

Learning Places Fall 2017

SITE REPORT #3

Art and Artist in the Gowanus



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1Louisa Armbrust explains the process of Gentrification 313 Butler Street Brooklyn

Andrew Alleyne

11/8/17

INTRODUCTION AND PRE-VISIT REFLECTIONS

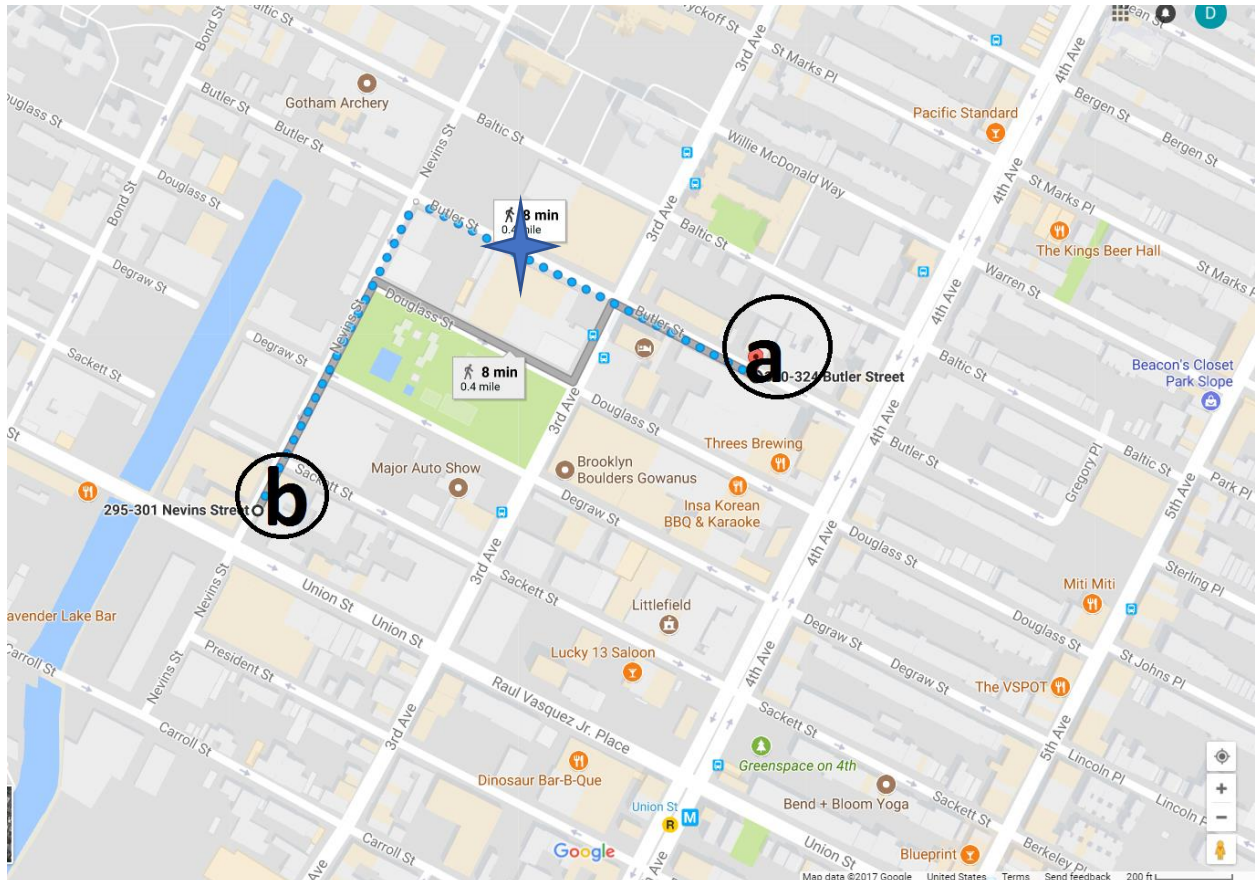
PRIOR to site visit, reflect on what you anticipate learning or seeing during the visit given what you have learned so far from the previous visit, class discussions and what you know about the topic of the visit.

Prior to visiting the Gowanus area to study the Art and Artist in the canal I expected to learn and see different things as they related to the area and its constant state. Throughout our class we discussed many topics as they pertained the Canal and its habitats as they deal with the rezoning and new establishments. Depending on how one may look at these establishment they can be either beneficial to a community or remove the existing one. My journey throughout the Gowanus Open Studios were to find artist and ask them questions based on their work.

SITE DOCUMENTATION: Take notes and sketch in your notebook, take many photographs – search for angles and details that really tell a story and use those to report your documentation. Your site documentation will include the following:

MAP OF AREA OF INVESTIGATION -- on a map like the one below charts the route of the walk and mark the following: (a) significant stops; (b) Locations and directions of your photos and sketches.

The map above details the journey of my trip as it relates to my site visit. We started at Whole food and made our way to a store on Butler Street called the 'Gowanus Souvenir Shop'. While in the store we meet a lady who with mixed reaction described her fears of the changing neighborhood. Due to the nature of our topic many of the stores were not open and we decided to return on the weekend for the Gowanus Open Studio Festival. The map above also details the journey for that as well. Points A-B contain cumulatively 10 studios and 14 artists in total. Monty and I teamed up and interviewed many of the artist between these point together. We gathered their stories and future wishes for the Gowanus area. Many of them are against the change while some are visiting from nearby neighborhoods.



PHOTOS AND SKETCHES: Provide a minimum of 4 photos and 2 sketches of places, elements, processes, people or anything else that you found significant and meaningful during the walk. Focus on scenes that relate to ecology, the environment and public spaces. Feel free to include IN ADDITION other “findings” that you found intriguing. For each photo provide captions and explanations – why is the image shown significant for your exploration.



2567 Union Street, Brooklyn NY 11215 -GOWANUS SOUVENIR SHOP



Karren Gibbons standing in front of her art. She has been in the Gowanus area for nearly 34 years!



Visiting artist from Park Slope.

ANALYSIS: Select one of the topics discussed on the walk and 1-3 most important of your images (from those presented in the documentation section) and develop a 300-500-word discussion of that topic. Be specific and consider multiple points of view of that topic. Consider how it might affect the neighborhood, people, environment, art, development or anything else that you detect as significant either positively or negatively or both. How are your images relevant to the discussion? How will this topic affect the Genius Loci, or spirit, of this place? Does it have any ramifications for the rest of Brooklyn?

My journey throughout our last site visit was one of true sadness. I've interviewed many artists whom I consider amazing people struggling in the Gowanus. Some of the topics that have been most prominent amongst our interviews are, gentrification and dishonest developers. According to Wikipedia.com, "Gentrification is the process of renovating and improving a house or district so that it conforms to middle-class taste." Many of my questions dealt with and related to the rezoning of the Gowanus neighborhood and its effects on the artist along with the community. The effects associated with rezoning are mostly the division of a community.

Numerous of my interviewees all had something in common in the Gowanus area, which was the community. My observation resulted in the impression that artist seem to function well in spaces that contain or exceed their level of creativity. Intrigued by many of the answers, it led me to ask them whether they believed if they were a part of the gentrification process. To my surprise, many of them agreed to contribute to towards gentrification in some manner.

The effects of rezoning so far have led to many of the artists that were on display over the past weekend being a guest of the Gowanus rather than residents. That was a bit upsetting as I had high hopes to review and appreciate work as it directly speaks to the Gowanus and its current state. While my journey wasn't as I expected it to be I managed to stumble upon two artists that had their own studios. Their names were Karren Gibbon, an artist in the Gowanus for nearly 34 years and Louisa Armbrust, an artist that has deep roots with Gentrification in the community. My analysis will focus both on Ms. Gibbon and Armbrust as they mostly appeal to the disapproval of the rezoning methodology.

Ms. Gibbon's art mixed as some art pieces focused on her Gowanus experiences. Throughout our sit down she explains that she has found herself in opposition to the rezone efforts being made but won't be affected as much. The reason for her ease of mind comes from her building code not being up to date. She goes on to explain that her landlord is not able to raise the rent on the building that is not up to code. What I found even more interesting is that the landlord himself is an artist. Ms. Gibbon then goes on to harshly explain her stance on the newly constructed apartment building along the Gowanus river at 365 Bond Street. "The developers come into our community and pretend as though they care about us. They will sit in on meeting and give suggestions as though they care but deep down they don't," she said explained.

Another artist, Louisa Armbrust, also focused in on the specifics on Gentrification. When asked what her views are on the restoration of the Gowanus, she responded by noting that it is a sad cycle amongst neighborhoods. She went on to say that not only is she affected by it but she is a part of the cycle as

well. Her interpretation of Gentrification was interesting as it related to my previous research question, that essentially appealed to an artist is the cause of their own gentrification. This self-inflicted cycle of gentrification has made the art community in the Gowanus stronger in the fight against giant developers but fewer in the community doorstep reach.

In conclusion, the ferocious unforgiving cycle of gentrification continues to plague the Gowanus as many artists fight to remain above murky waters in the community. With many artists, already being removed by the upsurge in rent prices, the community struggles to stay afloat and tight-knit due to rezoning efforts. Many of the interviews conducted resulted in artist living apart from their studios due to rent increases and uncertainty of longevity in their neighborhood. A result of this translates to their work as their creative energy suffocates due to their community being split. The art form of the Gowanus is at stake and they hope to combat through art and community meeting with developers.

KEYWORDS/ VOCABULARY (these must be words you learned on this walk such as specialized vocabulary, city agencies, names of businesses or significant people – they must be specific to the topic of the walk) *5 keywords required per site visit

1. Rezoning
2. Building Code
3. Affordability
4. Accountability (developers aren't trustworthy)
5. 365 Bond

QUESTIONS for FURTHER RESEARCH: (these should follow directly from your analysis section and be complex and specific enough to serve as the basis of a research project; do not include questions you can answer with a quick google search)

1. Are artistic communities subject to developer interest or are they both subject and the cause?
2. Should City Planning place laws that force developers to incorporate the community culture it builds in?
3. As an artist what would you propose the rezoning spot policy include? Will you incorporate community culture as a product?