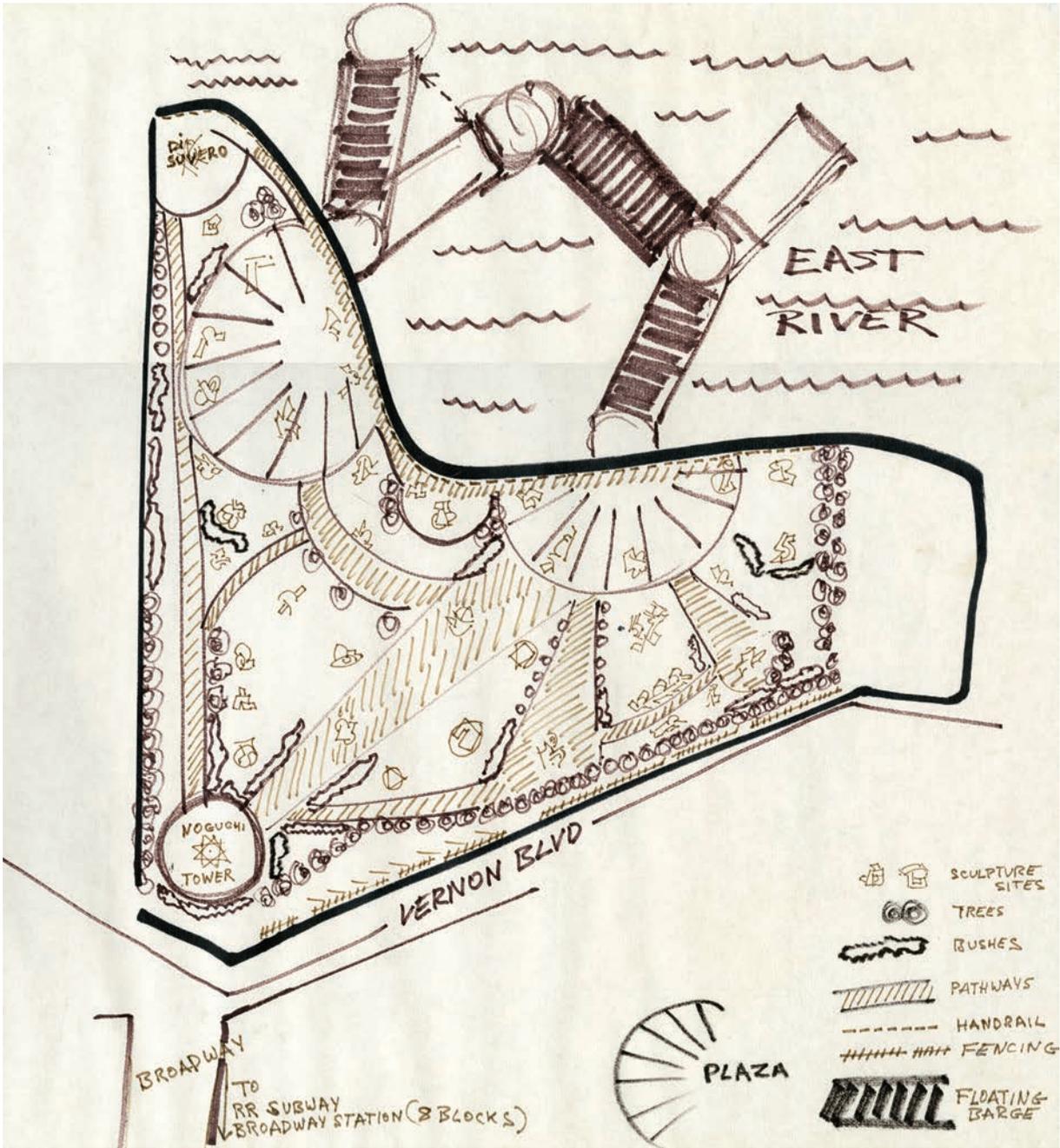
Fueled by the Internet, the recession, and a demographic shift back to cities, tactical urbanism is not so much a new movement, but rather a newly invigorated one. In fact in New York, Play Streets, or neighborhood streets closed-off to traffic, go back to 1914; any neighborhood can have one as long as 51 percent of the neighborhood residents sign a petition and present it to the local police department.

But there is a creatively inflected energy behind this bottom-up approach to urbanism that is entirely new. And it is thoroughly in sync with the projects conceived and developed for *Civic Action*.

R/CaLL: If Only the City Could Speak by Mary Miss envisions the city as a living laboratory, repurposing infrastructure, from light poles to smokestacks, to communicate actively with visitors and residents about the past, present, and pressing sustainable issues affecting the neighborhood. In several participatory and/or recycling projects reminiscent of Guerrilla Gardening, Natalie Jeremijenko connects the dots between energy, distribution, transportation, food, and ecology. George Trakas’s fractured boardwalk made of remnant wood and granite slabs along the East River insistently reclaims the waterfront for human use rather than industrial exploitation, while Rirkrit Tiravanija takes the homespun truth that people are drawn to food and turns it into a kitchen as local beacon signaling communal activity, no small achievement in a community with a fractured identity.

Like the pop-up initiatives of urban tacticians, the four artists participating in *Civic Action* invert presumptions about how cities are shaped by inventing, showing, and doing. In 1995, raising a prescient finger to the wind, Rem Koolhaas wrote that “to survive, urbanism will have to imagine a new newness.” With the exhibition and installations of *Civic Action*, The Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park start that imaginative process where it will matter most, close to home.

Julie V. Iovine Editor-in-Chief, *The Architect’s Newspaper*



Mark di Suvero's drawing of Socrates Sculpture Park with Isamu Noguchi's tower and East River piers

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

Art takes on so many different forms that closely approximate life these days—a meal, a carousel ride, a reading room, a fashion show. It mirrors life, but infuses it with just the right amount of the unexpected. This makes a lot of sense in the do-it-yourself culture we live in—where thanks to the Internet we can create our own brand, become a star, or self-publish and mass-market a novel in our spare time.

Many labels orbit around this relatively new kind of art making (indebted to Land Art, Conceptualism, Happenings, and Feminism). It has been called relational, experiential, social, and encounter art. Perhaps it is just living art. What it does best is challenge us to re-imagine our relationship with the world around us—making us see things we've taken for granted and then mixing it with a better or alternative way to arrange our lives.

Often, artists do this by assuming the roles of others, from urban planners to landscape designers, social scientists to environmentalists, architects to engineers, choreographers to directors, and, of course, political activists. To do this, they often work closely with experts in these very fields—showing us how change happens when we collaborate.

What this art does best is to start a dialogue, with you and me, the community and the world around it. It demands that we participate and is dependent on a special kind of interconnectivity. It breaks down biases and makes us all become a part of it. As artist Andrea Zittel points out: “Sometimes if you can't change a situation, you just have to change the way you think about the situation.”

Amy Smith–Stewart *Curator for Civic Action*



**NATALIE
JEREMIJENKO**

UP_2_U

WITH

NINA RAPPAPORT

ALEX FELSON

EDWARD PECK

FRAN GALLARDO

DAVID FLETCHER

USMAN HAQUE

ANGEL BORREGO

AND

PWP LANDSCAPE

ARCHITECTURE

Socrates Sculpture Park,
Civic Action,
UP_2_U, installation





UP_2_U

In UP_2_U, the Civic Action plan developed by Natalie Jeremijenko's Environmental Health Clinic *Civic Action* team, the systems for energy, food, manufacturing, distribution, and mobility in Long Island City are creatively, but practically adapted to improve environmental and human health and explore a tasty, biodiverse future. It is around this common good of shared environmental health that participation is structured, creating a new (organism-centric) urbanism of BiodiverCITY, ComplexCITY, and SynchroniCITY.

The proposal envisions a smart Long Island City, that takes advantage of real-time "smart-city" technology to close feedback loops and radically upgrade environmental health. What would Long Island City be if the trees owned themselves and the land they inhabit?; if salamanders traveled on superhighways and tweeted us when they migrate?; if gorgeous bridges were built for bicycles and butterflies?; and if people used aerial flylines to connect subways to areas underserved by public transit, like The Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park? How much could we improve air quality if we used flylines to connect manufacturers to the distribution port instead of, for instance, 76 asthma-causing diesel trucks that pick up bread every morning from each of the 15 or so commercial bakeries in the area?

In UP_2_U, people improve not only their health, but also the quality of the water, air, and the soil we all share. The *FARMACY* dispenses inexpensive modular urban farming systems, called AgBags, suitable for hanging from buildings (particularly in the locally dubbed "asthma alley" near The Noguchi Museum), to create arable land for new edibles. Elevators in "Vertical Urban Factories" become micro-power plants that contrast the charismatic Manhattan skyline (a skyline created by elevators) with a denser, but healthier manufacturing zone. The City's own backyard becomes populated with exhilarating devices, marvelous couplings, delicious new foods, and spectacles that are designed to create shared public memories of very possible futures.



The Noguchi Museum,
Civic Action,
UP_2_U, installation



Long Island City Water Landscape Project

- 2006 - 2014
- 14,000 sq ft
- 2006 - 2014
- 2006 - 2014
- 2006 - 2014

CROSS SPECIES ADVENTURE CLUB NEWSPAPER

Exploring new socio-ecological systems that improve environmental health

Water Quality Indicators

DATE: _____

TIME: _____

TEMP: _____

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DO: _____

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ARTIFICIAL: _____

TIME	WEEK 1 JUNE 01 2011	WEEK 2 JUNE 08 2011	WEEK 3 JUNE 15 2011	WEEK 4 JUNE 22 2011	WEEK 5 JUNE 29 2011	WEEK 6 JULY 06 2011	WEEK 7 JULY 13 2011
AMBIENT							
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Water Quality Indicators

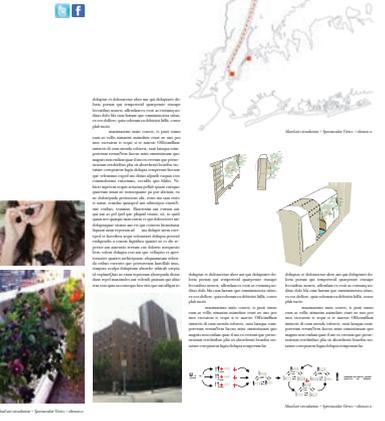
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Public Housing in Long Island City Suited for Massive Deployment of the AgBag Distributed Agriculture System Prompting a Call for Expanding Socrates Farmer's Market

Public housing in Long Island City is being transformed into a massive urban farm. The AgBag distributed agriculture system is being deployed in the city's public housing projects, providing a sustainable and local source of fresh produce. This initiative is prompting a call for expanding Socrates Farmer's Market to accommodate the increased demand for fresh, locally-grown food.

The AgBag system consists of modular, stackable units that can be used in a variety of settings, from balconies to rooftops. Each unit is designed to grow a wide variety of crops, including leafy greens, herbs, and small fruits. The system is easy to use and requires minimal maintenance, making it ideal for urban environments.

Socrates Farmer's Market, a local food market in Long Island City, is currently the primary source of fresh produce for the community. However, the massive deployment of the AgBag system is expected to significantly increase the local supply of fresh food, necessitating a larger market to accommodate the demand.



Farm produce + Tidal = fresh delicious foods to manhattan

How do we increase the value of farm and farm produce so that tracking for natural gas is less competing and the productivity of farmlands is a realized asset; how do we quell the ongoing loss of family farms?

How do we claim the water as part of our public space, provide access to and use of aquatic structures -- beyond leisure -- as productive part of urban systems?

The Farm produce + Tidal initiative aims to increase the value of farm and farm produce by tracking for natural gas. This initiative is designed to reduce the competition for natural gas and increase the productivity of farmlands. Additionally, it aims to address the ongoing loss of family farms by providing a sustainable and profitable alternative.

The initiative also focuses on claiming the water as part of our public space. By providing access to and use of aquatic structures, beyond leisure, we can create a productive part of our urban systems. This includes the use of tidal energy and the development of aquatic infrastructure.

Water Water Everywhere

Water quality and environmental services technologies determined by shoreline length, means creating aquatics, sun-lighting buried waterways, and greatly increasing the number of vertical, open-air and distributed bodies of water.

Water quality and environmental services technologies are determined by shoreline length. This means creating aquatics, sun-lighting buried waterways, and greatly increasing the number of vertical, open-air and distributed bodies of water. These technologies are essential for improving water quality and environmental health.

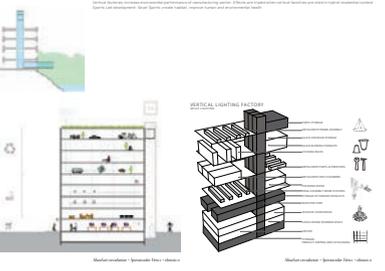
The initiative focuses on creating aquatics, sun-lighting buried waterways, and increasing the number of vertical, open-air and distributed bodies of water. These actions are necessary to improve water quality and environmental health.

Electric Vehicles for Vertical Transportation, a.k.a. Elevators

Electric vehicles for vertical transportation, also known as elevators, are being developed to improve the efficiency and sustainability of building transportation. These vehicles are designed to be used in high-rise buildings and are powered by electric energy.

The development of electric vehicles for vertical transportation is a key component of sustainable building design. These vehicles are designed to be used in high-rise buildings and are powered by electric energy. This technology has the potential to significantly reduce the carbon footprint of buildings.

The initiative focuses on the development of electric vehicles for vertical transportation. These vehicles are designed to be used in high-rise buildings and are powered by electric energy. This technology has the potential to significantly reduce the carbon footprint of buildings.



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Examples of Cross Species Adventure Club Newspapers

Shoreline Attraction Where Public Feed Fish Nutritionally Appropriate "Lures" Increases Nutritional Resources and Fish Populations Reach New High from NY/NJ Estuary



Photo by [Name] for [Organization].

Electric Vehicles (story continued)



Photo by [Name] for [Organization].

Wetlandings: Urban Furniture

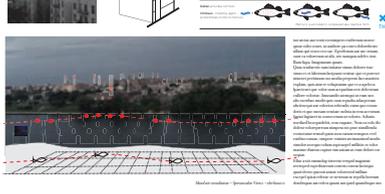


Photo by [Name] for [Organization].

How do Human Powered Shoreline Transformation with Exercises Deliver Personal and Environmental Health?



Photo by [Name] for [Organization].

Sports-led Urban Development Strategy Redesign Sports to Aggregate into Positive Environmental Effects



Photo by [Name] for [Organization].

Solar Awning + Fenix + Bike + Hybrid Power Sources = Distributed Urban Power System

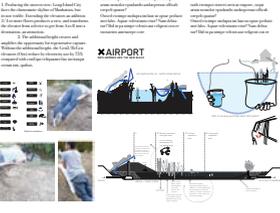


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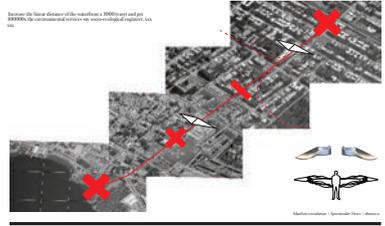


Photo by [Name] for [Organization].

What is the Infrastructure Investment Required to enable distributed Power Production? Almost NONE



Photo by [Name] for [Organization].

Buildings are Doing Body Building -- facades are the new back



Photo by [Name] for [Organization].

Salmader Crossroad



Photo by [Name] for [Organization].

A new Reason D'etre for the Bleak Bridge: can the ecological nightmare become an asset to the parks below?



Photo by [Name] for [Organization].

Long Island City: New Bridges to Possible Futures



Photo by [Name] for [Organization].



Photo by [Name] for [Organization].

LIC: Socrates railing



Photo by [Name] for [Organization].

Experimental Food Products in The Museum Shop



Photo by [Name] for [Organization].

BIOCHAR MARKS THE SPOT



At Socrates Sculpture Park, xClinic launched a public investigation to explore and exhibit the effects of enriching degraded soil in a 30-foot “X” with biochar.

Biochar is the direct by-product of a process that converts waste into energy—helping break down industrial contaminants, promote soil biodiversity, plant growth, and, most important, provides long-term (thousands or millions of years) of carbon sequestration.

Socrates Sculpture Park,
Civic Action,
Biochar Marks The Spot,
installation



FARMACY

The xClinic's *FARMACY* is a distributed urban farm incorporating soft-architecture AgBags. A vertical plot is mounted on an appropriated structure and hosts tayberries (raspberries crossed with blackberries), nasturtiums, and other delicious edibles. AgBags can adapt to other urban structures, including railings, windows, and parapets, creating arable territory out of thin air. Dispensed at Socrates and distributed through Ravenswood and Long Island City, *FARMACY* improved air quality, increased biodiversity, and improved environmental health in addition to having produced urban edibles.

FARMACY is a network of AgBags. Agbags create territory for urban edibles and neutraceuticals from excess structural resources in our urban environment. AgBags need "U" to farm, and Ufarms are networks that improve the air-quality and urban biodiversity. The critical component of a participatory socioecological system is the work of participation. The aim is to capture the incredible resource of many intelligent observations, from many diverse humans.

Here xClinic points out the strange and wonderful incentives for "U" to transform your railing, window, parapet, fence, or formerly unproductive spaces into thriving "i"-farms. Imagine snail races, black pansies, and 14th floor pollinators; "U" can use rainwater, graywater, automate (with a hydraulic-robot), and retain soil moisture. This is within the safety margins and structural capacity of existing urban structures, requires no destructive attachments, and is easily moved into place or removed by a single "i"-farmer. The closed and coupled systems of *FARMACY* and AgBags specifically, demonstrate an agriculture system with no nutrient run off which means no degradation of local ecosystem or water

quality: a demonstration that food production need not externalize the environmental costs, like fertilizers, contaminants, or other additives (take, for example, snail poison). By contrast, the system will augment the nutritional resources for humans and non-humans and is designed to create new forms of biodiversification (here come the snails) and intensification (how do "U" milk a snail?).

The phenological diagram for each planting scheme (depending on exposure and other factors) has been developed to maximize the shoot-to-root ratio and the leaf area for trans-evaporation so that each mature AgBag has a capacity to cool the urban heat island with the same effect as a mature tree—but in a single season.

Recruit your neighbor to create a share-farm, like farmville for fleshy neighbors and explore the social experiment in how we can aggregate microplots for our mutual benefit. There is also an optimized pedestrian distribution system for highly perishable urban foods (U-foods); and an opportunity to market your produce and micro-harvest by making transaction costs very low, piggybacking on the trips "U" already make to the green market, and building on the observations and experiments that each of us can do. The exploration of how people can collectively produce a viable urban agriculture begins.

The Noguchi Museum,
Civic Action,
AgBags, installation



Socrates Sculpture Park,
Civic Action,
AgBag making workshop



Socrates Sculpture Park,
Civic Action,
FARMACY, installation



MOTH CINEMA

The silver screen that hung in the Park was illuminated each night shortly after sunset. A beam of light shone over a garden, attracted moths, and casted dramatic shadows as moths played out nightly dramas of love, survival, and the fluttering lifestyles of the dark and mysterious.

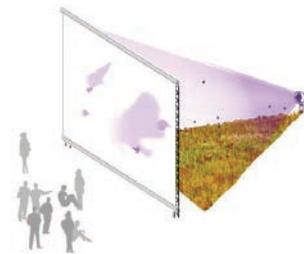
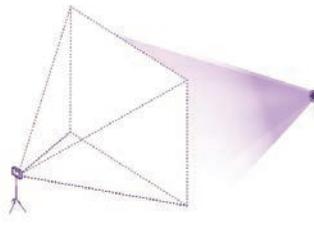
Instead of bedazzling and exhausting moths however, the Moth Cinema's habitat demonstrated an alternative to the hostile light-polluted urban environments we have created, and offered tasty provisions in the form of nectar and host plants.

Moths are valuable pollinators that provide critical connections within our networked urban ecology. Rather than leading them into carnage, these moth celebrity-beacons guided us toward a new, healthy, and biodiverse urban ecosystem—one upon which our own health critically depends.



CLINIC the environmental health clinic+lab

Project: Moth Cinema
Concept: Concept diagrams
Supervised: Natalie Jarman/Genec
Drawings: Fran Salando



Screen + Vegetal Moth Provisions + Black Light Illumination Time Lapse Motion = Moth **CLINIC** Cinema

Socrates Sculpture Park,
Civic Action,
Moth Cinema, installation



TREEXOFFICE

TREEXOFFICE was a co-working space and open plan office in the canopy of a tree in Socrates Sculpture Park. This workspace overlooked the East River and had magnificent views of the Manhattan skyline. The facility was owned and operated by the tree itself, which acted as a landlord. Your tenancy generated rent—proceeds could be used by and for the interests of the landlord tree as the tree determined, for example: augmenting soil with biochar, companion plantings, and other actions at the tree's discretion.

In Long Island City, UP_2_U trees owned themselves and the land they inhabited and the services they provided. Historically, the capacity to own property has bestowed political agency, independence and even personhood to the property owner. “40 acres and a mule” were reparations granted to (and then re-seized from) freed slaves, a well-known example of the suturing of recognition and territorial control. However, even today the capacity to own and inherit property diverges markedly with gender. If non-human organisms own property, will that change their explicit value in a market-based participatory democracy? The precedent for TreeXOffice was a transaction that took place between 1820 and 1832. According to the newspaper article, the deed read:

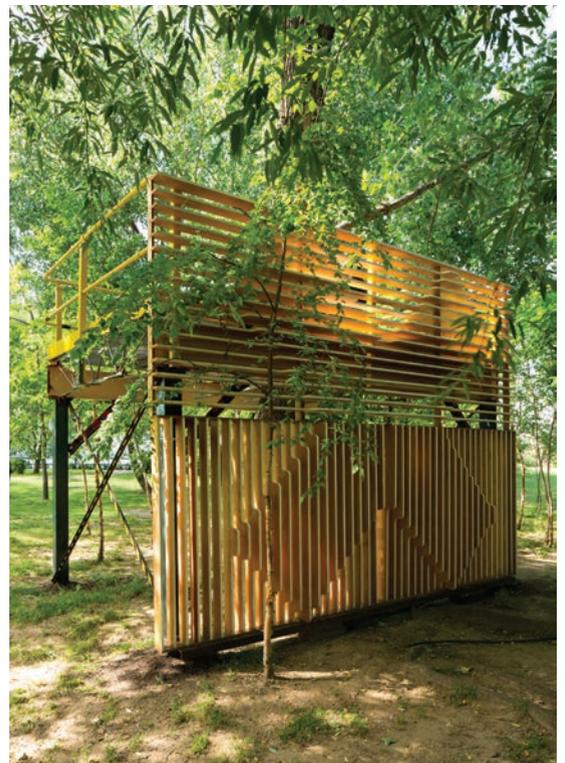
I, W.H. Jackson, of the county of Clarke, of the one part, and the oak tree of the county of Clarke, of the other part. Witnesseth, That the said W. H. Jackson for and in consideration of the great affection which he bears said tree, and his great desire to see it protected has conveyed, and by these presents do convey unto the said oak tree entire possession of itself and of all land within eight feet of it on all sides.

Under the new property ownership regime of UP_2_U trees can of course exploit their property for their own purposes. Moreover, trees assume personhood through the 14th amendment, which is now assumed to grant personhood to corporations. Applying this to trees, by virtue of their property-ownership, trees themselves become corporate/persons, or active agents—new citizens.

Further, the current technological opportunity transforms trees' capacities to self-monitor and report, tweet, and account for their uses by people and other organisms. Trees themselves account for the variety of uses and services they provide, and they themselves monetize these services, exploit their own assets, and capitalize on their capital. Using simple, inexpensive sensors, the trees assume their own voices and capacity to exert corporate personhoods within this new structure of ownership.

*See the Tree that owns itself: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tree_That_Owns_Itself

Socrates Sculpture Park,
Civic Action,
TREEXOFFICE, installation



MARY MISS

**R/CaLL: If Only the City Could Speak
Ravenswood / City as Living Laboratory**

WITH

BELINDA KANPETCH

ELLIOTT MALTBY

AND

ROBERT SULLIVAN

Socrates Sculpture Park,
Civic Action,
Tracing Sunswick Creek: Reflecting Forward,
installation





RAVENSWOOD

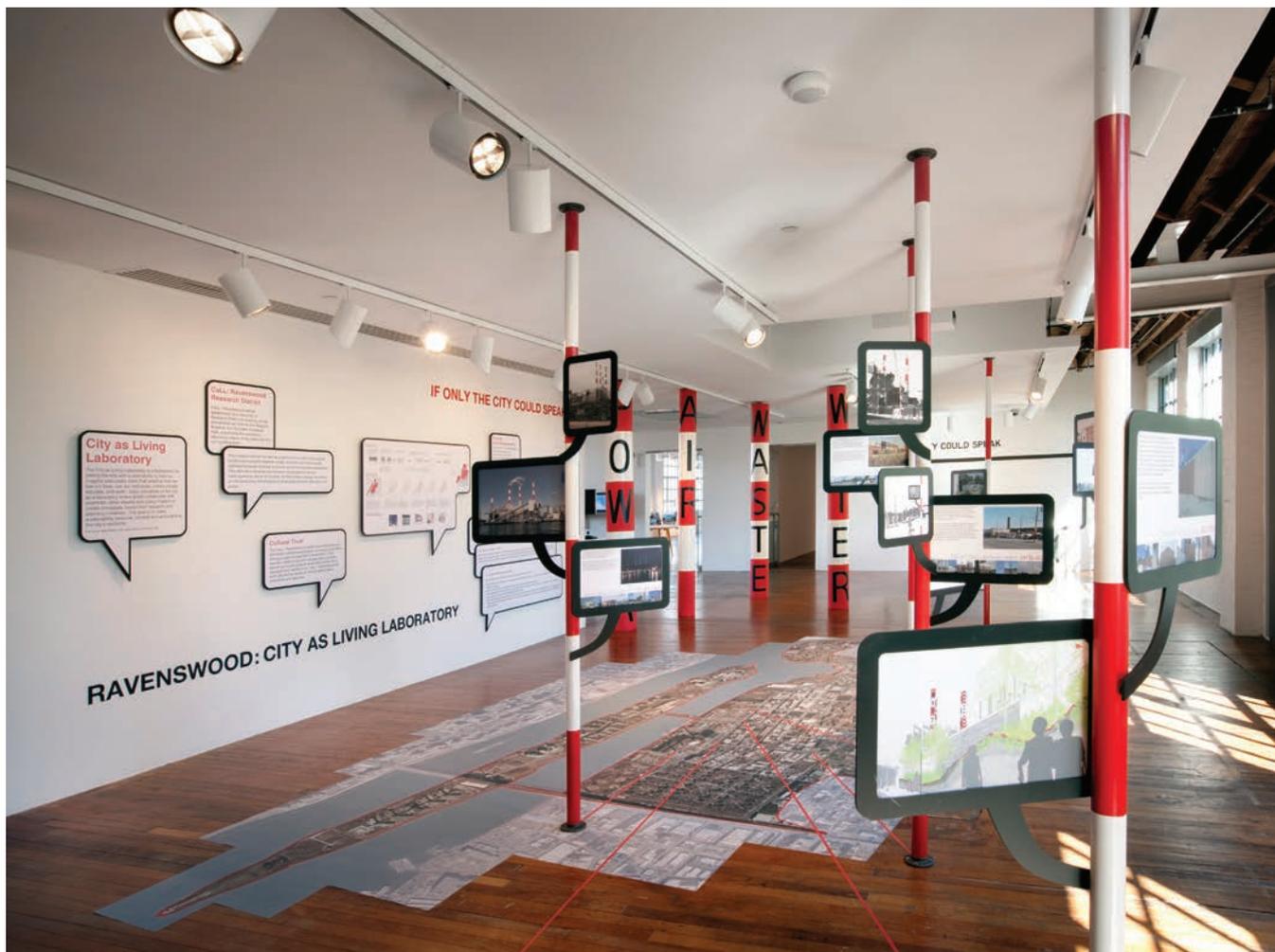
The City is a perpetual experiment that is—in the case of New York—poised on an estuary of tidal creeks and old streams, on suburb-born rivers that still make themselves known in one way or another. Ideas and technologies rise and fall and intermingle, like waters in the harbor, and neighborhoods and ways of living are scrapped or redefined or invented anew, as masses of people move in and out, are born and die—all adjustments of the civic equilibrium, for better or worse or both. Improvements catch on slowly or sometimes disappear, through no fault of their own.

But what if one section of the City worked like a small plot on a big farm? What if one district were recognized not just for its historic nature or its subway access or its view but as a planned site of inventiveness? What if one neighborhood was a place where the creativity that marks City life was championed?

It would be an innovation district, where engineers and scientists, artists, and urbanists of all stripes were invited to explore alternatives to the City's current systems, to speculate with its streets, its buildings, its infrastructure—to reexamine the way we think of the City itself. Artists would have the opportunity, for example, to repurpose the exterior of an electrical plant, to show life becoming more sustainable, with all the economic and public health considerations that sustainability entails. It would be a place where artists went beyond filling up spaces with studios—where artists' projects would reimagine what an urban neighborhood might be, and, thus, drive change other than gentrification.

We propose such a district, and we propose it for the western coastline of Queens, at the end of an old native trail that was made into a 19th-century toll road, in a neighborhood long known as Ravenswood and then subsumed by Long Island City, after Long Island City went from rural outpost to industrial area. As we see it, it will be a small-scale example of the City as Living Laboratory (CaLL). Ravenswood/CaLL, a district of innovation, is a new kind of art-infused urban research zone looking over the buried Sunswick Creek, in the panoramic view of Hallet's Cove, where the East River tides mix the inspiration of the past with the potential of a transformational future that sees the City as more alive than dead, as an ecology that needs continued sustenance.

The Noguchi Museum,
Civic Action,
Ravenswood: City As Living Laboratory,
installation



City as Living Laboratory

The City as Living Laboratory is a framework for linking the arts with sustainability to help us imagine and create cities that redefine how we live our lives, use our resources, communicate, educate, and work. CaLL conceives of the city as a laboratory where artists collaborate with scientists, other experts and policy makers to create immediate impact from research and planning initiatives. The goal is to make sustainability personal, visceral and actionable to the city's residents.

CaLL: Ravenswood Research District

CaLL: Ravenswood will be established as a new kind of Research District by building on the precedents set forth by the Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park, expanding the residency / laboratory nature of Socrates into the surrounding area.

This initiative defines the area as a district of innovation that supports collaborative projects between artists, scientists and other experts addressing issues of social, economic and environmental sustainability. This alternative development scenario recognizes the ad hoc, heterogeneous nature of the area; it's often hidden ecology, the history of manufacturing, the presence of small scale artisanal fabrication and

Cultural Trust

The Ravenswood / CaLL cultural trust will facilitate and administer collaborative projects, providing a permitting and approvals process that is streamlined. It will maintain relationships with city agencies to ensure ethical and quality projects while relieving the city of oversight and maintenance. Ravenswood / CaLL will work with and be made up of local stakeholders, institutions and agencies.

how it works: the process
CaLL Cultural Trust

At the annual “speed dating” event, artists and other experts meet, identify critical issues to be addressed, and create new partnerships across disciplinary and institutional lines.



Teams develop proposals that explore those critical issues in relation to the district’s social, ecological, and economic environment.



CaLL reviews proposals and works with collaborative teams to develop viable projects.



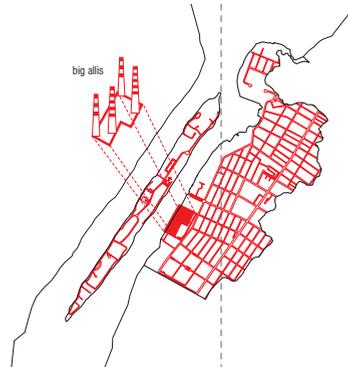
team develops project

Successful collaborative projects build upon existing civic and scientific institutional efforts and resources; proposals are developed in conjunction with local organizations, residents, and businesses.

CaLL provides working studio space for teams in the neighborhood, to support collaboration and strengthen community relationships.

where it is: the research district
CaLL: Ravenswood

What if one district was recognized not just for its historic nature or its subway access or its view but as a planned site of inventiveness? What if one area became a place where innovative ideas about the future of the city can be developed and tested?



define the district:

CaLL is a new model for neighborhood change that builds on the complexity and resilience of Ravenswood, reinventing and amplifying its existing characteristics. CaLL projects will maintain Ravenswood as a place of diversity and production rather than monoculture and consumption.

repurpose Big Allis stacks: make the district visible
 Prominent throughout New York, the Big Allis stacks, modified simply with paint and lights, become performance gauges of the city’s conservation and consumption behaviors.

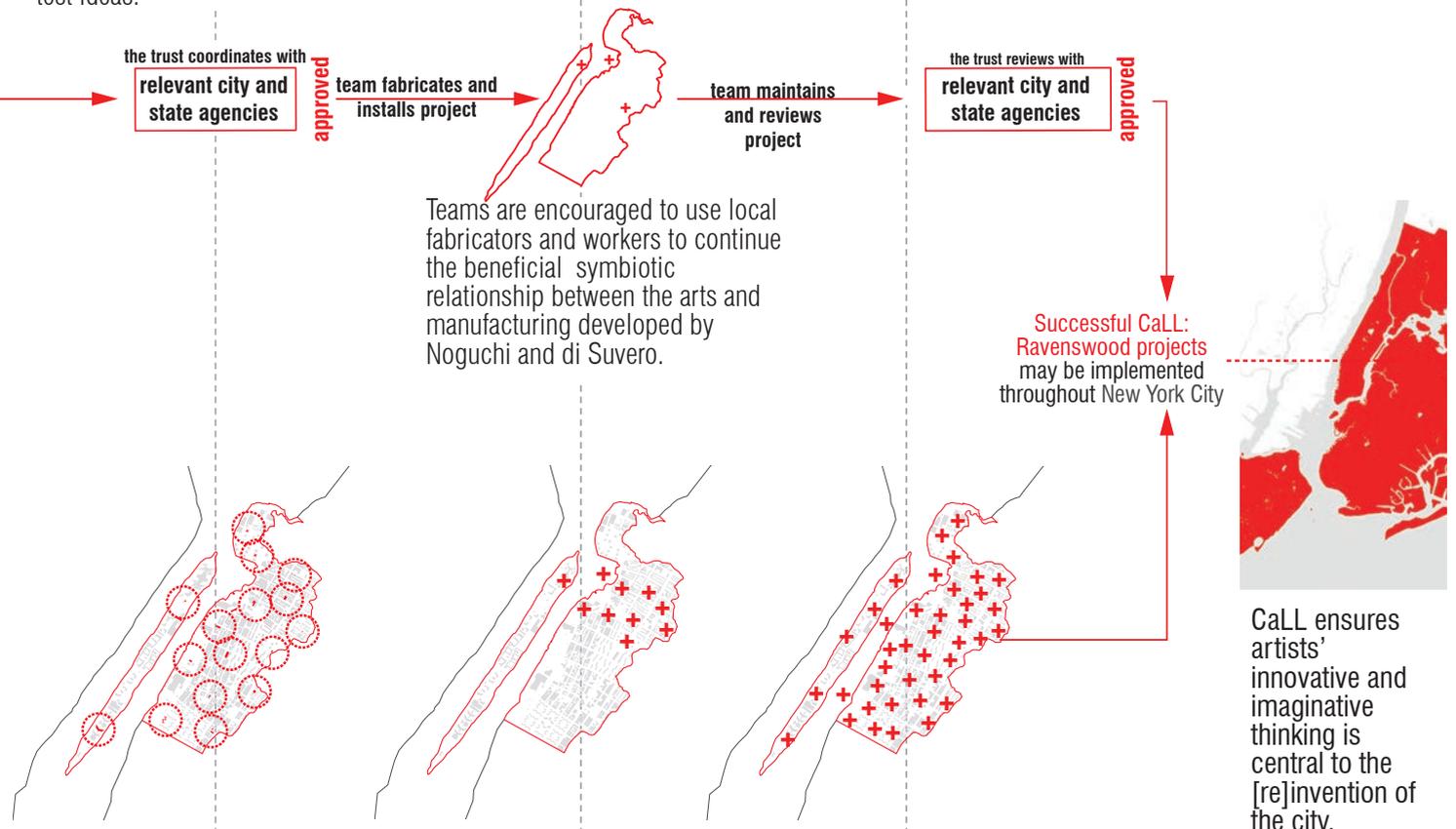
repurpose existing verticals mark the territory
 Red and white banding transforms everyday urban fixtures such as streetlights and utility poles with the visual language of the stacks, demarcating the territory of CaLL: Ravenswood.

what it looks like: mary miss project
If Only the City Could Speak



CaLL Ravenswood works with city agencies on a project by project basis to get approvals and, when necessary, permission to supersede regulatory obstacles that hinder experimentation and innovation - expanding the city's current use of pilot projects to test ideas.

Projects include an ongoing assessment and evaluation; new projects can build on the precedents of earlier innovations. With appropriate research and review, new ideas will be recommended to the relevant city agencies.



Teams are encouraged to use local fabricators and workers to continue the beneficial symbiotic relationship between the arts and manufacturing developed by Noguchi and di Suvero.

Successful CaLL: Ravenswood projects may be implemented throughout New York City

locate incubator studios: keep it a working neighborhood

Existing spaces throughout the neighborhood are activated as work sites for collaborative teams. These spaces include: trucks, temporary additions, rooftops, underused interior spaces and garages.

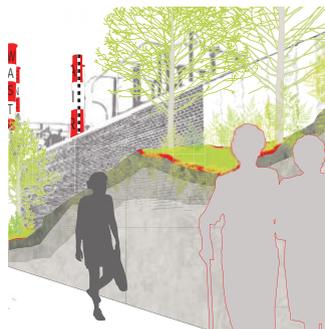
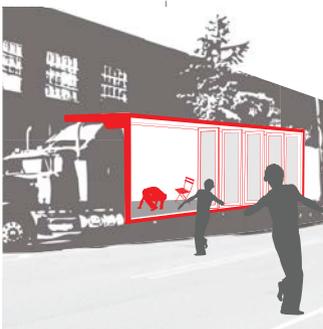
install pilot projects: make tangible new ideas

Ravenswood collaborative projects explore experimental ideas, test multiple solutions, and make long term solutions visible now. Artists add experiential impact to research and policy by directly engaging residents and visitors.

projects layer over time create a district of innovation

People visit CaLL: Ravenswood to see imaginative speculations about the future of the city. Over time collaborative projects are located throughout the whole district, with new research and new projects continuously being developed and installed.

CaLL ensures artists' innovative and imaginative thinking is central to the [re]invention of the city.



Big Allis Stacks repurposed to be gauges of the City's performance



SUNSWICK CREEK IS NOT GONE

Sunswick Creek is not gone. It is also not entirely buried, though earth has been shifted and its streambed surely filled in. If it is referred to at all it is often referred to as diverted—diverted, specifically, into sewers. This is a fate commonly described for streams in the modern city, and it is true in one sense; the water that would have run through the creek after a rain is now going to wind up in the sewer lines. It is also true that often the oldest sewer lines run along the paths of old creeks. But to say that Sunswick is gone, or buried or is just a sewer is not correct, because Sunswick still exists.

You can see the creek, first of all, in the barest outlines of the old elevations. You can just make out where a stream would have been, given the slightly higher land along what would have been its edges. The city is an instrument of change, of destruction, of getting things built, of getting things finished, but the essential geology of the city is difficult to erase or completely ignore. While you may not see the creek per se, what you will see is still a perfect creek site.

This is because the proof that the creek is still there—that it remains an actual force on the ground—is not in the past. It is in the present.

Take an old map that shows where the creek was, or follow Mary's marked-out path and think about the way we have long thought of land. High ground is traditionally valuable, with views, with the purity of air, with great and wide prospects. On the other hand, for centuries Americans have considered lowlands a waste. Native Americans may have used marshlands as seasonal stops, the places where food was abundant, in the form of shellfish and crustaceans as well as the myriad fish species meandering through the New York estuary that are, for the most part, still in New York Harbor

today. But Dutch settlers in New York and New Jersey and their relations or imitators all along the coast, sought to dyke and dry marshes, to fill them in completely.

This was a mistake, in the clear sight of retrospect, and it is important to remember that the East Coast salt marsh is one of the most biologically productive ecologies in the world, producing as much as ten times the biological material produced in a forest or a farm. When Sunswick Creek was being transformed, individuals may have enjoyed the medicinal marshmallow roots, or noted the peacefulness or even the birds, but as a community—from the 17th century and even up to a few years ago—it was a disease-infested waste.

So back to the creek, and the path it takes today. Look what's at the mouth: a dump, which would only recently be reclaimed (in another way) as a park, a place for humans to meander. Move upstream, and there where the stream would have spread out, the city built public housing. A private developer did not build luxury housing on this once swampy land—though it should be noted that at the time these houses were built, in the middle of the 20th century, our idea of what was public was more expansive and generous, and these were built as homes to be valued, rather than discounted. Now, head up the stream farther and see that where there were once likely fields and sedges and brackish water grasses—the kind of plants that come in and out from season to season, and thrive in tune with not just seasonal but tidal variations—there are small businesses, as in very small businesses, as in the kinds of places that are a starting point for immigrant businesspeople.

Along Sunswick Creek today are food-vendor cart storage units, and taxi repair shops, and signs denoting business hours in all the languages of Queens—which are nearly all the languages of the world. At a what would have been a meadow close to the top of the creek there is a bus stop, the bus to Rikers Island, or downtown Brooklyn,

depending on which way you go. And then there is a power station, the kind of utility that consumes space and deters adjacent private development. When you see a power plant in New York, you see the still-active power of a creek, still charging, still triggering dynamic agency, even if it is less noticed than a giant new skyscraper.

What we see mostly along Sunswick Creek, in other words, are pockets of human experiments, with new businesses striving to take root, with workers looking for growth—the economic kind, but growth. At this level, it should be noted, growth seems less monolithic—everyone gets coffee at the same diners—than at the level of, say, corporate finance. Small businesses inspire small businesses and lay the groundwork for more.

At some point around 1900, Ravenswood was a peripheral area, a meadowland, as opposed to an industrial district, but slowly it filled with businesses that were sited on the outskirts to a place of street-lined industry. A view of the succession of businesses might be glimpsed today, from atop the Sanitation Department's garages, and looking north across what eventually—when the creek was dammed in the 1800s—became a mill pond, then south through the marsh grasses and the village of Newtown. See the canning factory that was washed away by economic tides, and as Astoria develops and grows, see the marshy land of Sunswick Creek take its time, the pond receding, the creek slowly disappearing, former marsh being filled in by garages and small buildings along the newly laid-out streets. When the bridge to an expanding Manhattan opens, in 1909, the marshland in Ravenswood becomes even more valuable. What remains of the creek itself, a watery run along Twenty-first Avenue, is filled in with ash and municipal waste by 1910, as roads are paved, sewer lines laid. The water-filled creek loses value, an example of how a place can be commandeered, in the same way that an old streambed can be filled with construction fill or ashes and other things from dumps.

Around the City, we see the same kind of thriving economic activity in places that—can it be a coincidence?—were once creeks or, at the very least, creek-fed marshy land—in Willets Point, along the banks of Newtown Creek, on what is now the Gowanus Canal, and the area of Queens that is still sometimes referred to as Flatbush Bay. Can we call these places estuarine? That word comes from the Latin *aestus*, meaning boiling or undulating or swelling, like the tides in the sea. Can there be such a thing as estuarine economics?

We can perhaps say that these places all have an estuarine aesthetic, and frequently artists are drawn to where there is industrial space and old factories. So Isamu Noguchi came to Ravenswood in the early 1960s. Then, in 1986, the old dump at the mouth of Sunswick was reclaimed for a park, by community members, including Mark di Suvero. Artists sense light, space, opportunity—they have a sense of landscape and geography similar to that of the food-cart vendors. Oftentimes, in the succession of development in New York and elsewhere in the country, a punishing development follows the appearance of artists, so that eventually the food vendors and the artist must leave—cheap lunch and real beauty and ingenious repair replaced by a desire for more of the ubiquitous retail environment, for entertainment over use. In a sense, work is paved over. The streams of arts and craft that we need to survive on a human level are filled in by entertainment entities, by less-local real estate concerns, by buildings that are in tune less with local tides and more with the global economy's floodtide.

And yet if the stream were acknowledged, if it were considered alive rather than buried, maybe its watershed would remain charged for humans and for the economy. The closer you look at the ecology of the creek and the neighborhood the more you see that the human ecology and the natural ecology are one in the same; there is no difference. So that now—like bubbles from an ancient frog-burrowed streambed, or, perhaps like sulfurous belches from

the contaminated bottom of the nearby English Kills—questions arise when pondering the history and continuing power of Sunswick Creek. Could it continue as a flourishing and diverse manufacturing center that has historically adapted to shifts in the economy? Could its vitality be managed and encouraged rather than replaced? What kinds of innovative manufacturing make sense for the 21st century? How can manufacturers work together to improve their business models, and their relationship to the Sunswick Creek watershed? Can it be a living laboratory for the undivertable connection between human health and welfare and the welfare of the ecology?

Today, the still lowland of Ravenswood is peppered with the small businesses that live off the even smaller ones, and, thus, recharge the neighborhood and in turn the city, like herring running out from the old Sunswick into the larger harbor, and then the Atlantic. Ravenswood is a place where taxicab drivers stop—for a new transmission, a paint job, for a four-in-the-morning repair. Likewise, street vendors bring their aluminum carts each night to Sunswick's former source. As the invisible creek bed curls to an end beneath scrap-metal yards and parking lots and basement-less building supply companies, a power station transforms voltage for local use. Hear the quiet hum in sight of the red-and-white smokestacks of Big Allis, standing like trees in a small but well-known forest.

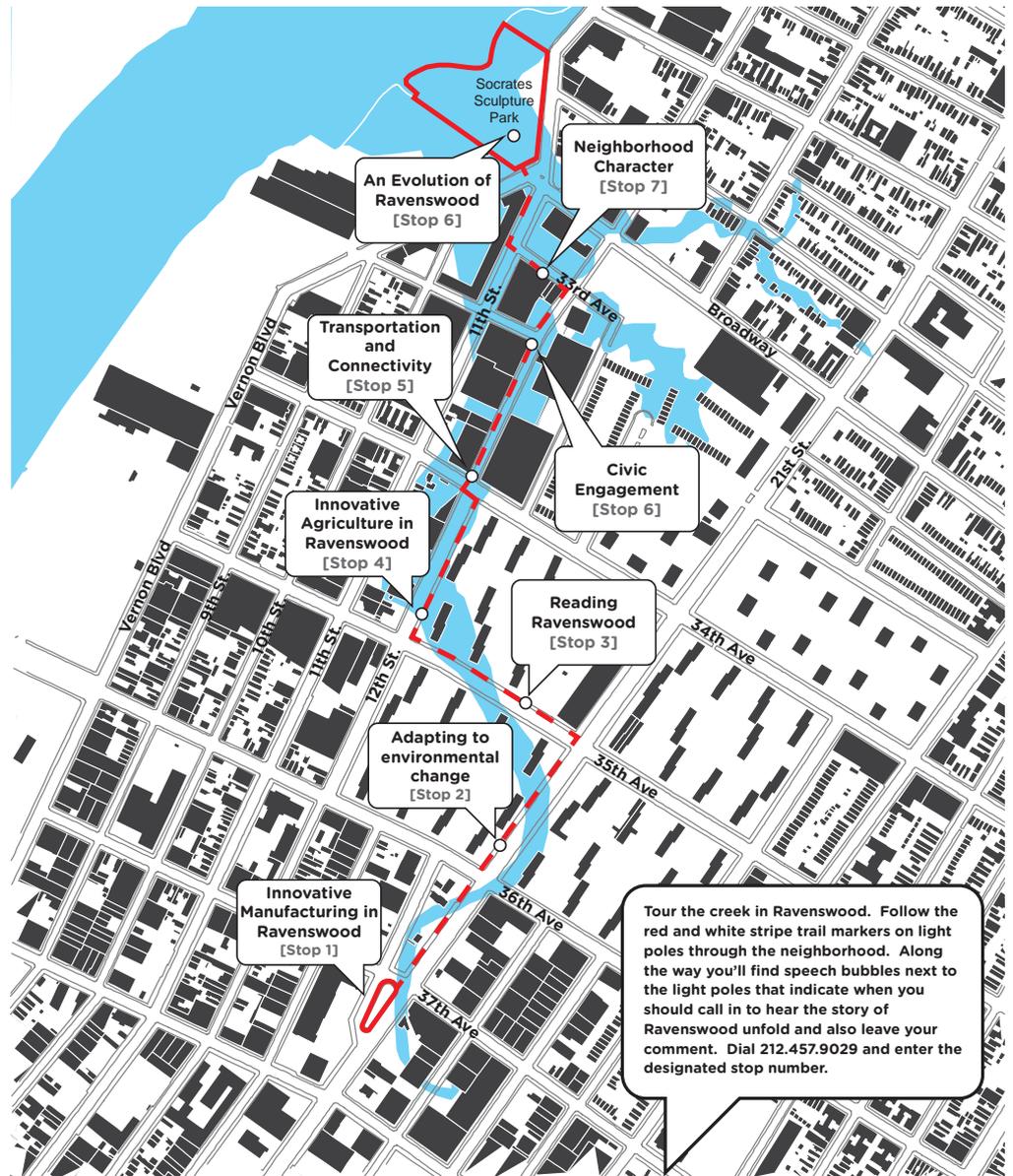
Walking the path of Sunswick Creek, touring the slightly serpentine course through the neighborhood, and ending up finally at the old creek's source, a person wandering the area today might see builders being supplied, drivers nodding their heads over recently repaired engines, and, at one point, up on the ridge, two men of Greek heritage, working hard to repair a boat, parked on the edge of an invisible stream.



Map of the R/CaLL area with an overlay of Sunswick Creek, a historic watercourse, Ravenswood, Queens



(left)
 Socrates Sculpture Park,
 Civic Action,
 Tracing Sunswick Creek:
 Reflecting Forward,
 installation



Tour the creek in Ravenswood. Follow the red and white stripe trail markers on light poles through the neighborhood. Along the way you'll find speech bubbles next to the light poles that indicate when you should call in to hear the story of Ravenswood unfold and also leave your comment. Dial 212.457.9029 and enter the designated stop number.

Below our feet in Ravenswood a creek is buried. Once a natural system, it now flows through a series of pipes that catch the street runoff through storm drains after a rain. Can the historic ecology help give insight into future development scenarios in the area? Or suggest how a natural ecology can be bolstered if integrated into development?

A corridor of embedded mirrors, banded poles and speech bubbles provide cues for tracing the path of Sunswick Creek. By 'tagging' the stream's former location from its origin at 16 Oaks Grove Park to the

mouth at Socrates Sculpture Park a glimpse of the original character of this place is given while providing insight into how the natural system has continued to shape this part of New York City.

Following the markers that can be glimpsed one to the next a visitor finds intermittent stations with a number to be dialed to hear a description of the area as a place of constant regeneration. There is also the opportunity to respond to queries about the area and add the visitors own insight.

Waterways are systems of maintenance and renewal. Over time we imagine this corridor becoming more physically apparent: wheeled planter carts suggest moving markers and plants out to signify the former corridor; the insights residents and visitors will accumulate to reveal the continued richness and potential of the stream's path.

Socrates Sculpture Park,
Civic Action,
Tracing Sunswick Creek:
Reflecting Forward,
installtion





DIAL 212.457.9029
AND SELECT
STOP #1

DIAL 212.237.9009
AND SELECT
STOP #1

How to use the phone booth
1. Dial the number
2. Press the number
3. Press the number
4. Press the number

Socrates Sculpture Park,
Civic Action,
Tracing Sunswick Creek:
Reflecting Forward,
details from 16 Oaks Park



Planter cart at 16 Oaks Grove Park



A stop on the Sunswick Creek tour through Ravenswood, Queens



Installation at 16 Oaks Grove Park,
an neighborhood park located
at the creek's origin



**RIRKRIT
TIRAVANIJA**

**GreenWay and
Community Kitchen**



WITH

SOLVEIG FERNLUND

NEIL LOGAN

AND

MOLLY NESBIT

Socrates Sculpture Park,
Civic Action,
Untitled, installation





GREENWAY AND COMMUNITY KITCHEN

This project might be summarized as a tale of two tables but it might equally be said that we chose to work on the street. We propose re-paving Broadway in Queens with drivable grass, turning it into a GreenWay running straight from the N/Q subway station to Socrates Sculpture Park. Any portion of the GreenWay can be closed off for special events, markets, movie screenings, dance parties, or anything else that fits.

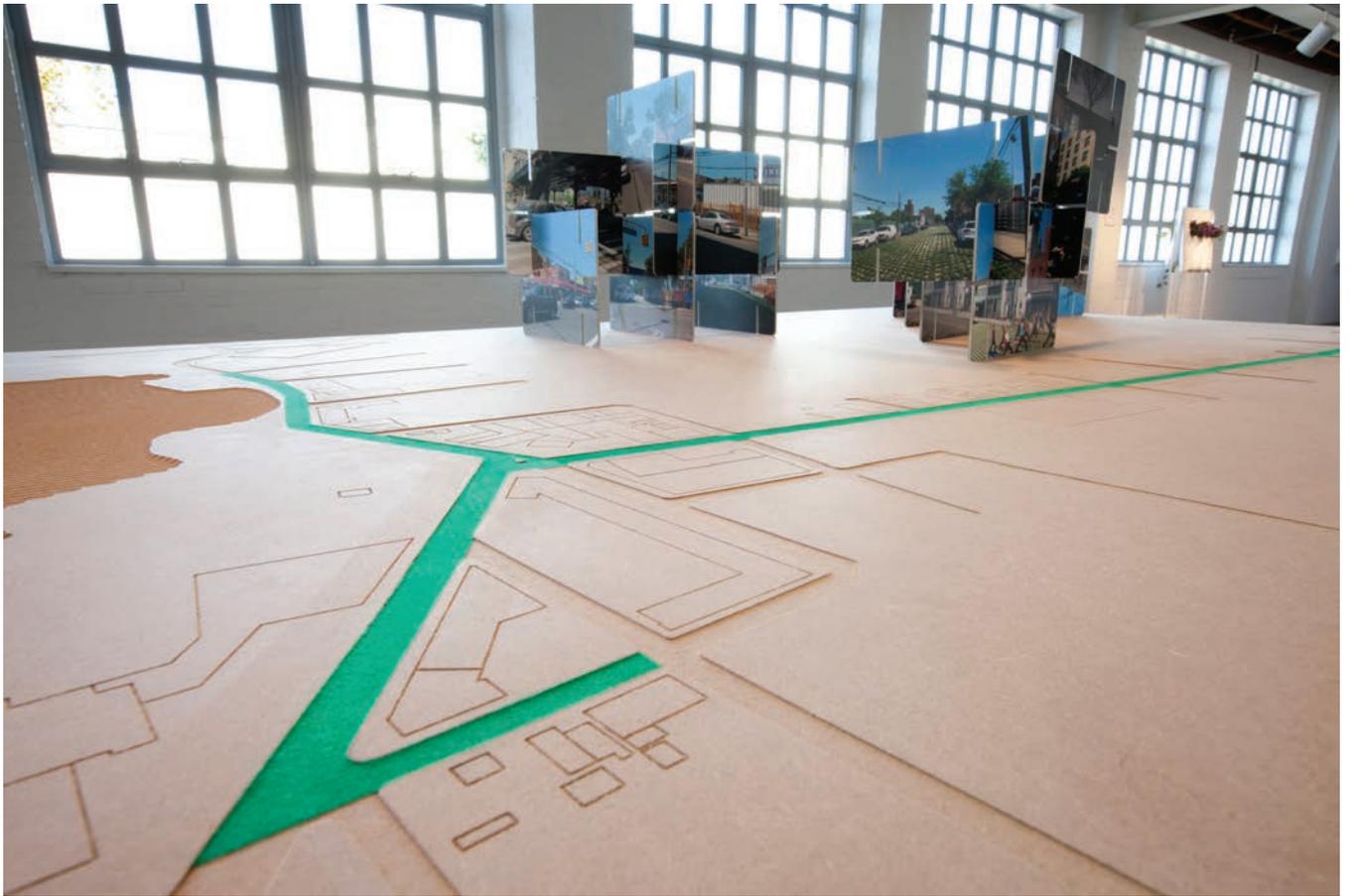
At the end of the street there is a temporary and infinitely reusable Community Kitchen containing a cooking area and a place to eat, which is intended, at least initially, to be set up in Socrates Sculpture Park. The design is based on a table lamp model (YA2) by Isamu Noguchi and gives it a super-table scale. Light turns into campfire. The kitchen works in any kind of weather. Its walls can come up and go down. Menus vary according to the occasion.

The GreenWay is displayed in *Civic Action* (at The Noguchi Museum) by means of a long table that maps the plan and provides a panorama of photographs plotting the present street view and interrupting it with green visions of the future. The exhibition also includes a life-size model of the Community Kitchen.

The two tables only point to a beginning. New techniques of street-sweeping and plowing will be invented. The GreenWay will require gentle techniques of maintenance, like fertilization and watering. These will produce a condition of ever-increasing complexity, of overgrowth and undergrowth. Spores will arrive and new plants will grow of their own accord. Perhaps they will be edible. More will be best.

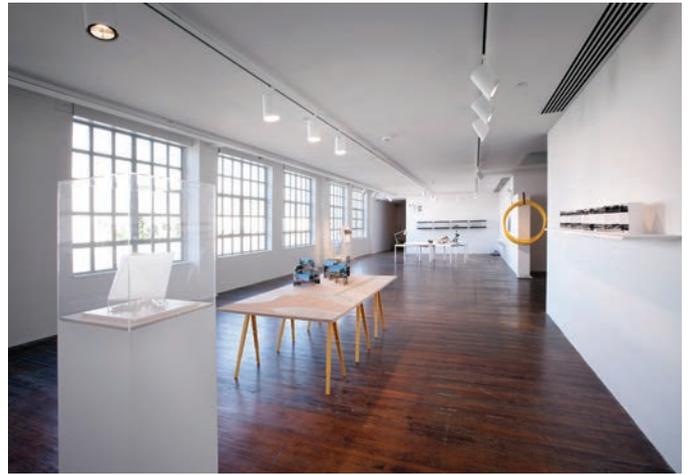
The Noguchi Museum,
Civic Action,
GreenWay and Community Kitchen,
installation





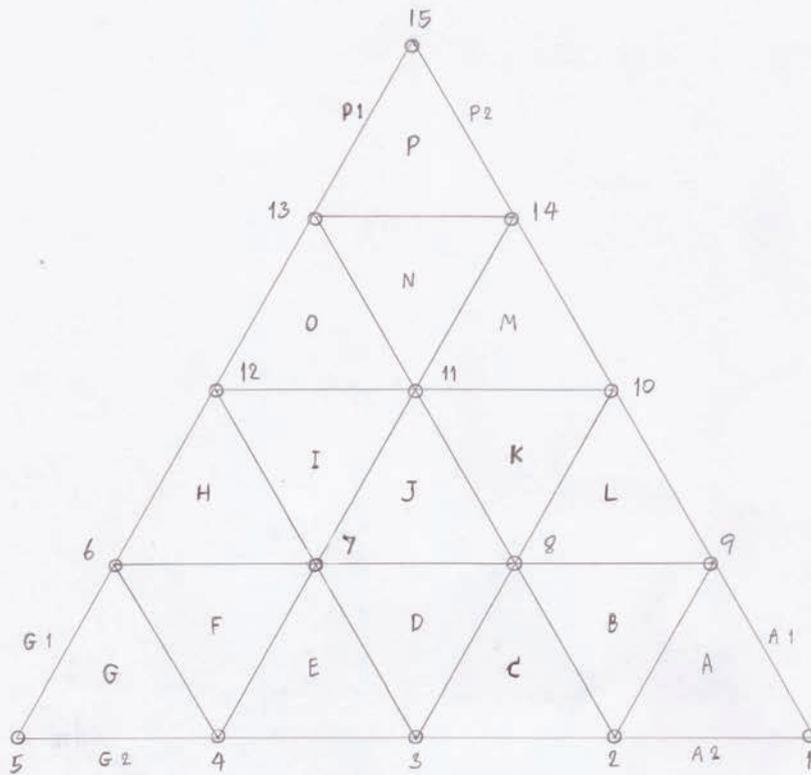






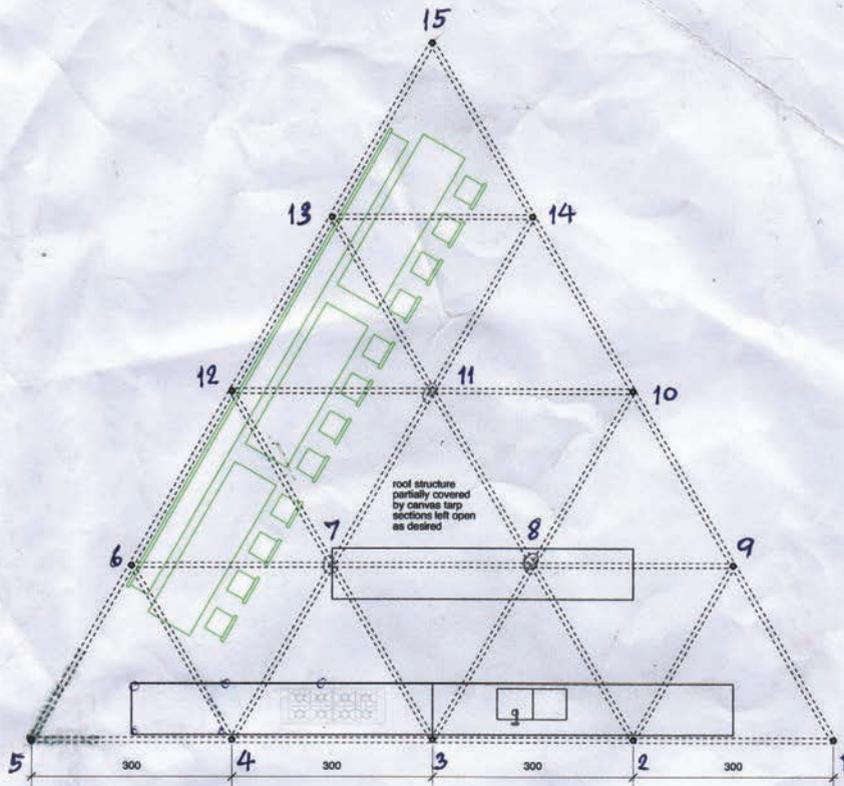
The Noguchi Museum,
Civic Action,
GreenWay and Community Kitchen,
installation





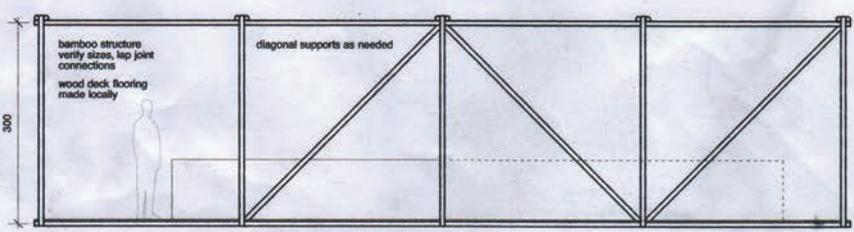
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The main beam



plan 1:50

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elevation 1:50

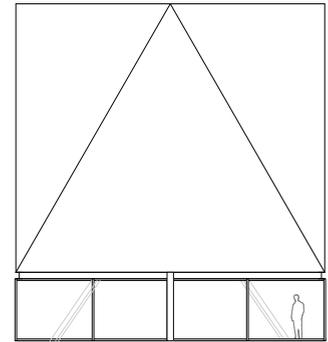
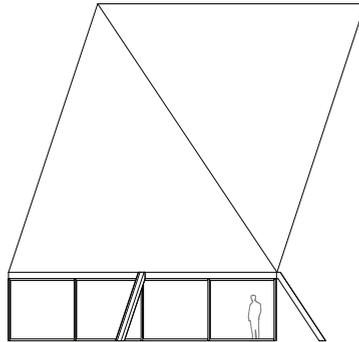
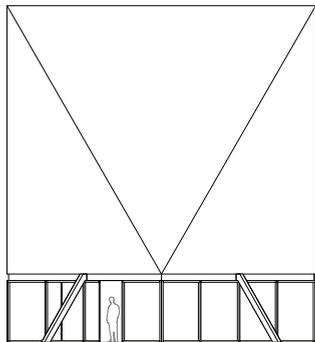
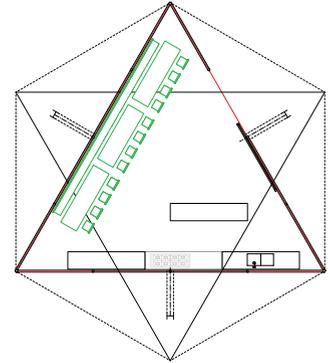
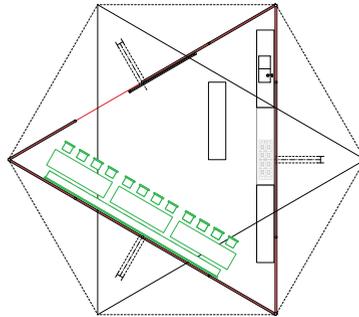
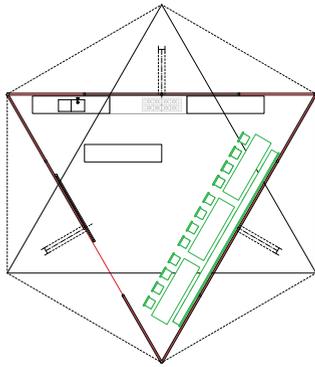
studio tiravanija
130 west 18 street
new york 10011

fernlund + logan architects
414 broadway new york 10013
212 925 9626

01 12 12

civic action
proposed community kitchen

63 013-2



Socrates Sculpture Park,
Civic Action,
Untitled, installation



Socrates Sculpture Park,
Civic Action,
Untitled, details









GEORGE TRAKAS

**Shoreline Access:
Queensbridge, Ravenswood
To Astoria**

WITH
LYN RICE
ASTRID LIPKA
AND
AMELIA BLACK

Socrates Sculpture Park,
Civic Action,
Sunion Point

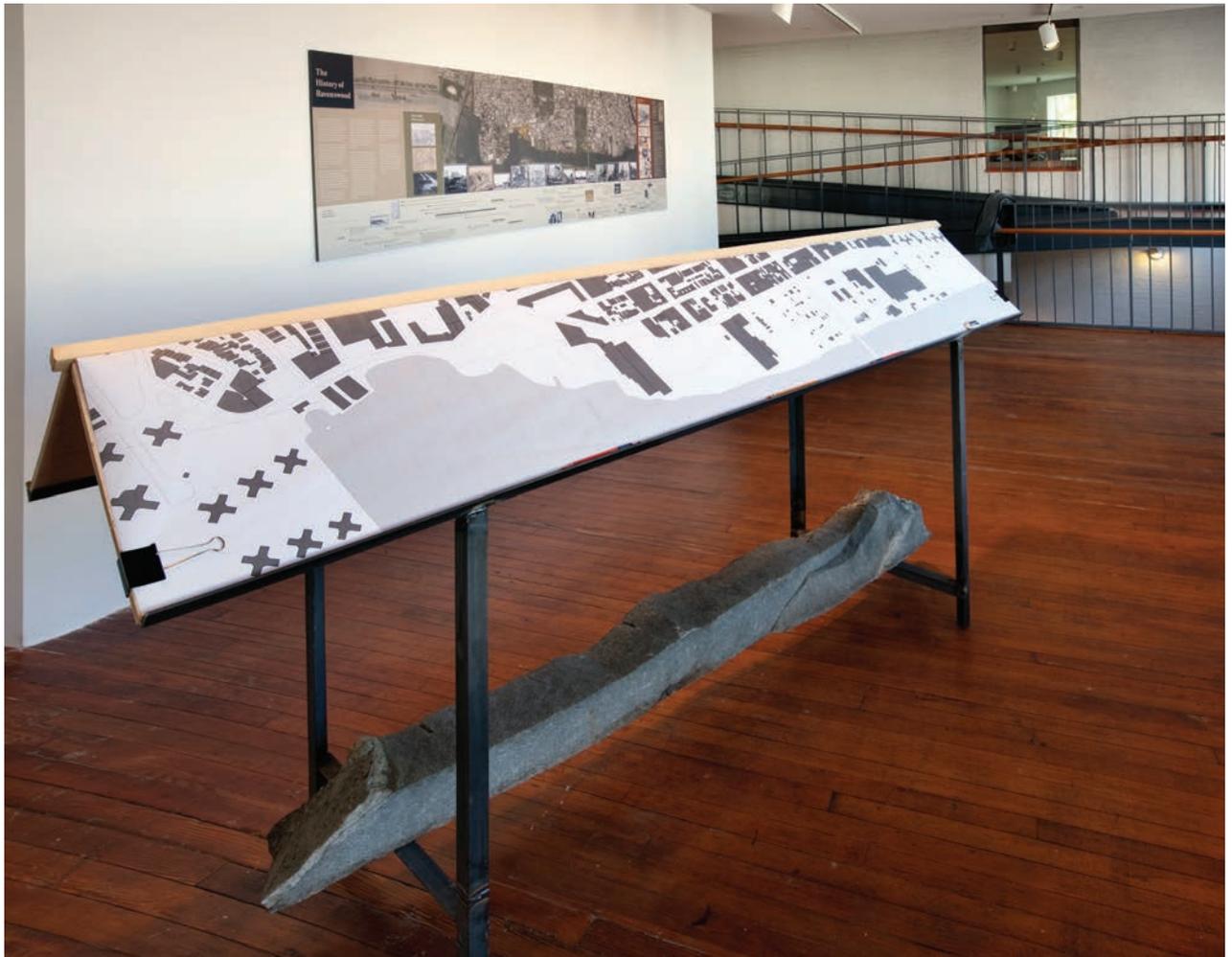




SHORELINE ACCESS: QUEENSBRIDGE, RAVENSWOOD TO ASTORIA

From Queensbridge Park to Hallet's Cove, there is an urgent public need for stabilization of the shoreline. Opening the currently underutilized waterfront to the community provides for the rehabilitation of a civic amenity, the East River shoreline.

By challenging the regulations that currently prevent community access, working within existing conditions, and engaging local property owners, a pathway can be made open to the public for relatively little cost and with no harm to the environment or local industry.



The Noguchi Museum,
Civic Action,
River Shoreline Walk,
installation

The Noguchi Museum,
Civic Action,
River Shoreline Walk,
installation





Socrates Sculpture Park,
Civic Action,
Sunion Point





In an effort to bring the community to the water's edge, the Queensbridge waterfront access and 'Ravenswood Astoria Shoreline Trail' is a proposal that seeks to engage with local property owners in a dialogue to unite the shoreline through a series of rehabilitation projects that would provide walking paths and bikeways for local residents. This vision takes its cue from the civically minded heritage of the neighborhood—a place where the original residents shared a common boardwalk along the shore and replaced later by commercial docks and landings, the remnants of which are still visible today at low tide. And most recently from the legacy and cultural impact of two artists, Isamu Noguchi and Mark di Suvero, whose studios, museum, and waterside park have set precedents for future improvement in the area.

Project scope, Civic Action



The Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park share a locally energized vision for the future of the Long Island City and Astoria waterfront, which they have in common. At Jenny Dixon's invitation to participate in the *Civic Action* exhibition envisioning exercise, our team developed a proposal for the unification of the existing parks into a publicly accessible shoreline. Our work shows that by following the simple and easily achievable steps of stabilizing the river's edge to create various public access points stretching from Queensbridge Park north to Hallet's Cove and the former WLIB radio platform, the community can ensure a continued focus on civically-minded development. The rehabilitation of the waterfront for public access would add yet another important civic resource to the community and play an important role in plans for the area's renewal.

Rehabilitation and access to the underutilized waterfront was envisioned as a way of linking property owners with the City's Parks Department

Nathaniel Currier, Ravenswood, Long Island,
Near Hallett's Cove 19th century,
Lithograph, hand colored, on wove paper, 22 x 54 1/2 inches,
Brooklyn Museum 51.239 Dick S. Ramsay Fund



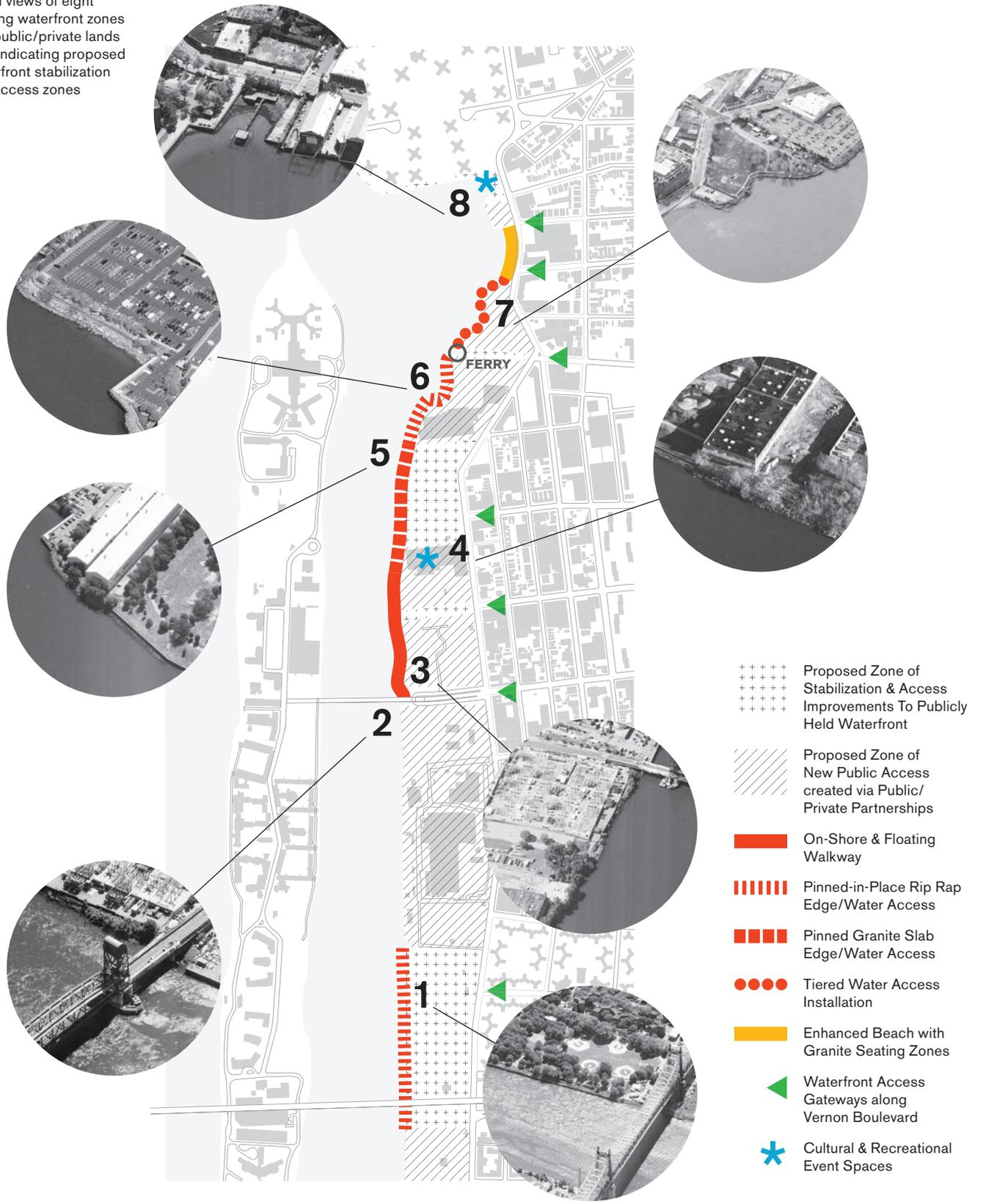
and other agencies in a collaborative effort to realize a series of walkway and bike paths that both respect and celebrate existing natural and manmade conditions of the shore. Building on the disheveled remnants of boardwalk and bulkheads visible at low tide, we propose that a series of new public spaces could be created by shoring up existing riprap with large slabs of granite pinned and interlinked for long-term stability. The currently neglected and inaccessible shoreline would be revitalized through design solutions that respond to the particular needs and challenges of each site, bringing back the presence of community and natural beauty along the shore.

We include in our proposal thoughts for the role that such facilities as TransCanada, ConEd, Modell's, and Costco could play in improving the public's access to the river. By contributing to this effort, these businesses not only improve their image in the community, but also become important links to the cultural future of the

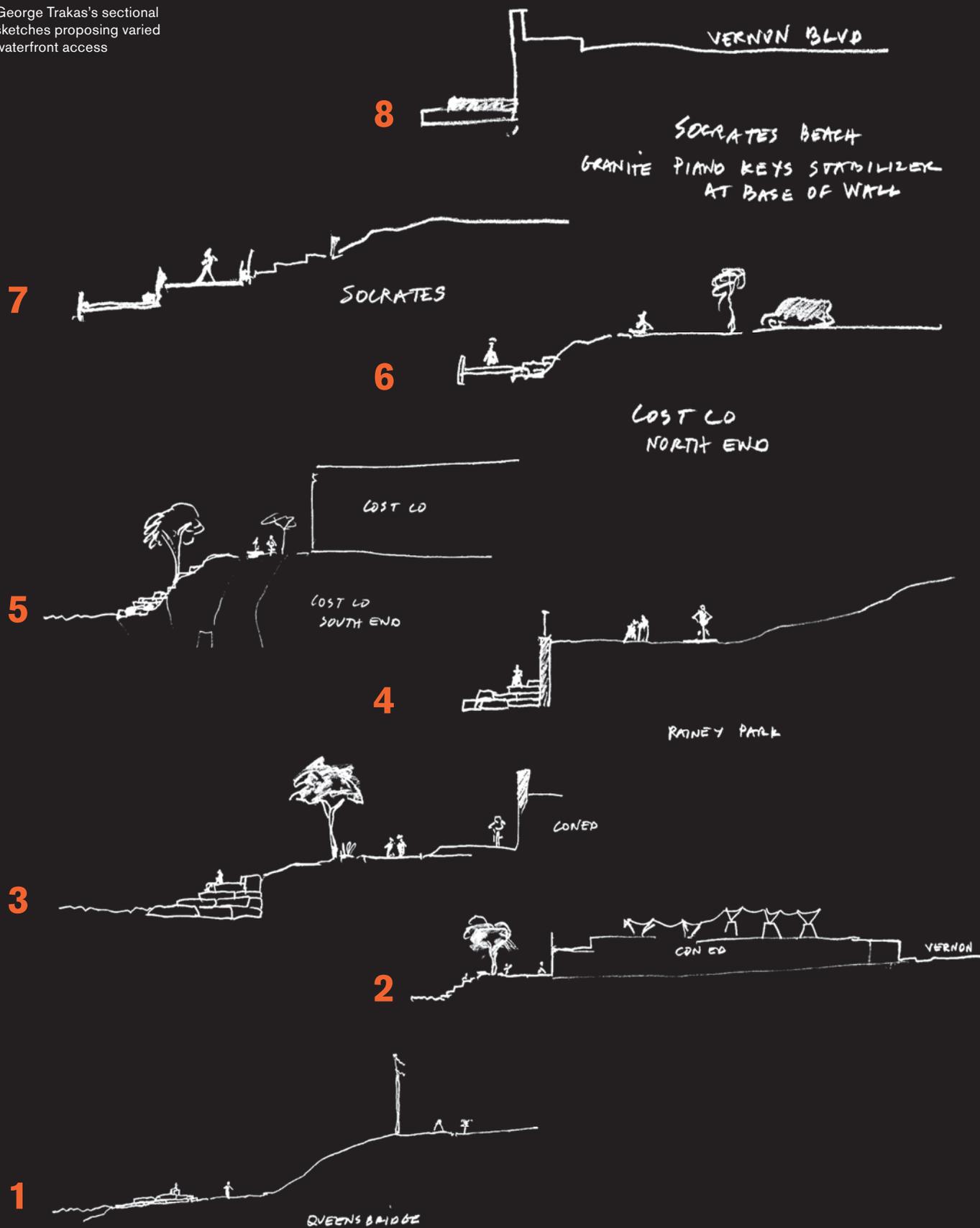
neighborhood. Pleased to be a part of the initial conversation, we hope the following ideas, permits, and drawings that have come through the *Civic Action* project will be useful tools to the community in the process of realizing the shoreline's return to an accessible neighborhood resource.

A public accessible waterfront is not a new concept. In fact, it builds on the historic precedent guaranteed in an 1848 deed drafted by then local developers Samuel Throekmorton, Charles & Peter Roach, which outlined an unobstructed public promenade be built to connect the wealthy mansions that once stretched from 36th Avenue north to Broadway. This neighborhood's waterfront has always been an asset, and today we envision it being given back to the community.

Aerial views of eight existing waterfront zones and public/private lands map indicating proposed waterfront stabilization and access zones



George Trakas's sectional sketches proposing varied waterfront access



QUEENSBRIDGE PARK > 36TH AVENUE BRIDGE

Remove the concrete wall and railings that have begun to erode into the river and instead use a riprap approach, naturally securing the riverbank against future erosion and storm surges. Create ADA- accessible paths and bikeways that bring the community down to the water's edge. Install park gates at the 36th Avenue Bridge access point to connect this serene spot with the parkland to its north and south.

1



1 Between the Queensboro Bridge to Manhattan and the 36th Avenue Bridge to Roosevelt Island lies over 3,000 feet of neglected, inaccessible waterfront most recognizably occupied by the large red and white smoke stacks of the TransCanada power plant. Here, the seawall has given way and the shoreline crumbles daily into the water. For safety reasons, public access has been blocked, and while much has been done to rehabilitate the park itself, the water's edge remains untouched. This problem could have been predicted—the lack of clear responsibility over the park's maintenance has left its oversight to a stalwart group of community seniors at the Jacob Riis Settlement House to do all the work of building awareness, cleaning it up and raising funds to restore the park to the place they remember from the days when they used to bring their children there in the 1960s.

We propose that the public enjoyment of this waterfront area is in the best interest not only of the senior groups at Jacob Riis and Queensbridge Housing, but also invaluable to the entire community in cementing a strong cultural future for the neighborhood. With the support of TransCanada, we envision a few simple solutions to get people down to the water's edge in a safe way without the need for railings. We propose that TransCanada join the residents in creating a public space to enjoy the view and partake in the beauty of the river and its tides. We'd start by removing the remnants of the concrete wall and railings to naturally control the erosion with a protective barrier pinned in place of riprap. This 30-foot cutback would create an inviting space for people to sit, play, and walk while allowing the space above, where the chain-link fence currently sits, to be transformed into an ADA accessible footpath and bikeway. And while the shorefront of the TransCanada plant prohibits public access by the necessity of its work and our City's reliance on the energy it produces, there is no good reason to keep the community from accessing the shoreline at the entry of the 36th Avenue Bridge. Here, both from pedestrian path on the bridge itself and from the foot of the bridge at the water's edge, views of the water and shore could be made accessible.

2



2 Viewing platforms would create serene moments to view and reflect on the natural beauty of Long Island City as residents walk over the bridge to participate in the weekend farmer's market. Then below, where a brand new road has brought a sidewalk gate could replace chain-link fencing and allow for fishing and other activities to connect the community to the river. The bridge is a crucial access point to unify the waterfront, especially as the Roosevelt Island population is set to expand exponentially in the coming years. It serves as a midway point between the Queensbridge communities to the south with the Ravenswood/Astoria neighborhood to the north, opening the waterfront at the bridge's base is a relatively small act with a monumental cultural impact.

CON ED SUBSTATION > MODELL'S BLDG > RAINEY PARK > COSTCO

Use modest design approaches to stabilize and rehabilitate the waterfront from the 36th Avenue Bridge all the way north to Costco's parking lot. Bring the community down to the water with walking paths and bikeways that reveal the natural beauty of the river and its amazing views of Manhattan and Roosevelt Island. This is a perfect opportunity to unify over 3,000 feet in a publicly accessible shoreline trail, transforming the industrial feel of the neighborhood to meet the contemporary needs of its residents.

3



3 Just beyond the 36th Avenue Bridge access point is the Consolidated Edison (ConEd) substation where power from Big Allis and TransCanada is transformed from high to low voltage and distributed within the city's grid. It is important work and some very high walls heavily protect it. Unfortunately, as a result, its access to the shoreline goes completely unused and has become seriously neglected. Working with the City's Parks and Transportation departments, ConEd could do a huge service to the community by allowing the introduction of a public pathway along the water's edge in the same way that pedestrians are already able to pass along the Vernon Boulevard sidewalk.

4



4 The waterfront walking path and bikeway would then extend up and around the currently vacant lot owned by Davidson Equities, past the Modell's building currently underutilized as a shipping warehouse, and connect to Rainey Park where it would slope up to meet the Park's seawall.

5



5 At water's edge, a series of granite slabs could create a place for the community to come and sit by the water while adding important stabilization of the existing seawall. Above, cyclists could continue their trip north through the park and on towards Costco.

SOCRATES SCULPTURE PARK > HALLET'S COVE / WLIB PIER

Improve the longevity and access to the waterfront by removing existing debris and marine hazards from the shoreline. Stabilize the existing riprap and remnants to allow for ADA accessibility and to protect the shoreline from continued erosion. Transfer control of the city-owned pier to NYC Parks Department for the creation of recreational facilities and an events space at the far end of Hallet's Cove.

6



6 At Costco, the paths would again merge to curve around the big box store's esplanade, reinforcing the existing riprap in a connective boardwalk that would link the waterfronts of Rainey Park with Socrates Sculpture Park.

A ferry landing could be made just north of the Costco Esplanade at the original Sunswick Creek outlet where the wooded existing conditions allow for installation of a scenic dock and the protection needed for riders to board safely. Allowing visitors to access both the cultural and consumer services of Ravenswood by boat opens up a whole new set of possibilities to the Ravenswood Astoria Shoreline Trail and is yet another way that citizens could gain greater access to their waterfront.

7



7 With the Socrates Sculpture Park installation for Civic Action, George Trakas created an accessible series of decks integrated into the existing boulders to reveal the derelict state of the shoreline and inspire simple solutions to draw people down to the water's edge in a safe way - without the need for railings to enjoy the views and presence of the river.

We propose continuing these efforts by removing the wreckage of the former steamboat dock that it is currently deteriorating into the water and presents a serious safety risk to the public. The shore could then be easily and affordably made available for public access by using granite rough back to stabilize it and creating spaces for the community to sit and take in both the artwork and the water. We envision an enhanced space where dog owners can continue to congregate at Socrates Beach. Installing long slabs of dark and light granite would create a piano key-like seating area, and provide a tangible link the local history of the Sohmer Piano Factory across the street.

8



8 And lastly, beyond Mark di Suvero's studio, is the City-owned pier where WLIB once broadcast its programming, the radio station that for years served as leading voice of New York City's black residents. Neglected and left to rot, the pier is in need of much rehabilitation. Once reopened, it could become an important space to connect the New York City Housing Authority's Astoria Houses with the cultural and retail spaces to the south. We propose that this space be considered with its full potential in mind - a place-making gem along the community's shoreline.

The Ravenswood Astoria Shoreline Trail takes inspiration from projects such as Berlin's Badeschiff, a floating pool created in 2004 by artist Suzanne Lorenz, to envision the way that public places such as this pier can, through the cleanup and rehabilitation process, be returned to community service and provide social spaces for the neighborhood to congregate at the water's edge.

7





Agnes Denes, *Wheatfield—A Confrontation: Battery Park Landfill, Downtown Manhattan* —With artist in the field, 1982.

Two acres of wheat planted and harvested by the artist on a landfill in Manhattan's financial district, a block from Wall Street and the World Trade Center, summer 1982. Commissioned by Public Art Fund, New York City. © Agnes Denes

WHAT DO ARTISTS HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

“Speak truth to power”—the 1950s articulation of Quaker politics has often been a strategy by artists to draw attention to political corruption, injustice, or abuses of power. In recent decades artists have also focused on the “truth” of economic gentrification, the crisis of our natural environmental, and quality-of-life issues of our communities.

Artists as agents of change in New York City were particularly active in the late 1960s and ‘70s and in conflict with the powerful forces of city planning, wholesale eminent domain condemnation, commercial interests, and environmental obliviousness. While there were many artists using the City as the subject of their work, a few pioneers illustrate these oppositional endeavors. The Fluxus artist George Maciunas initiated (intentionally or not) the artist-driven real estate concept of the co-op in SoHo and the artist-In-residence status and changes in zoning and Certificate of Occupancy classifications. During the early to mid 1970s, the former architectural student Gordon Matta-Clark became infamous for clandestinely cutting into derelict industrial buildings, transforming them into large site-specific sculptures of light, space, and form. But he also sought to engender a sense of community by creating, along with Carol Goodden a co-op restaurant called FOOD located in Soho and designed as a place for artists to eat cheaply, served by other artists. At a City auction in 1973–74, Clark purchased “gutterspace” parcels and forgotten lots for a work entitled *Fake Estates*. It may be arguable whether he conceived of it as a work of art, but it certainly was a provocative conceptual rumination on ownership and the vagaries of the built environment and urban space. Of note, it’s hard to imagine that it’s any coincidence that all of these useless lots were in Queens (one deed was in Staten Island). A more poetic and emphatic challenge to City planning occurred in 1982, when the artist Agnes Denes planted and cultivated two acres of wheat on the landfill of Battery Park for an earthwork entitled *Wheatfield—A Confrontation*. At the time, the land, which was to be developed in the future, was valued at two and half billion dollars. Wheat lost out to skyscrapers, but the exaggerated point was made about priorities.

It is common knowledge that many New York City neighborhoods—including Williamsburg, DUMBO, Chelsea, Harlem, and today, Bushwick—have been transformed by artists and cultural organizations occupying and advocating their interests. Artists often provide what professionals in the realms of public policy, environmental sciences, architecture, and urban planning have difficulty espousing—ideas that are unfettered by conventional wisdom. Artists possess an ability to see value where others do not, a courage and ego to ignore ridicule for concepts outside of the norm, and the talent and undaunted will to manifest ideas into visual and physical form. Neighborhood reclamation and development initially seeded by artists’ real estate prowess is a 50-year-old story in the City, and it is a pattern that continues today. Artists and small cultural organizations move into an undervalued area, invest sweat equity,

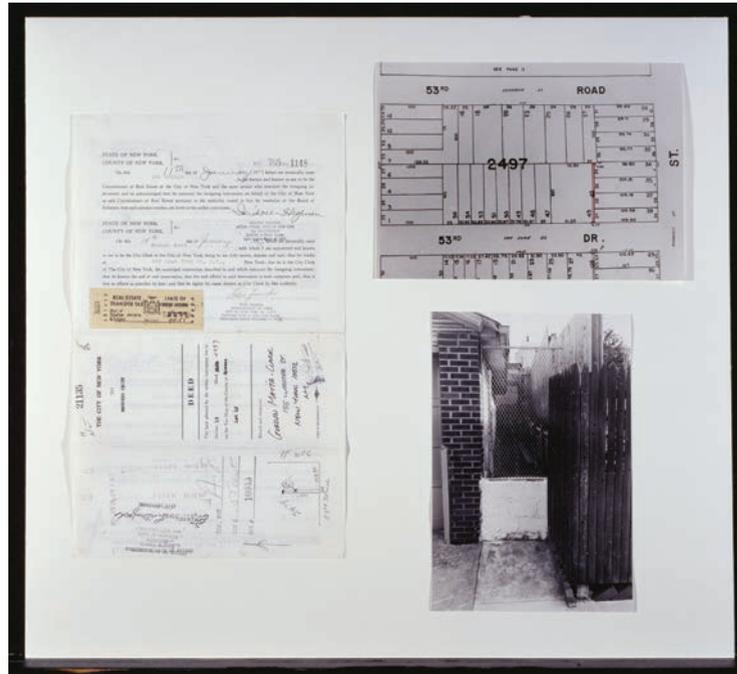
create value through their presence, and are then usually priced out (ironically due to their own contributions to the rising real estate values), only to repeat the cycle again in another location.

In the conflict between culture and commerce, historically artists have adopted an outsider role. And although there is a freedom from being part of a sanctioned system, there is also powerlessness and marginalization. Artists as individualists are hard to organize. Often singular guerrilla activities have been a preferred strategy for combating bureaucracy or initiate change. Of course artists are not alone in protest, and adversarial battles over land use, history, and the environment often produce winners and losers of the Jane Jacobs vs. Robert Moses variety. While an adversarial process can be successful, it can take a civic and psychic toll on combatants. It may also have limited effectiveness in the long run and, more important, it is a staggeringly inefficient use of intellectual and creative capital. Some of the best outcomes of development conflicts may be a more nuanced, collaborative, and informed strategy with artists in the mix.

Artists can inspire, tease, mystify and illuminate, but can artists, and by extension the organizations that represent them, affect the cascade of environmental destruction, the course of urban planning, and legislative agendas of a city? Can they compete with individual wealth, political power, and the brute force of economy? The answer is that they have for quite some time. Especially in New York City, they are inextricably intertwined with all of the above. Artists and cultural organizations have proved to be effective, influential, and visionary agents of social change through advocacy and provocation—sometimes subtle, sometimes dramatic.

With the repetition of artist-driven urban development over recent decades, there may be a new phenomenon occurring: longer-lasting cooperation and integration of artists within the process of development should by now have a recognized value to urban planners, city officials, and real estate holders. Nascent to be sure, increasingly artists have been part of community board meetings, city agency planning commissions, neighborhood initiatives, environmental scientific symposia, and even economic development strategies. The digital age has also transformed access to information—zoning maps, building permits, brownfield data, and public hearing minutes are readily accessible—and has provided artists with critical material for making work about these previously arcane or opaque topics. Artists and cultural organizations have proved their value when given the opportunity to be at the table early and often in sustained dialogue with those who shape a neighborhood and more broadly our city.

The strategy to harness the creative economy for the purposes of economic and real estate development has met with mixed results in the long term. For example, it would be hard to argue that SoHo today is remotely similar to what it was in the 1970s and '80s, and so goes Williamsburg as retail and gentrification displace culture. The “creative” is predominantly replaced by a short-term “economy” and the economy then suffers because of a lack of the creative. Perhaps there is something to learn from this long-standing pattern and apply it to



Gordon Matta-Clark, Reality Properties: Fake Estates, Little Alley Block 2497, Lot 42, 1974 (posthumous assembly, 1992).
 Photographic Collage, property deed, site map, and photograph, framed photographic collage: 10 x 87 3/16 x 1 3/8 inches;
 Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
 © Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark/ Artists Rights Society(ARS), New York.

Long Island City. The *Civic Action* project—with its collaborators, artists, The Noguchi Museum, and Socrates Sculpture Park—seeks an alternative model to this cycle that is diverse in its approach. Arts organizations and artists can shape the future of neighborhoods by using culture as an instrument of change *and* long-term sustainability.

Today, with experience and history as a guide, there is an increasing recognition of self-interest between disparate agendas and the people who represent them. The assumed mode of antagonism between professions that guide development has changed, for the time being, as a consequence of a receptive New York City administration, a co-mingling of expertise and the ambition of artists to adopt new forms of collaboration. An alignment of divergent interests is the bedrock of win-win resolutions for difficult and intractable issues. Artists and professionals in a variety of fields are now co-opting each other with interesting and complex results—environmental scientists are using artists to create compelling visual projects from their data and theories; artists are using real estate holders to support and present artworks in undeveloped buildings or properties; developers are pointing to cultural amenities to increase value; and historians and architects provide intellectual ammunition for artist’s ideas, and so forth. The artists of *Civic Action* have adopted this interdisciplinary approach, while at the same time provided singular visions for a neighborhood as a potential model for mixed-use development with art, our environment, and culture as the central anchor to a higher quality of life for a neighborhood.

John Hatfield Executive Director, Socrates Sculpture Park



Map of Long Island City and surrounding area

ESSAY

MUSEUM ACTIVISM

It is very uncommon for a museum, or any cultural institution, of any size to take on an urban project that will get both the architectural community as well as the artistic community working in such an intense way as *Civic Action* envisioned and executed by The Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park. It really has resulted in a visionary way of thinking about the public realm. What also must be noted is the pioneering work both of Isamu Noguchi and Mark di Suvero. Both of these remarkable artists have left quite a legacy in Long Island City (LIC) by introducing LIC to the international community interested in their work. And now both The Museum and the Park have united to challenge the City to think about another way of ensuring that their creative and thoughtful approaches to thinking about planning alternatives will have a future in the 21st century.

There have been many changes around the City during this past decade or so and much of it is very positive, such as ensuring that New Yorkers will have real access to their waterfront as well as stabilizing countless communities around the City. The Bloomberg administration has worked closely with these neighborhoods and the civic community and we should be very thankful for this. It is very exciting and at the same time challenging to be discussing ways of guaranteeing good design, enhancing these crucial cultural institutions while not remaining limited to such traditional planning methodologies as requesting zoning changes. Instead, *Civic Action* is creating a dialogue among different stakeholders to come to a shared agenda and then to advocate for policies that will be embraced by all these diverse groups.

Laurie Beckelman Beckelman + Capalino



Study images of Long Island City

NEW MODELS FOR PLANNING

At the beginning, *Civic Action* was proposed as a reaction to what was happening and what was not happening. The Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park both were seeing proposals for new developments and new building projects right across the street from their respective institutions. Neither indifferent nor beneficial, the new buildings were, to put it bluntly, eyesores. What they were not seeing was much in the way of new transportation or solutions to constant flooding and the deluge of traffic and trucks that Costco had brought when it moved in, in 1996. The neighborhood's low-scale but bulky industrial quality mixed in with smaller-scale homes hadn't changed much since the late 1970s when both institutions became part of the landscape and a source of new visitors to this part of the East River waterfront. Silently, but nonetheless real, construction hoarding was popping up and permits were being posted for apartments on former manufacturing and storage sites. Renderings of development incorporating art themes, the large storage site off Vernon Boulevard and Broadway were sent to the two institutions. Threatened by the idea that the neighborhood character was changing, but not in a good way, the administrations of The Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park needed to act.

"Competition" is one of those words that gets one's heart racing. It is also an important concept to consider, when trying to understand how cities and places change. Neighborhoods and communities in New York as well as other cities reflect in varying measure the balancing act between competition and collaboration. Competition for sites for example, creates real estate booms (and busts). Incentives in the form of planning regulations such as zoning, can influence the quality and the amount of visible public benefit for sites such as

waterfront esplanades, public plazas, better buildings, community spaces, parks, and playgrounds. The triggers that cause some places to be more desirable than others are complex. In many cases, during periods when an area has become less desirable—and thus has less competition for real estate—artists, small manufacturers, and other creative entrepreneurs have moved in—drawn by affordability—and affected the transformation into real estate attractive to developers. This has been true over and over again in neighborhoods like the Lower East Side, SoHo, Chelsea and now Greenpoint, Williamsburg, and Bushwick, all of which have been pioneered by artists who moved into these declining manufacturing districts.

But the neighborhood that is home to The Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park is different. It is neither a declining manufacturing district nor the site of a large influx of artists-in-residence. It is in fact a residential neighborhood with a great percentage of its blocks and lots used for a variety of light manufacturing. Directly on the East River waterfront and framed by Big Allis to the south and Astoria Houses to the north, it is the site of two important, distinct but complementary institutions within easy walking distance of each other.

An urban design competition was considered but rejected because it did not reflect how artists have created new ideas for cities. Although competitions can generate a wealth of design output, creating a sense of urgency and trying to influence public opinion, this was not the path that either of the artists who founded The Noguchi Museum or Socrates Sculpture Park took. Instead they created new kinds of cultural development through artist/architect/engineer/builder collaborations and the tradition of commissioning new work. In the case of *Civic Action*, this legacy inspired the process of setting up criteria for selection and creating a pool of local knowledge that would put artists in the position to have a vision. Urban-scale thinking might then be possible and at the same time grounded in present concerns. The process was intended to

make the answer to the question “What can artists do?” obvious to anyone who had visited either The Noguchi Museum or Socrates Sculpture Park. It was an opportunity for artists to both spearhead projects that they felt were worth doing and create opportunities for them to bring together a group of collaborators in a way that was simultaneously experimental and pragmatic. Compared to alternatives—not engaging the currency and history of these institutions or waiting for another entity to act—*Civic Action* could be a functional model for how planning issues might be tackled outside of government.

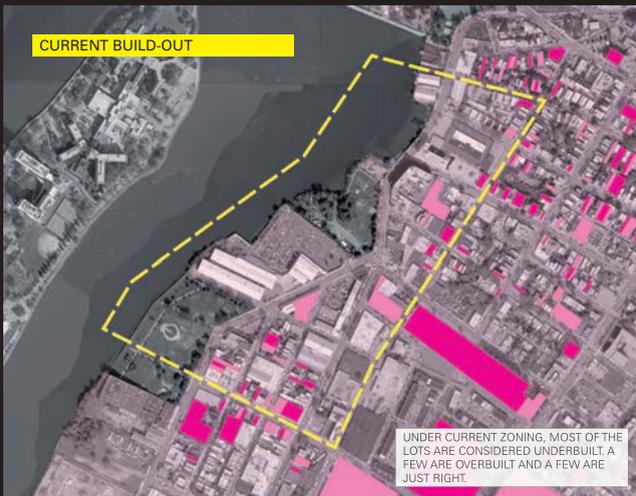
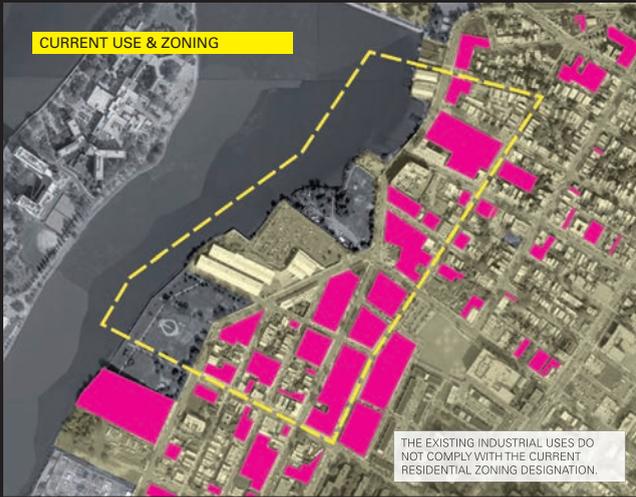
The process was as diverse as the artists involved. The issue of “large scale” and a lack of specific direction was expected as a concern of each of the teams, but the immersion in a variety of studies and approaches, gave depth in the end to what was put in the galleries. The tantalizing possibility that there would be pieces of these visions that could be implemented, could live outside the Museum and allow people walking by to pause and speculate, was a key goal.

Collectively and individually the artists’ work went against normative planning rules. Mary Miss’s team pushed up against what zoning should actually be doing for the area that once was the Sunswick Creek estuary and how new ideas should be incentivized; this was much debated with the planning and zoning experts during the *Civic Action* process. The same push and pull repeated with each artist. And as the public responded to the work, the artists and their teams had a chance to reflect on what they might do outside of the museum walls.

The final installation presented at Socrates Sculpture Park was the test for the engagement of local institutions and artists in planning. That Socrates found a way to go beyond its own fence and out onto streets models this future in a tangible way. The kind of enterprise that is a catalyst for fundamental change and at what scale that change might work, is out there and happening.

Let’s call this way of working the “urbanistic enterprise” versus the “urbanistic project.” In contrast to more traditional formulations of master planning, *Civic Action* demonstrates that artist-led actions can come first and influence the planning process that follows. Four artists and their teams each exhibited their work but in the end the process, the place, the exhibition called *Civic Action* was about more than the sum of its parts.

Claire Weisz Urban Strategist for *Civic Action* /
Principal, WXY Architecture + Urban Design



CIVIC ACTION CHARRETTE

Organized by
The Architectural League of New York
in partnership with
The Noguchi Museum

Rosalie Genevro, Executive Director
Gregory Wessner, Special Projects Director

on June 11, 2012

Charrette Participants

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Executive Director, Cornell University
College of Architecture in New York City

Andrew Bernheimer
Principal, Bernheimer Architecture

Stella Betts
Principal, Leven Betts Studio

Denise Hoffman Brandt
Principal, Hoffman Brandt Studio

Joelle Byrer
Queens Team Leader, New York City
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Susannah Drake
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Deborah Gans
Principal, Gans Studio

Belinda Kanpetch

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David Leven
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Astrid Lipka
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Neil Logan
Principal, fernlund + logan architects

Margaret Newman
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Department of Transportation

Lyn Rice
Principal, Rice + Lipka Architects

Claire Weisz
Urban Strategist for *Civic Action* /
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INTRODUCTION

New York celebrates itself as a city of change. One of the conundrums of contemporary city planning, however, is how to channel and guide change in ways that sustain the dynamism and character of the city's neighborhoods without undermining what makes them so special and appealing to begin with. If we agree that change is necessary to the city's vitality, if not identity, how can we shape it in ways that build on the existing strengths of a neighborhood to improve it, but not transform it beyond recognition?

In conjunction with *Civic Action*, The Noguchi Museum asked The Architectural League of New York for its help in answering this question in response to the challenges it sees emerging in the northwest corner of Queens that it and Socrates Sculpture Park call home. In contrast to the artist-led projects that form the core of *Civic Action*, which evolved as open-ended explorations over many months, The Architectural League organized a design charrette—a half-day of intense design, thinking, and discussion that brought together three teams of architects, landscape architects, and planners to generate ideas for possible futures for the area. Each team responded to one of three design problems, drafted by the League in consultation with The Noguchi staff and consultants, to focus their efforts on the key areas that seem both most pressing and the most productive for speculation: the waterfront, transportation and connection, and neighborhood and community. The outcomes of the *Civic Action* charrette are not intended as fully conceptualized design proposals, but rather as suggestions for future planning efforts and a demonstration of how much possibility and opportunity exists for strategic thinking in the neighborhood.

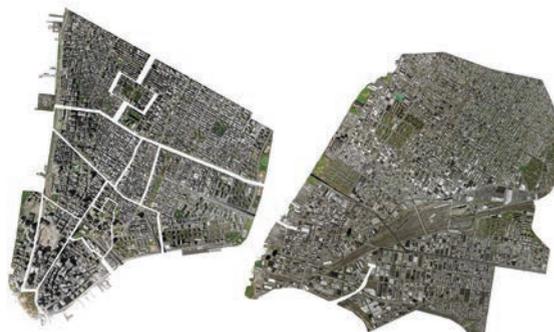
Although each team had recommendations specific to the challenges of its design problem (described in more detail below), there was

agreement among all three teams on several significant points. The first is that the waterfront is the neighborhood's most important, if under-utilized, asset. The patchwork of public and private entities along the waterfront of western Queens, as well as the existing landscaping and traffic patterns along Vernon Boulevard, combine to hinder its accessibility to the rest of the neighborhood. The waterfront should be reconceived as the neighborhood's public face, with greater attention to its visual and physical relationships with not only the upland areas of Queens, but also with Roosevelt Island and the Upper East Side of Manhattan. All three teams independently recommended different but related strategies for inserting "green fingers" of landscape or planted alleys that would connect the waterfront to the rest of the neighborhood, in some cases linking to the existing green spaces of three large New York City Housing Authority residential developments. Extending the waterfront upland would expand the amount of green space and simultaneously help mitigate damage from possible future flooding.

There was also agreement about the importance of the neighborhood's history as an area that balances production with display, the making of things with their presentation. As one of the few remaining areas of New York's once vibrant manufacturing economy, this is a neighborhood where things are made, whether it is in artist studios or in the workshops of the ironworkers, glassmakers, and other small-scale fabricators that are spread throughout the area. As home to a number of dynamic arts institutions, Noguchi and Socrates among them, it is also a neighborhood for displaying work. The way that Noguchi and Socrates combined these two activities of making and presentation—as artist studios that transitioned into cultural destinations—offers an important precedent in considering possible future trajectories for the neighborhood as an incubator for arts and industry. Protecting this aspect of the neighborhood was one of the motivating ideas

of the *Civic Action* project in the first place. The charrette teams agreed that it is a critically important asset and offered up a variety of ideas for enhancing it.

One final point of agreement among the teams participating in the *Civic Action* charrette concerned not a neighborhood asset but rather one of its major shortcomings: the confusion around naming and identity. Noguchi and Socrates lie in the blurred boundary between Astoria and Long Island City, an area that has at various times in the past been called Ravenswood or Old Astoria. The two institutions are considered unofficially part of the larger Long Island City community. That said, the neighborhood that we call Long Island City is roughly equivalent to the area of Manhattan below 14th Street, an area composed of a multiplicity of diverse neighborhoods ranging from the East and West Villages to the Financial District. An important first step is recognizing that the blocks surrounding The Noguchi and Socrates possess the subtle but defining characteristics of a neighborhood distinct from the rest of Long Island City. What do we call this neighborhood and what strategies can be deployed to give it a sense of place and identity? That is the question that still remains.



From Charrette with Noguchi Museum and The Architectural League of New York:
To-scale drawing comparison of Long Island City to Manhattan below 14th street

WATERFRONT

Design Problem

Zoned entirely for residential uses, the area along the Queens waterfront in the vicinity of The Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park is in reality a patchwork of public parks and private, commercial, industrial uses. How could the community gain full access to its waterfront and protect it in perpetuity from future development? What impact might climate change have on this stretch of the East River and how could any of those impacts be mitigated? Designers were also asked to think about the multiple waterfronts—of Queens, Roosevelt Island, and the East Side of Manhattan—as an integrated site that could use the river to connect the neighborhood to the rest of the City, both conceptually and physically, through different means of transport (funiculars, bicycle paths, bridges, boats).

Design Recommendations

- Because large areas of the district fall within a hundred-year floodplain, rezone the waterfront to prevent future residential development.
- Use land-banking and tax incentives to transition existing private entities along the waterfront to public space.
- Building on the neighborhood's history of light manufacturing and art production, reconceive of the waterfront as a "productive landscape," an area for recreational uses but also for the making and displaying of large-scale art.
- Recognize that the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) properties of Queensbridge, Ravenswood, and Astoria Houses represent an existing landscape resource and enhance and integrate them into a larger system of green spaces that stretch to the waterfront. Connect the housing to the waterfront through the insertion of "green fingers" that extend upland.
- Designate the area as the Upper East River Park System and think about it as a contiguous site with Roosevelt Island and the river's edge parks of the Upper East Side
- Connect the waterfront to Roosevelt Island and the Upper East Side through the "Transformer," a new kind of mobility system that can transform itself as it moves along its route, from an aerial tram hanging off the FDR, to a tram to Roosevelt Island and across to Queens, to a light rail along the waterfront. The Transformer would be a "spectacle" transit experience, not unlike the Roosevelt Island tram, that would draw people over to Queens.

Team

Joelle Byrer
Belinda Kanpetch
Susannah Drake
Neil Logan
Claire Weisz

NEIGHBORHOOD/COMMUNITY

Design Problem

Isamu Noguchi and Mark di Suvero created a vision of life in New York as well as providing specific public monuments. That vision of living and working as artists in a context of small industrial buildings and businesses is important to the future of New York for both its economic and its physical fabric. In order for that character to continue and thrive, it needs to be re-envisioned for the current City and its development pressures. The larger frame drawn around Noguchi and Socrates provides a context for understanding and resolving development demands and potentials, including public open space and social infrastructures such as schools and libraries in addition to housing. Within this vision of neighborhood, The Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park could have a more prominent role as attraction, resource, and voice.

Design Response

- Building on the neighborhood's history, create mechanisms for developing the neighborhood as an incubator for small-scale light industry and art production.
- Create AIR, an arts and industry nonprofit development corporation that would encourage specific kinds of economic development in the neighborhood.
- Work with Technion-Cornell Innovation Institute to incubate spin-off businesses from the Roosevelt Island campus, specifically in the areas of health and wellness, built environment and sustainable building technologies, and applied digital technologies and new media.
- Create an industrial land bank to promote continuity of industrial uses; other types of loans, seed money, to provide affordable housing, workspace.
- Upzone 21st Street to intensify development along that corridor.
- Bring Ravenswood Houses down to the water and bring development into the neighborhood; create alleys or connective tissue that tie it to the waterfront and park; these would serve as a catchment route for stormwater management and emphasize co-dependence of upland and waterfront.
- Use NYCHA developments as sources for development rights.
- Use existing zoning tools, such as an M overlay, to hold off residential development.

Team

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TRANSPORTATION/CONNECTION

Design Problem

The Noguchi and Socrates are perceived as remote; getting to them can be difficult because of the lack of public transportation options. How can both the perception and the reality of their location and accessibility be enhanced? How can they be better connected to the transportation infrastructures of New York? The infrastructures at issue are the routes of subway, bus, ferry, and bicycle, but also soft infrastructures such as the mapping of cultural/public institutions, meeting places, and parks.

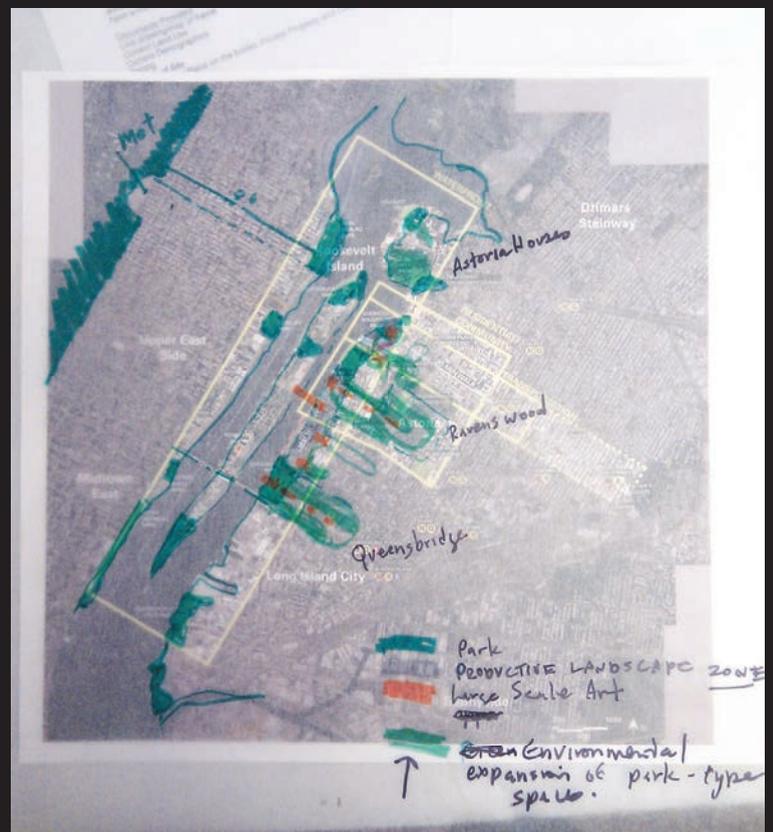
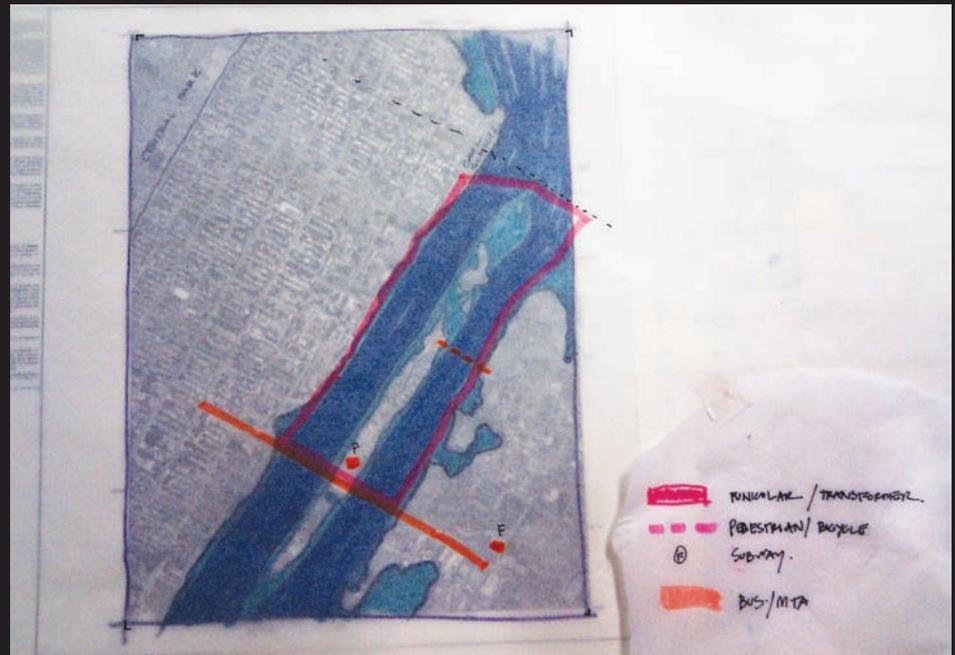
Design Response

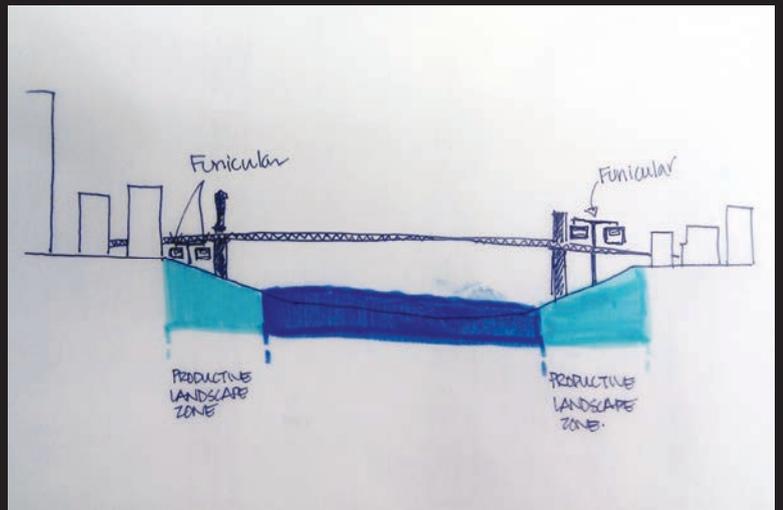
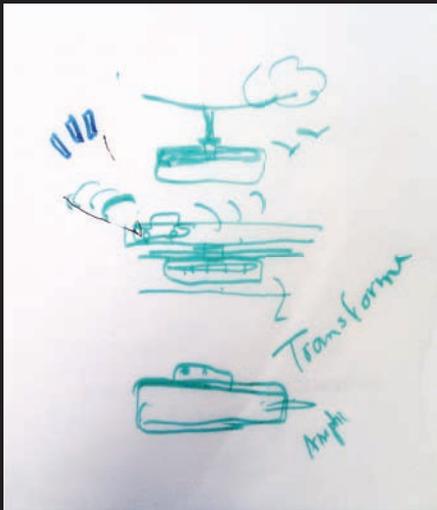
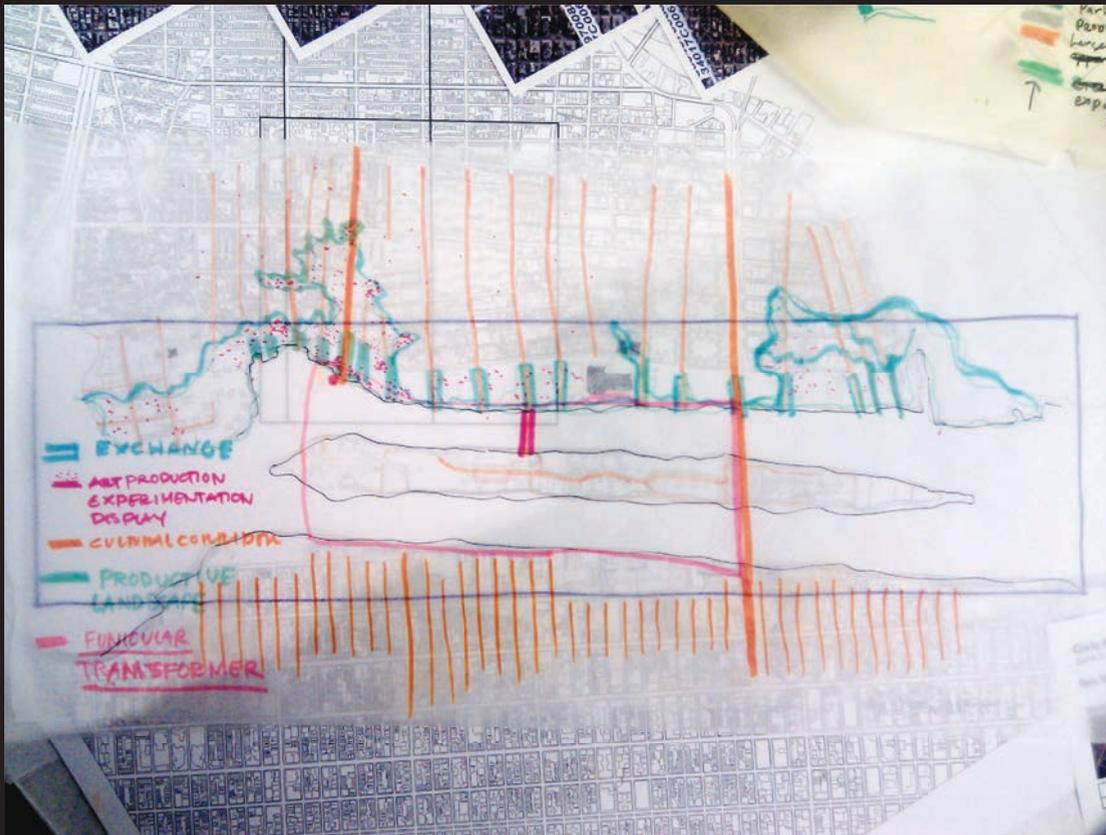
- Understand the area in a larger context that extends across to Manhattan, but also in a more fine-grained way, recognizing that the area known as Long Island City is equivalent in area to Lower Manhattan below 14th Street.
- Rethink street naming to make it more easily understandable.
- Develop multi-modal transport systems that coordinate with one another to connect the different parts of Long Island City to itself, as well as connect the neighborhood to Roosevelt Island and Manhattan.
- Expand ferry service to create a ferry loop that connects the Queens waterfront to the FDR Memorial, the Technion-Cornell campus, and points on Manhattan waterfront, including 79th Street. Link 79th Street stop to cross-town transport that would tie Queens all the way to the 79th Street boat basin across Manhattan.
- Create the “LIC Loop”—a local bus service that runs along Broadway, Vernon, and Northern Boulevard.
- Develop a system of nodes along Vernon Avenue that more clearly recognizes its proximity to the waterfront through the insertion of “park piers” or fingers that make the waterfront visible.
- Install wayfinding and signage systems throughout the area to help provide orientation to the water and the cultural institutions in the neighborhood, and provide information about all transit options, including walking.
- Introduce traffic-calming strategies, including plantings, along Broadway to reduce traffic speeds and green the street.

Team

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From Charrette with
 The Noguchi Museum and
 The Architectural League
 of New York





EPILOGUE

CITY DIALOGUE

Civic Action represents an initiative by two quite different arts institutions, each built by men of strong creative conviction. Although arts institutions are usually focused inward around their mission, identity, and collections, this neighborhood investigation represents two established institutions seeking a way to positively influence the future of their neighborhood, officially called Ravenswood by the Department of City Planning.

Several artists and architects have been joined together to think about the nature of this special part of the City. They have uncovered several surprising and powerful results.



Bodine Castle on Vernon Boulevard



Illustration of former Sohmer & Co factory

The first is discovery of a place more environmentally complex and historically rich than what now appears to the casual visitor. While other conventional institutional uses or retail stores can be found on upper Broadway, by and large Ravenswood, set between two large public housing projects with a Costco at its nexus, is a low-scale residential neighborhood interspersed with some light manufacturing. Upon casual inspection, none of this appears special in New York. However, shifting marketplace values have proved that wholesale changes are occurring here. A few high-rise residential buildings have recently appeared, lending a certain urgency to those who find creative opportunities in this neighborhood's existing, diverse character.

The purpose of *Civic Action* is not to prevent change, but rather to ensure that it reinforces the basic character of what now exists. There is no way to directly control who comes to live and work here, but Julie Iovine's insightful essay proclaiming the death knell of top-down solutions

in urban planning that are superimposed from above, in favor of bottom-up citizen-sponsored activities could not be better represented than in this initiative. Although both cultural institutions have become strategic partners with the City, neither was initially represented as the product of government policy. Instead they demonstrate the power of personal conviction and labor, suggesting how it would be possible to continue to see other creative ideas advance here.

Ravenswood's waterfront, once farmland, subsequently was defined as an upper-class residential neighborhood because of its ease of access by water and unparalleled views of Manhattan. Hallet's Cove and Point offered a natural identity that marked its geography as a destination. Ravenswood's transformation into an industrial neighborhood was assisted by water access to its manufacturing sites and a diversity of City streets. As a consequence, changes in land values and the undesirability of living next to manufacturing diminished the site's attractiveness as an upper-class residential neighborhood. The waterfront still remains a major asset of the site, although access is currently limited. Future development could create a wall of high-rise residential towers that would further reduce inland views. Currently a boundary, the waterfront, with the addition of public access, could also be a source of relaxation and activity whose connectivity will increase with ferry access, making this a place of discovery.

As many other parts of the City prove, changes in the use of industrial buildings can easily occur. Costco has brought something different to the neighborhood with its large-scale retail activities. This suggests that other industrial spaces in Ravenswood could be put to new income-producing uses, even without major exterior changes. In addition, we know artists can create live-work spaces from such leftover places without affecting their appearance from the street.

To consider the future, land ownership is the basis for any urban plan. In Ravenswood, the areas in private hands used for light manufacturing are legally nonconforming uses according to the underlying zoning. Therefore these uses cannot be increased, even in this "backyard" part of the City. With renewed interest in the area and residents awaiting the offers of speculators, what regulations should control the future use of this land? The purpose of *Civic Action* is to begin answering that question through an intensive consideration of what is now in place. This investigation takes place with understanding that the different components of a neighborhood are interdependent, and context can change as individual properties find new uses.

The four artist teams together with The Architectural League represent and investigate ideas that enhance understanding of this urban nexus. In different ways they suggest it is more ecologically diverse than it first appears, but waterfront access is weak, public transportation is sketchy, and despite the presence of a major electrical generating plant, there is little awareness of how this corporate neighbor could make a creative contribution to the community or how to use it to consider environmental issues. The teams' efforts reveal this

as a neighborhood that offers a hybrid of activities, not a homogenous enclave. This is what continues to characterize Ravenswood's (northwestern Long Island City's) potential as a hub of creativity.

Isamu Noguchi used an unkempt area to make a garden of contemplation, a peaceful oasis in contrast to its urban surroundings. Di Suvero embraced the neighborhood's gritty atmosphere and, together with its citizens and artists, worked to make it a place of creativity in which to discover the City. His ongoing plea for waterfront access can only enhance the quality of activities at Socrates Sculpture Park. If Mary Miss is correct and Ravenswood could become known as a community that fosters creativity—a workshop for new ideas that could also become a proving ground for urban archeology—it might even be linked with Technion-Cornell Innovation Institute where millions are being spent to create a new academic center for research, itself a focus of renewal on nearby Roosevelt Island.

What should follow as next steps after *Civic Action*? Used by itself, zoning is a fairly blunt instrument for urban planning with its control of land use and bulk and height. It cannot by itself create a neighborhood or foster creativity. On the other hand, landmark designation assumes an architectural homogeneity not present in Ravenswood. It seems more reasonable to suggest that the neighborhood calls for special regulation aimed at creating a place of waterfront access, height control at the water's edge, architectural diversity, and maintenance of its distinctive light manufacturing/residential mix. This could perhaps lead to the definition of a Special District. To be successful it would have to define the characteristics its proponents believe have value to the City as a whole. Such an achievement requires a process that enlists general public support together with political and legislative action through the City Planning Commission. The political muscle necessary to do this will take time to realize, but there are already approximately 50 special districts in New York, and *Civic Action* announces what could be the beginning of this effort.

The work of Noguchi and di Suvero shows the power of ideas. Both reached out to the community, but in different ways. Di Suvero worked directly with local citizens to build Socrates Sculpture Park on what had been a dumpsite. Noguchi reclaimed land to build a seraphic garden and museum in an old printing plant. Their ideas changed this neighborhood, making it a destination for people from all over the world. With patience, perseverance, and clear definition, Ravenswood could emerge with official recognition as a major asset for its residents, the surrounding City, and New York as a whole.

Hugh Hardy FAIA



Detail of Isamu Noguchi with model of Skyviewing sculpture, 1969.
Photo by Michio Noguchi © 2011 The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York.

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Positive Feedback

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