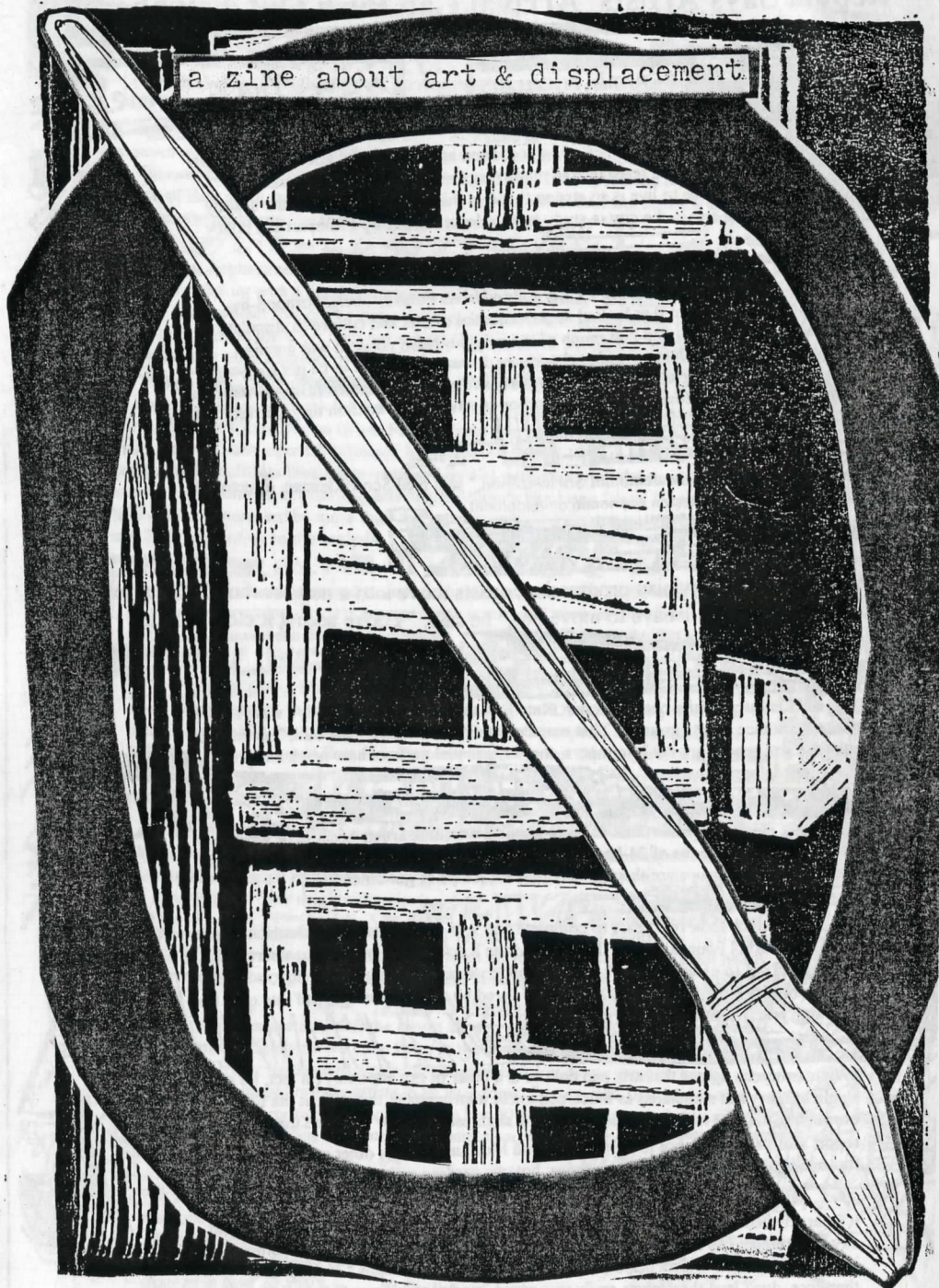


EASELS VS. EVICTIONS

a zine about art & displacement



Report Says Artists' Arrival Can Push Out Neighbors

November 11, 2002

By ROBIN POGREBIN

New York Times

New York City's vibrant arts scene is often portrayed as an unalloyed good, economically as well as creatively. But the resistance in many neighborhoods to a large increase in artists looking for places to live is so strong that it is the biggest obstacle to the healthy development of the arts in the city, a study to be released today by a nonpartisan policy research group said.

The study by the New York-based Center for an Urban Future, a neighborhood-by-neighborhood assessment that looked at the potential of arts and culture to stimulate economic growth, concluded that much of the neighborhood concern was justified because artists' moving into a neighborhood can drive up rents and force out long-term residential and commercial tenants. The paradox is that arts groups drive up the rents and then cannot afford to remain in the neighborhoods whose rejuvenation they spurred in the first place.

"Everyone is fearful of the demon of SoHo-ization," said Neil Scott Kleiman, director of the center, which focuses on economic development.

"You have this Darwinian progression: artists move into a neighborhood, prices tend to go up, and the artists have to move out," he said. "You're seeing it cloud cultural development."

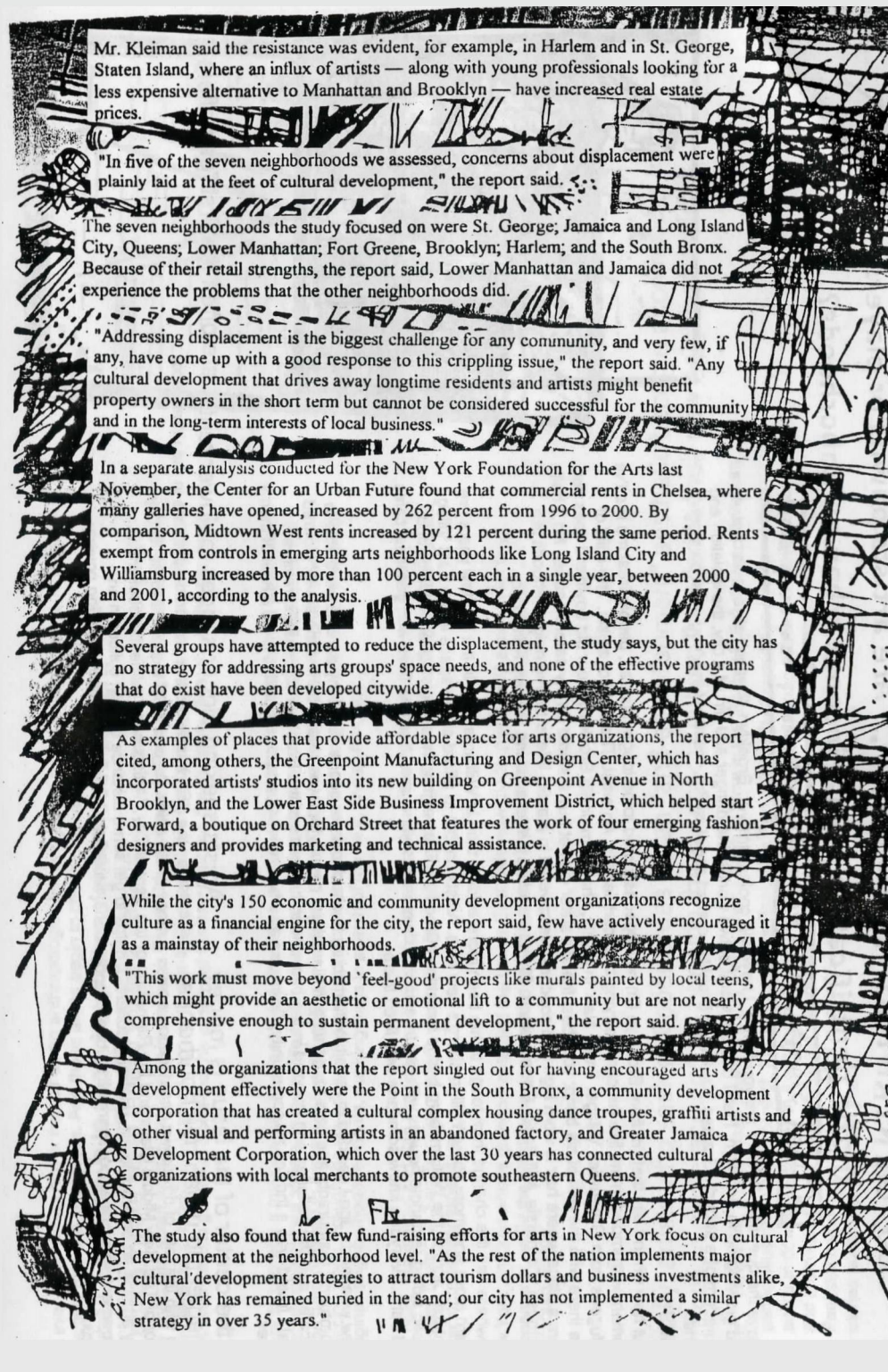
The city's cultural affairs commissioner, Kate D. Levin, disputed the study's main finding about resistance to arts groups. "That may be true in some cases," she said, "but most of the time arts groups are not interlopers, they're essential parts of how neighborhoods grow and define themselves."

"In almost every case I can think of, communities welcome artists because of what they bring to the mix in terms of 24-hour liveliness and the business they bring," she added. "Artists and arts groups are themselves the first victims of gentrification."

The study, which took two years to complete and was commissioned by Deutsche Bank, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Arts and the Rockefeller Foundation, asserted that the city had yet to understand fully the economic value of its cultural industry, which is responsible for more than 150,000 jobs, stimulated by a 52 percent growth rate over the past nine years.

"While everyone agrees that arts and culture is a pillar of our economy (in fact, no other single industry has stimulated as much economic improvement throughout the five boroughs), the vast majority of us haven't the slightest clue how to define the sector," the report said. "Culture is not just Broadway and Museum Mile, in other words, but thousands of commercial artists, galleries, botanic gardens and zoos citywide."

It is largely because of the disparate nature of culture in New York, the study said, that city government has failed to address it. "The arts are a scattered, tribal and complex industry, with roots widely dispersed throughout the five boroughs," it said, "and therefore, don't lend themselves easily to a grand 'master plan' from City Hall."



Mr. Kleiman said the resistance was evident, for example, in Harlem and in St. George, Staten Island, where an influx of artists — along with young professionals looking for a less expensive alternative to Manhattan and Brooklyn — have increased real estate prices.

"In five of the seven neighborhoods we assessed, concerns about displacement were plainly laid at the feet of cultural development," the report said.

The seven neighborhoods the study focused on were St. George; Jamaica and Long Island City, Queens; Lower Manhattan; Fort Greene, Brooklyn; Harlem; and the South Bronx. Because of their retail strengths, the report said, Lower Manhattan and Jamaica did not experience the problems that the other neighborhoods did.

"Addressing displacement is the biggest challenge for any community, and very few, if any, have come up with a good response to this crippling issue," the report said. "Any cultural development that drives away longtime residents and artists might benefit property owners in the short term but cannot be considered successful for the community and in the long-term interests of local business."

In a separate analysis conducted for the New York Foundation for the Arts last November, the Center for an Urban Future found that commercial rents in Chelsea, where many galleries have opened, increased by 262 percent from 1996 to 2000. By comparison, Midtown West rents increased by 121 percent during the same period. Rents exempt from controls in emerging arts neighborhoods like Long Island City and Williamsburg increased by more than 100 percent each in a single year, between 2000 and 2001, according to the analysis.

Several groups have attempted to reduce the displacement, the study says, but the city has no strategy for addressing arts groups' space needs, and none of the effective programs that do exist have been developed citywide.

As examples of places that provide affordable space for arts organizations, the report cited, among others, the Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center, which has incorporated artists' studios into its new building on Greenpoint Avenue in North Brooklyn, and the Lower East Side Business Improvement District, which helped start Forward, a boutique on Orchard Street that features the work of four emerging fashion designers and provides marketing and technical assistance.

While the city's 150 economic and community development organizations recognize culture as a financial engine for the city, the report said, few have actively encouraged it as a mainstay of their neighborhoods.

"This work must move beyond 'feel-good' projects like murals painted by local teens, which might provide an aesthetic or emotional lift to a community but are not nearly comprehensive enough to sustain permanent development," the report said.

Among the organizations that the report singled out for having encouraged arts development effectively were the Point in the South Bronx, a community development corporation that has created a cultural complex housing dance troupes, graffiti artists and other visual and performing artists in an abandoned factory, and Greater Jamaica Development Corporation, which over the last 30 years has connected cultural organizations with local merchants to promote southeastern Queens.

The study also found that few fund-raising efforts for arts in New York focus on cultural development at the neighborhood level. "As the rest of the nation implements major cultural development strategies to attract tourism dollars and business investments alike, New York has remained buried in the sand; our city has not implemented a similar strategy in over 35 years."

the GENTRIFICATION game... Are artists pawns or players in the gentrification of low-income urban neighborhoods?

by Ilana Stanger, Senior Writer, TheArtBiz.com, February 2001

I love the question, "Where are you from?" I have the coolest answer: Brooklyn. It wasn't always so cool. As a kid growing up in Brooklyn, I felt I had the worst of two worlds: the danger and dirt of a city, the isolation and boredom of a suburb. Granted, back then Brooklyn carried social cache, mostly of the "you must be tough" kind.

But now when I say that I'm from Brooklyn I'm no longer assumed to be tough. Instead, people treat me like I've somehow trumped them, like I'm card-carrying birth certified hip. An artist. The child of artists. The child of refugees from Greenwich Village. True? Nah. In reality, I hail from unhip Brooklyn. Your old boyfriend does not live there with the rest of his band; your best friend's sister did not buy a studio on my parent's street. No, I hail from a place where hair is worn high and couches are covered in plastic. We're talking neighborhoods like Flatbush, Carnarsie, Mill Basin, Coney Island, Sheepshead Bay. We're talking Brooklyn-Brooklyn.

Nowhere has the change from tough to hip been more evident than in Williamsburg. In the last few years I've heard more and more about Williamsburg's new face. Artists unable to afford studio space in the East Village ventured across the Williamsburg bridge to settle in Brooklyn. The neighborhood-ugly squat buildings and plastic siding rectangle houses with few trees and a desperate skyline-soon became filled with galleries, cafes, and bars. Everyone knew someone who lived there.

A few weekends ago I decided to revisit Williamsburg to check out the scene. Even my parents were able to recommend restaurants and bars to me-as a Williamsburg neophyte, I was clearly behind the times. I toured the cafes and the galleries and lounged in the bars under the shade of the Brooklyn Queens Expressway. What I found was a thriving art community, facing, as all urban-renewal arts communities face, a host of thorny issues.

At the center of the issue is money. Artists seeking bigger spaces for lower rents are often the first "gentrifiers" of neglected urban neighborhoods

Research by the NEA has linked the proportion of artists in the urban labor force with the rate of downtown gentrification across a range of US cities. As one artist explained to David Ley, author of *The New Middle Class* and *The Remaking of the Central City*, "Artists need authentic locations.... every artist is an anthropologist, unveiling culture. It helps to get some distance on that culture in an environment which does not share all of its presuppositions, an old area, socially diverse, including poverty groups."



Not every artist views him or herself as an anthropologist, but every artist needs cheap space-and plenty of it. So artists move to poor areas. And those areas begin to change. According to Ley,

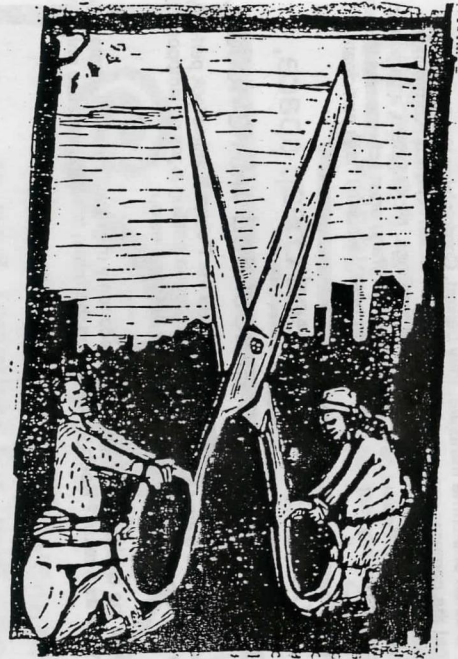
when artists move to poor inner city neighborhoods property prices inflate six to tenfold within a decade.

Janet L. Abu-Lughod gives a telling anecdote about artist gentrification in her book "From Urban Village to East Village: The Battle for New York's Lower East Side." Abu-Lughod reports that in 1978, New York's Mayor Koch was so impressed with the way in which artists gentrified Soho that he proposed the same for the South Bronx. Somehow, the proposal didn't take.

It's easy to see why a mayor would love gentrification. Soho, once a neighborhood of abandoned warehouses and loose-cobblestone streets, is today filled with cafes, expensive restaurants, and designer boutiques. But you'll be hard pressed to find a real-live struggling artist living there. Once the studios open and the smell of cappuccino wafts through the air, price hikes are just around the corner. This leaves the artists, not to mention the original neighborhood residents, packing bags in search of the next, cheap frontier.

At this point, Manhattan and San Francisco are all but frontier-less. Areas like Alphabet City in Manhattan and the Mission District in San Francisco, which were occupied by poor, mostly Hispanic families for over a decade, are now increasingly expensive.

In New York, children whose grandparents fled the Lower East Side now gladly pay \$1500 a month for tiny, dark tenements, while the artists who sparked this reverse exodus are settling into studios across the Williamsburg Bridge



Ironically, artists who seek out poor areas for an "anti-establishment" aesthetic become accomplices in the gentrification game and end up bringing the bourgeois culture they fled to their new neighborhoods.

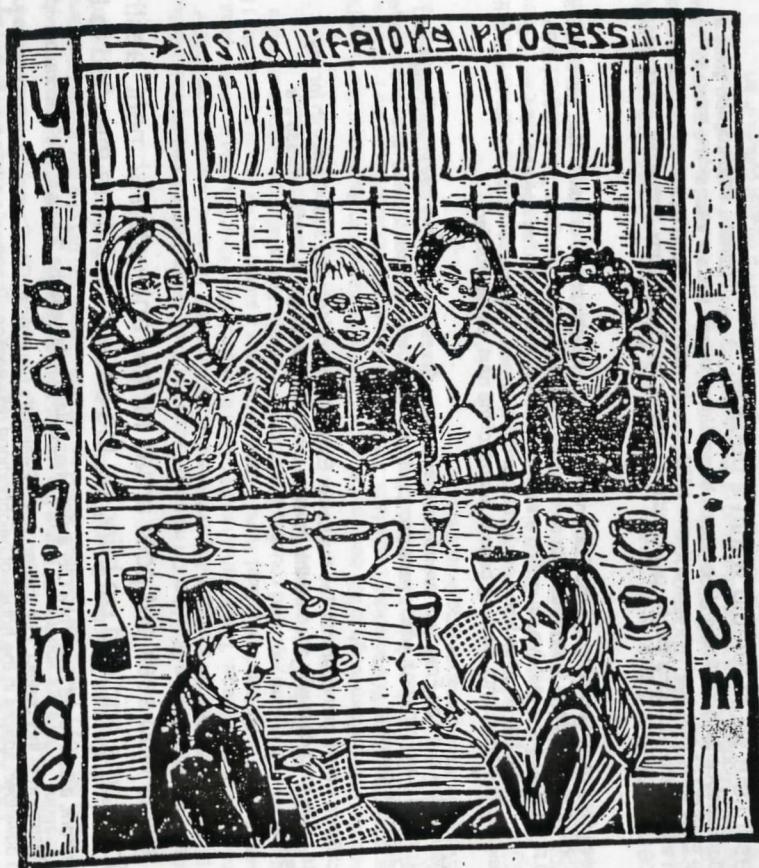
Peekskill, New York, a depressed New York City exurb whose claim to fame is the "Facts of Life" sitcom, provides a perfect illustration of this conflict. For the ten years Peekskill's Republican City Council has attempted to lure artists to downtown spaces in the hopes of neighborhood rejuvenation. The city ran ads in the Village Voice and promised to help artists renovate old storefronts into lofts and studios. After 80 artists made the move, Peekskill began construction on ArtLofts, a \$5.7 million project of 48 state-subsidized artist-only lofts. Each loft carries tax breaks for fifteen years.

Sounds good, doesn't it? But when the Peekskill artists discovered the city was planning to install video cameras at downtown intersections as an anti-crime measure, they balked. Complaining that "artist only" zoning invites gentrification and that the cameras are targeted at the city's African American community, Peekskill artists have taken to protesting and filibustering City Council meetings. Nick Mottem, a carpenter interviewed by the "New York Times," said, "If I would have known that this grand artist scheme was to create a layer on top of the African-American community that was already living here, I wouldn't have participated."

So what's an artist to do? Artists need cheap space,
but don't want easels to become associated with eviction.

A few have taken to fighting gentrification head-on. In a move that makes the Peekskill artists look perfectly passive, a small movement in San Francisco's the Mission District has begun pasting signs on lampposts that call for neighborhood residents to key luxury cars — anything to keep the yuppies out.

While guerrilla tactics might not stem the chai latte tide, the slowed economy might. Will the real estate market cool down—and will city artists stay put as a result? Keep your eyes on the urban frontiers, because only time will tell.



*Street Theater*Lake Worth, FL*
February 28&29, 2004

"Wedding Invitation"



Government and Developers:
in bed together for long enough....

It's time to make it official!

PLEASE JOIN US...

For the Historic Marriage of Lady Government
and Mr. Gorealestate.

Date: TODAY

Place: Corner of "L" Street and Lake Ave

TIME: throughout the day of the street painting festival.

The happy couple will exchange vows of

Love for profit,

HONOR of political pay-off, and

RESPECT for the wishes of developers.

Following the ceremony
we invite the public to wish Mr. and Mrs. Estate
a wonderful future of greed and corruption
in their new luxury condo at Lucerne Arms.

With prices in the \$ 300,000...

it is an address for the truly elite.

The drums will start the wedding procession.
Public involvement is encouraged in this mock marriage!

MORE INFORMATION AVAILABLE, FREE!!

contact us (below),

*for a free
copy of:*

ZINE "Vote Yes: Vote NO"
a collection of writing about
real estate development, race,
class, & your future" 18 pgs

VIDEO "Holding Ground"
inspiring documentary about
the Dudley Street Initiative

to borrow:

BOOK "There Goes the Neighborhood"
by UrbanHabitat Program

BOOK "New Urban Frontier"
by NeilSmith

Our culture's obsession with upward mobility is not sustainable. The old "movin' on up" mantra is social and ecological suicide. It paves the path for an elite few to walk all over the rest of us while they make their way to the top. It leaves the vast majority fighting for crumbs, trying to emulate their oppressors. It leaves an earth that nurtured human social development for hundreds of thousands of year in total devastation.

Rejecting the upwardly mobile society doesn't mean regressing into the past or accepting the misery and poverty that so many live with. It means looking down at the earth below our feet, and at the people around us, and learning how to go forward together...

For more info about these ideas or to get involved in local/global activities to build community and create social change, get in touch:

Downward Mobility Press and Distribution
PO Box 961
Lake Worth, FL 33460
561-547-6686