

Artists Lab

Niloofer Ghanavati, 119807

Projekt Modul

Professor: Ursula Damm

Lecture about Ellie Irons

I am an interdisciplinary artist and educator based in Brooklyn and Troy, New York. I work in a variety of media, from walks to WIFI to gardening, to reveal how human and nonhuman lives intertwine with other earth systems.



Lecture about Ellie Irons



Born Ukiah, California, 1981

Education:

Ph.D. in Electronic Arts, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (expected 2021).

M.F.A. Hunter College, City University of New York, Fall 2009. Semester Exchange, Frank Mohr Institute, Groningen, The Netherlands, Spring 2009.

B.A. Studio Art, Minor, Environmental Science, Scripps College, Claremont California, 2003. Institute for Central American Development Studies, San José, Costa Rica, Spring 2002



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SANCTUARY FOR WEEDY SPECIES: A WINTER RESPITE FOR URBAN-DWELLING PLANTS AND HUMANS



Feral Landscape/Novel Ecosystem/Weed Habitat

Ellie Irons

Bushwick Relocation & Rehabilitation Collection, Winter 2015

If they weren't in the gallery, where would these plants live? The photographs opposite, drawn from my Feral Landscape Typologies collection, present a range of transitory gaps and holes in the cityscape that these plants are able to fill. The vast majority of these open spaces can be considered “novel ecosystems”, meaning the structure and function of the land has been so dramatically altered by humans that the changes have become irreversible. It is no longer possible to return the meadow in the image above to its former status as a reed-filled marshland (at least not as long as Brooklyn remains Brooklyn).



Harvesting plants from an empty street tree pit



Plants in transit to the gallery for installation

SANCTUARY FOR WEEDY SPECIES:

A WINTER RESPITE FOR URBAN-DWELLING PLANTS AND HUMANS



Maintenance and spontaneity:

The manicured botanical gardens and parks of New York City are well known, and host a wide array of maintained plant life, from rare ornamentals and showy cultivars to native trees and wildflowers. The miles of concrete that spread between these green oases are home to another, less well-cared for community of plants. Sometimes called “spontaneous plants”, they are commonly labeled “weeds”. Under this moniker they are routinely ignored and often purposefully destroyed. But these plants have much to offer. Co-evolved with humans, they are well-suited to do the tough work of greening a heavily altered anthropogenic landscape. They stabilize soil, reduce storm runoff, clean and cool the air, provide food and habitat, and sequester carbon. And they do so in places, and at scales, that our city is unprepared to equal with maintained parks and plantings.



SANCTUARY FOR WEEDY SPECIES: *A WINTER RESPITE FOR URBAN-DWELLING PLANTS AND HUMANS*



Project 1

SANCTUARY FOR WEEDY SPECIES:


A WINTER RESPITE FOR URBAN-DWELLING PLANTS AND HUMANS





Weeds in context: If you'd asked me ten years ago, like many city-dwellers I wouldn't have been able to tell you what grew on my block, or why that mattered. But over recent years I've been using the plants outside my door to make watercolor paint. This has alerted me to a host of benefits (emotional, social, ecological) that come from engaging with spontaneous plant life in an urban setting.


Sanctuary for Weedy Species


SELECTED INHABITANTS

1  *Ailanthus altissima* (tree of heaven)
origin: NE Asia/studio germination
 Formerly used as a street tree, now considered an invasive pest. Fast growing and short lived, but can reproduce vegetatively for longer life span. Allelopathic. History of use in Chinese medicine (bark/roots). The namesake for *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*.

2  *Gleditsia triacanthos* (honey locust)
origin: Central N. America/unkept park edge
 Aka "thorny locust". Fast growing tree. Thorns may have evolved in response to Pleistocene megafauna, now vestigial. Short lived, considered a significant invasive in temperate climates outside N. America. Provides shelter/shade/food/soil stabilization in cities.


3  *Phytolacca Americana* (pokeweed)
origin: E. North America/construction site
 Perennial bush, toxic leaves, roots. Magenta berries useful for making ink, provide food for wildlife. Attractive foliage but often considered a pest when flourishing in cultivated and ornamental settings. Regenerates yearly from large root structure.


4  *Celastrus orbiculatus* (bittersweet)
origin: Eastern Asia/studio germination
 Woody vine. Introduced to US as an ornamental in 1879. Readily hybridizes with native bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*). Considered an invasive threat due to hybridization and competition with hardwood canopy trees. Distinctive orange berries.


5  *Ipomoea purpurea* (tall morning glory)
origin: Central America/construction site
 Herbaceous vine. Naturalized to warm temperate/subtropical regions throughout the world. Considered a "noxious weed", but has many related cultivars valued as ornamental plants. Seeds contain an alkaloid that produces psychedelic effects.


Sanctuary for Weedy Species


SELECTED INHABITANTS

6  *Galium* (bedstraw)
origin: Eurasia/in-progress bioswale
 Herbaceous perennial, mat forming with some erect stems. Described as a "persistent weed" in agricultural settings and other regularly disturbed/anthropogenically modified landscapes. Non-toxic, young plants edible.

7  *Oenothera biennis* (evening primrose)
origin: E. & Central N. America/vacant lot
 Herbaceous flowering plant, biennial. In second year yellow flowers bloom at dusk. Copious seed production, valued by birds as nutritious food source, by humans as a nutritional supplement. Has been studied for medicinal properties.


8  *Cirsium vulgare* (bull thistle)
origin: Eurasia, N. Africa/in-progress bioswale
 Herbaceous biennial thistle. Naturalized throughout N. America, Australia, Africa. Disturbance specialist, unpalatable to many grazing animals, persists in rangelands. Human-edible stems, seeds important to birds. Designated an "injurious weed" in UK.


9  *Artemisia vulgaris* (common mugwort)
origin: Eurasia/construction site
 Herbaceous perennial. Tall, erect. Distinctive spicy scent. Historic and contemporary use as a medicinal and culinary herb. Disturbance adapted. Can form dense stands in poor, disturbed soils.


10  *Datura stramonium* (jimson weed)
origin: E. North America/in-progress bioswale
 Fast growing herbaceous summer annual, widely naturalized in temperate regions. "Foul smelling" when crushed. All parts contain highly toxic alkaloids w/ psychotropic properties. Large, trumpet shaped flowers. Spherical, bristle covered seed pods.


Sanctuary for Weedy Species

SELECTED INHABITANTS

11  *Chenopodium album* (lambsquarters)
origin: Eurasia/newly filled street tree pit
 Summer annual. Rapidly-growing, versatile colonizer of disturbed soil. Often more frost/drought tolerant than neighboring plants. Young leaves and mature seeds edible. Related to *Chenopodium quinoa*, the high mountain species cultivated in Peru.

12  *Galingsoga quadriradiata* (quickweed)
origin: Central America/in-progress bioswale
 Herbaceous summer annual. Naturalized throughout eastern North America, Europe, Asia. Reproduces quickly (multiple generations per season). Seeds can remain dormant/viable in the soil over multiple years. Young plants are edible.


13  *Polygonum persicaria* (ladysthumb)
origin: Eurasia/newly filled street tree pit
 Herbaceous summer annual. Present in eastern North America in the late 19th century, may have been introduced as early as 1672. Now widely naturalized in disturbed areas. Long history of use as a medicinal plant in Europe.

14  *Bidens frondosa* (devil's beggarticks)
origin: eastern N. America/in-progress bioswale
 Summer annual. Upright, rangy flowering plant. Yellow and green blooms give way to barbed seeds that stick tightly to fur, clothing, hair. Tolerant of compacted soil in a wide variety of habitats.

15  *Solanum nigrum* (black nightshade)
origin: Eurasia/in-progress bioswale
 Summer annual/short lived perennial. Shrub-like plant produces deep black berries consumed by birds. Similar species native the Americas also grow in this region. Discrepancies over toxicity. Long history of medicinal use in Eurasia and Africa.

Sanctuary for Weedy Species

SELECTED INHABITANTS

16  *Daucus carota* (Queen Anne's lace)
origin: Eurasia, N. Africa/in-progress bioswale
 Also known as wild carrot. Herbaceous biennial, lacy white flowers in second year. Long history of medicinal use as a "morning after" contraceptive and fertility reducer. Tolerant of poor soil, road salt, compaction.

17  *Mollugo verticillata* (carpetweed)
origin: Central America/newly filled tree pit
 Herbaceous summer annual. Prostrate, mat forming growth structure. Well adapted for sidewalk cracks, other infrastructure gaps. Disturbance adapted colonizer of bare ground.

18  *Capsella bursa-pastoris* (shepherd's purse)
origin: Europe/new unplanted tree pit
 Herbaceous winter annual. Arrived in the Americas with European colonization, recorded as present by the late 1600s. Closely related to the model organism *Arabidopsis thaliana*. Short germination time, capable of producing several generations per year.

19  *Sonchus oleraceus* (annual sow thistle)
origin: Europe/new unplanted tree pit
 Herbaceous summer annual. Wind dispersed seeds on dandelion-like white pappus. Early arrival to the Americas with European colonization (reported as early as 1672). Leaves edible when young.

20  *Oxalis stricta* (yellow woodsorrel)
origin: Europe, N. America/in-progress bioswale
 Small summer annual. Cloverlike leaves are edible and have a sour flavor. Produces small yellow flowers and seed pods that burst on contact.

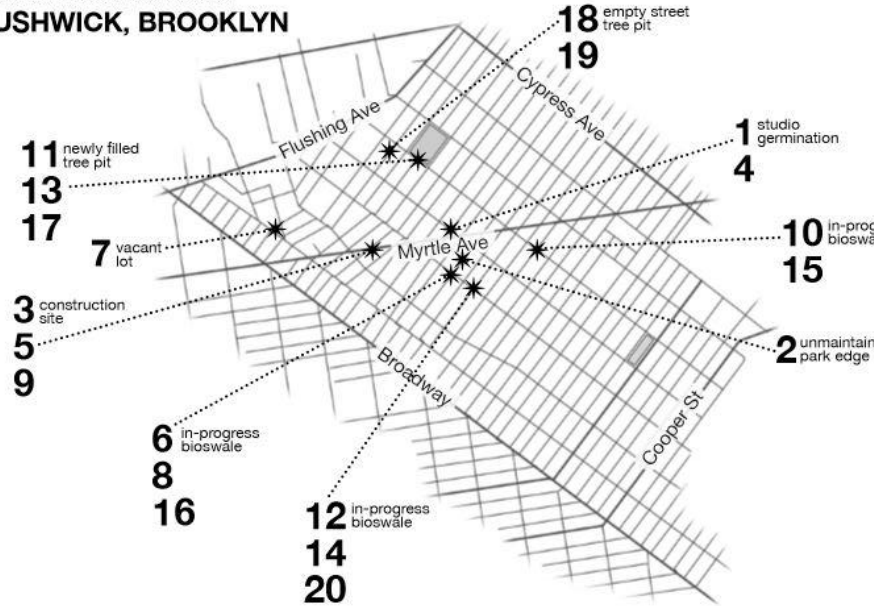


SANCTUARY FOR WEEDY SPECIES: A WINTER RESPITE FOR URBAN-DWELLING PLANTS AND HUMANS

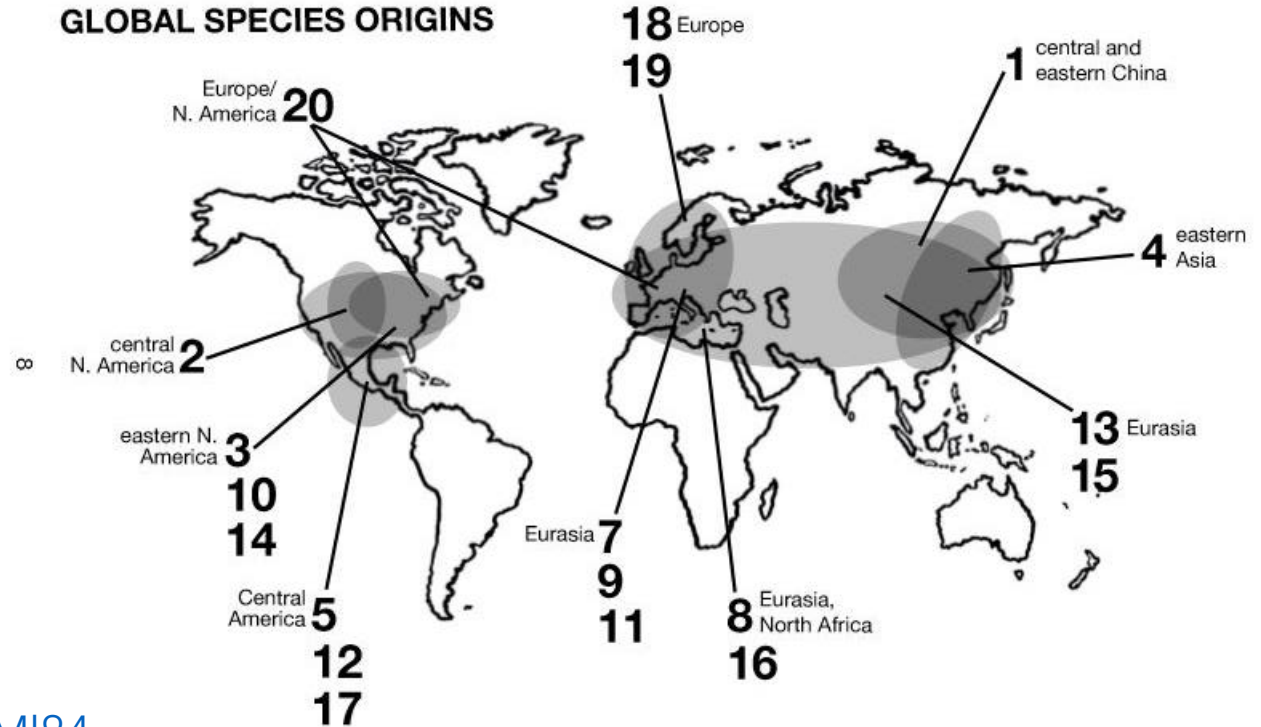


Selected collection sites:

BUSHWICK, BROOKLYN



GLOBAL SPECIES ORIGINS



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-yeSUEMI84>



The Environmental Performance Agency (EPA) is an artist collective founded in 2017 and named in response to the proposed defunding of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Appropriating the acronym EPA, the collective's primary goal is to shift thinking around the terms environment, performance, and agency – using artistic, social, and embodied / kinesthetic practices to advocate for the agency of all living performers co-creating our environment, specifically through the lens of spontaneous urban plants, native or migrant. The collective was founded by Carrie Ahern, Catherine Grau, andrea haenggi, Ellie Irons, Christopher Kennedy, and the spontaneous urban plants of 1067 Pacific Street, Brooklyn.

EPA meets EPA 2: Mugwort Planting

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6lr6wEsv_8&list=UUbl1pgbmMJJ7VXYxHdnDBWQ&index=1
<http://www.environmentalperformanceagency.com/>

LAWN (RE)DISTURBANCE LABORATORY: *UNEARTHING TO REWILD, REMEMBER, LOOK FORWARD*



“Pioneer species” are those plants that respond to disaster and disturbance, sprouting rapidly in bare, exposed or otherwise de-vegetated earth to jumpstart the process of ecosystem recovery. Large-scale events like earthquakes, floods, and landslides can churn up soil, exposing it to light, warmth, air and moisture. These ingredients unlock latent energy in the living soil seed bank- seeds that may have been dormant for years or even decades spring into action, providing the basis for ecosystem recovery and restoration.



Test Plot #1 on RPI's campus at the corner of Sage Avenue and 9th Street



Site #11: Above: March 31, 2018,
Below: June 3, 2018

LAWN (RE)DISTURBANCE LABORATORY: *UNEARTHING TO REWILD, REMEMBER, LOOK FORWARD*



Often labeled as “weedy,” many of the plants that emerge from disturbances produce relatively large numbers of seeds that have a long shelf life. This means they can stay dormant in the soil for many generations until the right kind of disturbance occurs, at which point they sprout and grow rapidly, stabilizing the soil and generating habitat until slower growing species arrive. What species does the city of Troy have waiting in the wings? Maybe a wildflower that was common in 1600 but we never see anymore? Maybe a medicinal herb that was brought by an immigrant from Europe or Asia two hundred years ago? Maybe a dandelion seed that was buried thirty years ago when the foundation for a new apartment building was excavated? Let’s find out!

Through both in-situ and lab-based disturbance and germination tests across a variety of heavily human-impacted landscapes, from long term turf grass monocultures to abandoned industrial sites, this art-ecology experiment will uncover the hidden power of past seed burial for future rewilding in the face of a rapidly changing climate.

Publicly visible test plots are accompanied by educational information about wild urban plants and city ecology. Results are shared with the community through group fieldwork days, public presentations and publications, art workshops and exhibitions, and an ongoing iNaturalist project.

Below: 1 x 1 meter test plots are established in the landscape and observed over the growing season.

<https://maps.smoldata.org/lawnlab2018#14/42.7384/-73.6792>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kg4tWre4Mk0>

GREEN BORDERLANDS

A PLANT APPRECIATION TOUR, IN DANCE AND PIGMENTS, IN COLLABORATION WITH ANDREA HAENGGI, AUGUST 2015



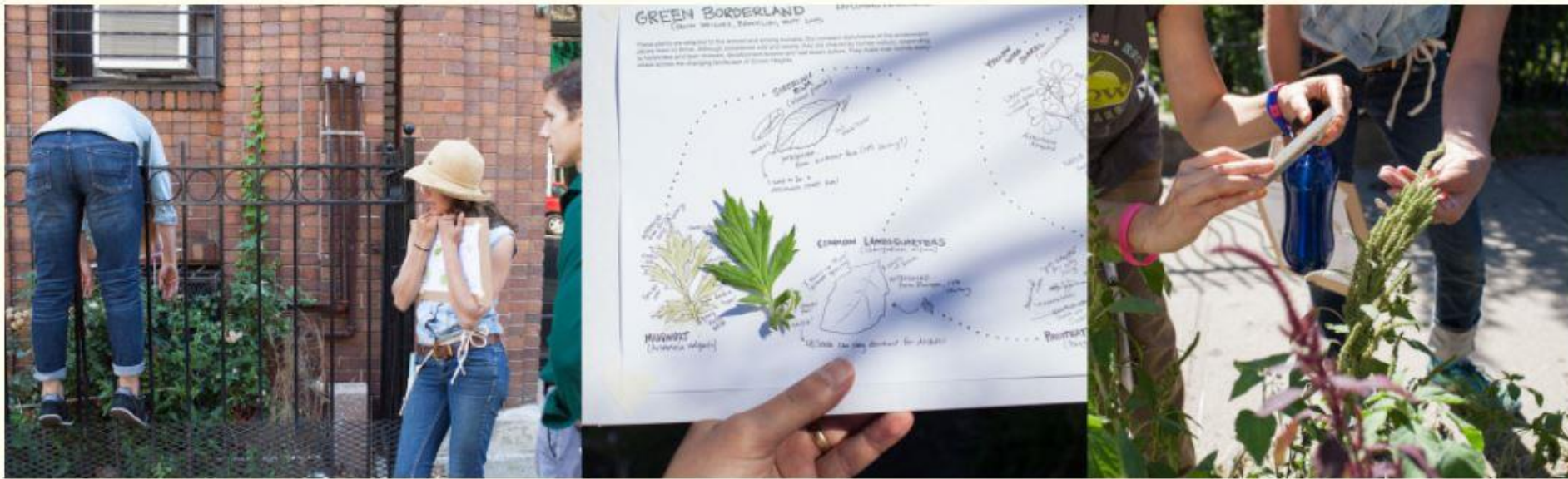
FERAL LANDSCAPE LOBBY



More than thirty years ago John Berger's influential essay "Why Look at Animals?" proposed an interrogation of the role of non-human animals as visual fodder in our day-to-day lives. Tracing the gradual separation between humans and other animals over history, Berger described industrialized, postwar humanity as a species alienated from its animal brethren, but compelled to watch, gaze and stare in an ongoing attempt to reconnect.

GREEN BORDERLANDS

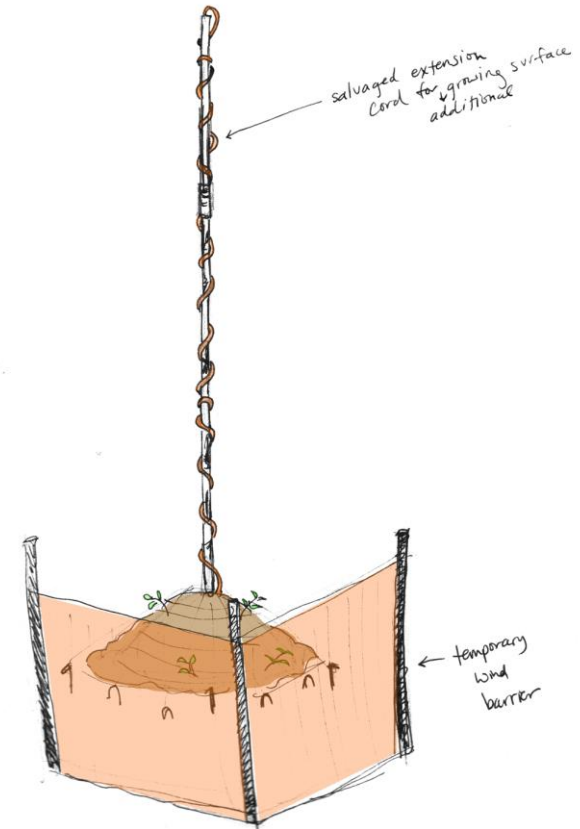
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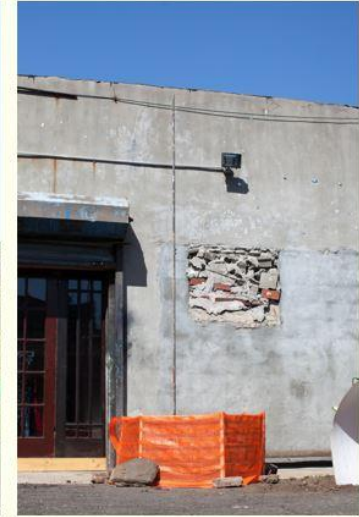
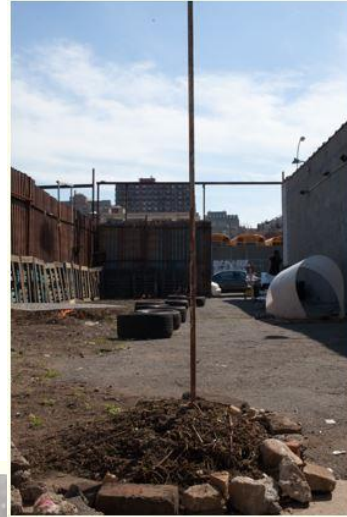
MONUMENT TO WEEDINESS



Sited in the yard at 1067 Pacific People (an art space operating out of a former auto body shop in Crown Heights, Brooklyn) this living sculpture is a testament to resilience and diversity of weedy life forms. The sculpture consists of a salvaged metal pipe, orange construction fencing, and an assortment of seeds and soil saved from last season's Invasive Pigments garden. Echoing the central placement of a flag pole common in front of state and municipal buildings, rather than providing an enduring and iconic image of institutional power, the monument is meant to shift and change unpredictably in accordance with the philosophy of 1067 Pacific People



MONUMENT TO WEEDINESS



NEXT EPOCH SEED LIBRARY (IN COLLABORATION WITH ANNE PERCOCO)



This project looks closely at plants that tend to live in close association with dense human populations. Growing where others can't or won't, the plants held in our seed library are those best adapted to live in the long shadow we throw on the landscape. Recasting these “weedy” species as companion plants for Anthropocene age, the project draws parallels between the characteristics of successful spontaneous plants and patterns of human population growth and flux in globalized cities. We are encouraging viewers to look at the overlooked and to be aware of how our value systems interact with both humans and non-humans.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ba7uJtTntZU&list=UUbl1pgbmMJJ7VXYxHdnDBWQ&index=3>

<https://www.nextepochseedlibrary.com>

NEXT EPOCH SEED LIBRARY (IN COLLABORATION WITH ANNE PERCOCO)



FERAL LANDSCAPE TYPOLOGIES



This research and photography project is an attempt to develop a typology of Bushwick's dwindling "vacant" spaces. Of course so-called "vacant" land isn't really vacant. It lacks the all-encompassing artifice associated with consistently maintained, human-centered habitats. It's also void of certain culturally recognized markers of progress, from cement and steel foundations masking and stabilizing the earth below, to the promise of rising property values for contiguous real estate. But it's full of many other things. Looking beyond plastic bags, candy wrappers and the occasional abandoned mattress, the companion species that flourish in humanity's shadow come into focus, filling these "empty" spaces to the brim.

This project lays the groundwork for the Feral Landscape Lobby by tracking and documenting "vacant" land and the species that live in and on it. The project is ongoing and will include an online map, photo database, collection of plant photos and a selection of herbarium specimens.

FERAL LANDSCAPE TYPOLOGIES



Feral Landscape Typologies (The rise, fall and rise of a lot at the corner of Irving Avenue and Cooper Avenue from May-October 2015)



Feral Landscape Typologies (The journey from forest to parking lot, Broadway and Dekalb Avenue, April 2015 – May 2016)

FERAL LANDSCAPE TYPOLOGIES



Corner lot: Suydam St. and Central Avenue, May 2015 and July 2015.



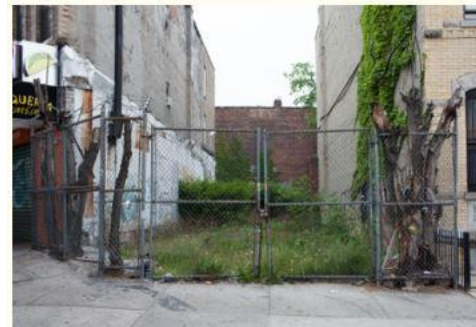
Triangular corner lot: Broadway at Dekalb Ave., August 2015 and November 2015.



Sandwiched lot: 1291 Dekalb Avenue, May 2015 and August 2015



Feral Landscape Typologies in the exhibition Kilroy Was Here at Kilroy Metal Ceiling, Clinton Hill, Brooklyn



Feral Landscape Typologies (Myrtle Avenue and Grove Street, August 2015 and May 2016)

Thanks

Artists Lab