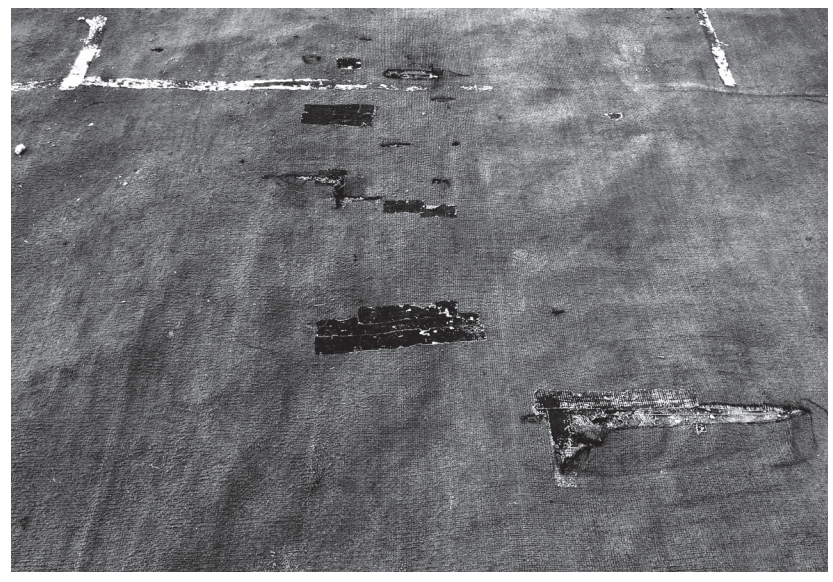
2024-25 FELLOWS

ELLIE BOTOMAN
EKEMINI EKPO
DAPHNE LUNDI
ANOUSHKA MARIWALA
PHILIP POON
SHIRT

NEW CITY CRITICS



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THE ARCHITECTURAL LEAGUE NY

The essays in this publication were shaped by insights and exercises with New City Critics' distinguished advisors and guests: Cosmo Bjorkenheim, Garnette Cadogan, Liz Greenspan, Eric Klinenberg, Alexandra Lange, Carolina A. Miranda, Tanvi Misra, Mazin Sidahmed, Avery Trufelman and Carina del Valle Schorske.

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In Memory Of

This program was founded in honor of Michael Sorkin, a longstanding Board Member of the Urban Design Forum and Architectural League. His death in March 2020 was a huge loss to the world of thinking and action in architecture and the shaping of landscapes and cities. He was a spectacularly good writer, fearless and funny, and adept at exposing and explaining the systems of power that create the built environment. We hope to honor one of his most important legacies: his generosity and care in encouraging the development of young thinkers and writers and designers around the world.

New City Critics, a joint project of Urban Omnibus/The Architectural League of New York and Urban Design Forum, is a fellowship program that empowers new, fearless, and diverse voices to challenge the ways we understand, design, and build our cities.

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(top to bottom)

The tourist kiosk remains at the Canal Street Triangle, years after the 2017 Gateways to Chinatown competition tried to replace it with a Chinatown arch. Photo: Philip Poon.

Detail from program for Mary McLeod Bethune memorial ceremony "Live the Legacy" (1974) from archives of the National Council of Negro Women.

The cricket pitch at Van Cortlandt Park. Photo: Anoushka Mariwala.

The Queer Ecologies Garden at the Alice Austen House in May 2025. Photo: Ellie Botoman.

MONUMENTS, PERIPHERIES & ECOLOGIES

What objects does the city present to us for scrutiny? How do we dissect them? And to what end? Over nine months, the New City Critics traversed many blocks, tracing cracks and fissures as evidence of larger structural changes in the city, and talking to those both affected by and informing those changes. Here, they present the findings in dispatches shaped by their distinct sensibilities. As accelerating deportations and displacements cast a pall over the city's promise of a place for all, these six writers train their attention on various attempts to build permanent footholds or maintain fluctuating occupations of spaces that are best defined by the many claims on them.

Recalling Maya Lin's now-iconic Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, Philip Poon continues his ongoing investigation into the politics of Chinatown by examining the process behind the renewed open call for a gateway arch. This piece is found in conversation with Daphne Lundi's survey of a growing commemorative landscape to Shirley Chisholm. Constellating across edifices and statues, she finds, is perhaps the only way to honor the larger-than-life figure.

In Crown Heights, a local bookstore serves as a cipher for Ekemini Ekpo as she navigates her adopted neighborhood's changing dynamics. Nearby in Bed-Stuy, Shirt contemplates what dictates the built environment, and for whom, and the architectures of emotion and care that uphold it.

For Ellie Botoman, the flora at the Alice Austen House's Queer Ecologies Garden in Staten Island disrupt stable notions of what we consider natural, and invite deeper intimacy with the non-human world. Other forms of solidarity emerge at the cricket pitch in Van Cortlandt Park, where Anoushka Mariwala bears witness to South Asian communities constructing a commonwealth one Saturday morning at a time.

This publication showcases works from the second cohort of New City Critics, a program spearheaded jointly by The Architectural League of New York and Urban Design Forum. In the following pages of this limited-run publication, the 2024-2025 fellows—Ellie Botoman, Ekemini Ekpo, Daphne Lundi, Anoushka Mariwala, Philip Poon, and Shirt—engage questions of authenticity, delve into impassioned debates around commemoration, chart solidarities along the urban periphery, and become enmeshed in ecologies of the non-human. In many voices, they ask a shared question, how and where do we continue to belong to this place?

NEW CITY CRITICS

QUEER COMFORT

By Ellie Botoman

Tucked behind the romantically overgrown, sloping grounds of a historic property on Staten Island is a noticeably modern landscape. A wisteria-drenched, arched metal trellis invites visitors to step into the community garden. Four raised garden beds sit within a protective frame of shrubbery, leafy vegetation, and hermaphroditic maidenhair ferns. There's a cluster of fruiting strawberries, whose genes can express four different gender variations. In another bed sit pansies, which are considered androgynous but also allude to the historical queer pejorative. It's tempting to reach out and rub a small patch of French lavender (an allusion to the color's long-standing significance in LGBTQ+ activism) or bend down to inhale the bloom of hyacinths (symbols of gay love attributed to the myth of Apollo and his lover) and hermaphroditic green carnations (used by men like Oscar Wilde to signal their sexuality). Sweet-smelling black cohosh represents pre-colonial methods of gender-affirming care, used by Indigenous communities in North America to treat menopause systems and gynecological ailments. Delicate honeysuckle, valued for its healing anti-inflammatory properties, signifies love's resilience. Benches nestled in each corner invite visitors to contemplate the delicious sensorium of the aromatic herbs and flowers sprouting in each raised metal container, the flittering dance of pollinating bees, and the cooling brine gusting from the nearby rocky waterfront. This is the Queer Ecologies Garden. Once an overlooked corner of the Alice Austen House's grounds, it now represents the historic site's experiment in community gardening as queer placemaking.

The Austen family called this place Clear Comfort. A modest 17th-century Dutch farmhouse nestled high up on a hill on the banks of Staten Island, the home and its surrounding sprawl of gardens remained Alice Austen's residence for 80 years—28 of them spent with her life partner Gertrude Tate. Austen and Tate were evicted and forced to sell Clear Comfort in 1945. It fell into a state of decay and disrepair until grassroots preservation saved the house from demolition. Purchased by the City in 1975, the landmarked property was restored, reopening as a public museum in 1985.

The Alice Austen House initially emphasized the building's architectural heritage and Austen's creative endeavors as one of New York City's first female street photographers. Since 2017, Executive Director Victoria Munro has worked to center the queerness of Austen's artistic life in its exhibits and programs. The new garden was conceived as a celebration of Austen's personal love of gardening and as a new, safe space for the public to learn through hands-on care about the diverse, inherent queerness of botany and fungi through plantings that are historic cultural symbols of LGBTQ+ identity or which exhibit gender and sexually-fluid behaviors themselves. What better way to understand Alice Austen's story and the proud, openly queer life she lived on Staten Island across the 19th and early 20th century than to learn directly from the land?

Austen founded the Staten Island Garden Club in 1914. In a time when women were held to strict codes of social dress and behavioral conduct and when engaging in same-sex relationships was still illegal in the state, Alice Austen transformed her family estate's garden into a safe space for radically reimagining one's gender and sexuality. She staged portraits of herself and her queer friends in gender non-conforming dress amid the garden's blooms and hosted annual wisteria parties to celebrate the gender-fluid species that bloomed on the side of her house every spring. The garden became a place where her lesbian community could socialize among found family and express themselves away from policing eyes. Austen lived a queer ecological life long before there was the language for it.

What does it mean to have a community garden that refuses heteronormativity? What does botanical science have to do with the lived histories of LGBTQ+ people? In their foundational book, *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, and Desire*, scholars Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson write that queer ecological thinking confronts the "compulsory heterosexuality as it manifests in our perceptions of nature, ecology, and environmental politics." Climate activist Ingrid Bååth also notes that queer ecology defies binaries, embraces fluidity, and interrogates assumptions about behaviors and ways of being we deem "natural" in biological science and human society. Designed in collaboration with nonbinary gardening consultant Marisa Prefer and historic preservation graduate students from the Pratt Institute Center for Planning and the Environment, the Queer Ecologies Garden demonstrates how the biodiversity of urban gardens parallels the gender and sexual diversity of the human world. The curated selection of species—many of which are already familiar to visitors and grow ubiquitously across the city—demonstrate a wide spectrum of reproductive strategies, sex identification, and gender presentation beyond the traditional binaries of "male" and "female."

The site's open layout, with generous paths of gravel around the raised beds, creates ample space to easily accommodate school groups. The elevated garden beds not only protect the plantings, but also invite interaction by bringing the greenery closer to the curious eyes and hands of visitors. Benches on the perimeter encourage contemplation, observation, and—true to Austen's love of botanical backdrops—provide picturesque photo ops. The garden's landscaping and its more secluded position on the property achieves a delicate balance between providing spatially intimate engagements with its queer vegetation and facilitating collective experiences of creative skill-sharing and ecological experimentation. "We can't organize effectively," Munro reminds me, "without space to think and reflect."

"The garden is founded on the idea that queerness is inherent in nature and to be a safe space for that creative exploration," Public Engagement and Programs Director Kristen Bartley tells me when I visit the garden in early May. The garden regularly hosts all-ages photography workshops, field trips, foraging and art-making events, and LGBTQ Photographic Storytelling programs rooted in that queer ecology framework. Local middle and high school Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA) groups from Staten Island and Brooklyn are especially engaged with the garden, with students regularly coming for school visits and joining the multi-generational team of volunteers and Alice Austen House staff members who maintain the garden.

The Queer Ecologies Garden at the Alice Austen House in May 2025. Photo: Ellie Botoman.

Lexy Trujillo-Hall first got involved with the museum as a local GSA student and has since become one of the Queer Ecologies Garden's principal stewards and educational programming co-facilitator. Trujillo-Hall describes the Queer Ecologies Garden as a source of community whose transformative greenery has, over the past two years, undergone the same kind of fluid journeys of self-discovery and personal growth that they have. "Being a young queer person in this current moment is so fraught," Trujillo-Hall reflects, "it's nice to know that there's always this space here where you can come and work on the land and just have this experience and share it with others, too." They invite me to think of this community garden as a site of solidarity where, for a moment, anyone is welcome to be however they are: "You have a reference to your own identity that nature understands without having to explain." Even if Staten Island GSA program participants might already be familiar with gardening or Alice Austen herself, Trujillo-Hall observes that, as students learn about the species growing inside the Queer Ecologies Garden, they "realize that these little things that surround them are representational of their identities, who they might be, or, in the future, who they might become. It makes students feel more comfortable when society as a whole is not always kind to them."

The Staten Island St. Patrick's Day Parade previously blocked LGBTQ+ groups from marching; a ban that was only lifted last year. In the city's most conservative borough, the Queer Ecologies Garden remains a small, yet mighty force for inclusivity, safety, and empowerment. When I ask Munro how she and the Alice Austen House team navigate local homophobia and national efforts to suppress opportunities to learn about LGBTQ+ history, she points out that the Queer Ecologies Garden regularly serves as a welcoming educational catalyst: "It's a point of connection. That anti-queer erasure and violence is born out of a lack of knowledge, which creates fear of the other. . . . Doing this gardening work in an open, public space for every person to enjoy creates that potential for a conversation about what the garden is, why we do it, but it can happen in a manner that's very approachable for a lot of folks that would never even want to have that conversation."

The Queer Ecologies Garden has already begun to surpass the boundaries of its original containment, a testament to its defiant sensibility. When I toured the grounds with Bartley, she pointed out the migration of pansies onto the property's lawn and an errant trail of hyacinths from one section of the garden to another. There are the hearty perennials, like lavender, strawberries, salvia, garlic, and Austen's beloved wisteria, which bounce back every year. A sturdy crop of garlic whose survival through New York City's winter means they'll be harvested for summer. Bartley takes me to a shady corner right behind the Alice Austen cottage where a stacked row of logs reveals a cluster of fruiting shiitake mushrooms used to teach students about the non-normative, multi-sexual morphology of fungi

and their capacities for queer world-making through their hidden mycelium networks.

When I first encountered the garden, I was frustrated by the lack of signage in the beds, the absence of clear demarcation amid the cluttered quilt of growing blooms. It felt a little too easy to pass by the unmarked, different looking back garden when an entire sweeping stretch of park around the historic house is there to explore. Yet, after hearing Bartley and Munro outline the plans of the garden's planting programs, I began to understand why the Queer Ecologies Garden didn't feature traditional labels. Over time, unplanned crops like marigold and goldenrod have sprouted up in the garden bed, most likely transported over by birds or the stray cats that occasionally roam the grounds. Bartley doesn't rush to remove these in order to maintain a pristine image of the garden's composition. She welcomes them to the site and invites them to stay a while.

Since the New York Restoration Project replenishes the Queer Ecologies Garden with a fresh array of annuals every spring, the Alice Austen House staff plan their requests based on what's thrived in the garden before and future programming needs. Bartley notes that, for this year, she's asked for colorful vegetables that can be harvested for the museum's anthotype workshops, more edible crops for staff's experiments in food production, and for a few previously successful species like fragrant ginger. Munro envisions the garden's sensorial growth out onto the rest of the property. The addition of new native grass plantings, Munro hopes, will eventually enable staff to reclaim the land for a new set of visitor walking paths, zones for pollinators, and a natural amphitheater to facilitate live performances in the meadow. At the moment, however, "just being open to the public is an act of resistance."

Photos inside the museum feature Austen and her friends posing around the estate's extravagantly blooming gardens and on its beachfront overlook, and I am reminded of other beloved, subversive sites of outdoor queer history: joyous partygoers on Jacob Riis Beach, the protective ruins of the old Christopher Street Piers, a 1969 demonstration by gay protesters in Flushing Meadows Corona Park to combat local harassment of cruisers. These ephemeral landscapes are some of New York City's greatest living witnesses to local queer history. Rarely preserved, constantly threatened by city planners, real estate developers, and climate change, these ecological communities persist by mutating with and growing in defiance of the built environment. New York City's environmental and queer histories have always been entangled, quests for refuge playing out across neglected urban peripheries in abandoned lots, public parks, and on waterfront margins. Each species cultivated at the Queer Ecologies Garden grows and thrives on its own nonlinear schedule of queer time, interconnecting Alice Austen's openly lesbian life at Clear Comfort with a network of queer movements for social justice, historic practices of communal healing, and modern-day struggles for visibility and safety in the face of continued political marginalization. Queer people, the Queer Ecologies Garden reminds us, have always cared for each other by taking care of the land.

THE SHORTEST RAMP IS A LONGER ROAD

By Ekemini Ekpo

To get into the shop, you have to travel up the world's shortest ramp. At the summit is a single rectangular room (longer than it is wide), with a cozy corner recess stocked with yarn in a wicker basket, and a graffitied, single occupancy bathroom. The two longer walls are covered in books, zines, and other ephemera, and the floor is covered in confetti. While the proprietors of other stores at this intersection have mostly papered over their windows, and opted to light their spaces with slightly oppressive fluorescent bulbs, this establishment feels as though it's lit solely by the sun. And it teeters on overstimulating. Inside, I saw nearly every color I can name, both "red" and "green," and also "chartreuse." There's also a community bulletin board that is impressively kept up to date; every posted event is yet-to-happen.

This is the Nonbinarian, which describes itself online as a "trans+ led volunteer-powered exclusively-queer bookstore & mobile mutual aid initiative in BK." The Nonbinarian's founder, K. Kerimian, began riding around Brooklyn on a pink custom cargo bike back in 2022. At that time, they were just giving books away. When I spoke with them, each of us sitting in one of the store's plush armchairs, they noted that their focus was on the borough's "book deserts," a term they used to describe places where access to books is limited. The store settled in its current location on the southeast corner of President Street and Rogers Avenue in November 2024.

Back in November, before the bookstore had even opened, someone smeared dog feces on Kerimian's pink cargo bike. And then in April, that very same bike disappeared in the dead of night. The Nonbinarian organized a GoFundMe page to raise funds to replace the bike, where they described the theft as an "act against our symbol of pride and community solidarity." The store's take is that the incident was definitely queerphobic in impact, plausibly in intent.

The Nonbinarian takes up a lot of space in my mind, because it takes up a lot of visual space in my commute. I used to walk past that bike almost every day. We also both showed up around the same time. Around when the book bike began operations, I moved to Brooklyn from Harlem, and from Texas before that. I bopped around the borough; mostly cycling through sublets in various corners of Crown Heights, and occasionally venturing further: Kensington, Boerum Hill, and what an oldhead might call Flatbush, but which is now known as Prospect Lefferts Gardens. I finally landed in my current corner of Crown Heights only a few months before the Nonbinarian bookstore opened its doors. I feel like my fate and that of the store are somehow tied up together. For that reason, I want to believe that the dog feces and the bike theft were pure flukes and not related to any larger ideological conflicts.

There's another, equally self-involved reason why I hope these incidents were acts of necessity or even convenience, rather than of hatred. Sometimes, I do a double-take because I see a face that looks too similar to that of an aunt or an uncle or a cousin. If I'm out in the late afternoon, I dodge clumps of students and wonder how come my braids didn't look that cool when I was a teen. I'm always searching for the dopamine hit of hearing an African grandma speak, and I'm still living off the high of that time a Black man in his 60s, adorned with a baseball cap, sang about how my friend and I were fly girls (the only lyrics in his song were "fly girls."). I'm happy to be a droplet in the sea of brown faces that populate this Black neighborhood.

Because I feel like a part of this particular whole, I experience others' worser impulses as my own. I've witnessed how racism is the only thing keeping a lot of Black people from professing a full-throated conservatism, complete with misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic views. While I know that Black folks are not a monolith—the Afro-Caribbean owner of my laundromat has a pride sticker above her own bulletin board—I dread the possibility that the person who stole the book bike was a Black person expressing their homophobia.

But if this hypothetical thief's experience is anything like mine, then they've found the store's whiteness as conspicuous as its queerness. The representation among the customers pales in comparison to that on the shelves. Almost every time I step into the store, or just peer through its expansive windows, I find a collection of people who could pass a paper bag test with flying colors. There's a world in which the thief views themselves as a freedom fighter, doing their part in a war against white encroachment.

In my quest to figure out whether my ambivalence towards the Nonbinarian is shared, or if I'm just making things way deeper than they have to be, I chatted with some folks, including front desk ladies at the nearby Brooklyn Community Pride Center, the cashier at a local bodega, somebody just minding their business at a coffee shop, artists, and community organizers. A volunteer at the Nonbinarian mentioned being an alum of Bluestockings, a queer, trans, and sex worker run bookstore on the Lower East Side. They were drawn to the Nonbinarian due to what they articulated as common values: a concern with accessibility, the distribution of free resources, and, of course, queer literature. Kerimian describes the store as a site for "queer joy," having elicited a response that is reportedly "overwhelmingly positive."

I chatted with a Black zine-seller who is currently organizing an abolitionist third space on the northern side of Eastern Parkway; they were cautiously optimistic about the Nonbinarian. For another organizer, focused primarily on the intersection of race and disability, it's big beef with the bookshop. They especially disliked how the aftermath of the bike theft played out. They felt that asking the community to fundraise for a stolen bike after leaving the bike outside in the first place is some "white shit." At the end of the day, they view the store as trespassers ("Do we really need another bookstore?")

If we take for granted that people's online personas are some approximation of their real-life beliefs, then there's actually plenty of people with questions about the store's place in the community. When News 12 Brooklyn reported on the dog poop incident on Instagram, folks wrote some choice words in the comments, including, "They done put everything but what the neighborhood could possibly use on that corner;" "let the chaos begin;" and "Guaranteed less than 5% of the community will even consider this as an essential for the community. Not much use to the locals who've been there for decades."

(I'm purposefully obfuscating this commenter's intent—they're speaking to the Nonbinarian as a harbinger of demographic change—but I think it's worth mentioning that no bookstore is essential if the only service it provides is in being a place to purchase books. And not to shill for Big Library, but you don't even *really* have to spend money to have access to reading material, to the extent that you consider literature essential to a well-rounded life; I know of at least 50 places in Brooklyn alone where somebody can get a book for free. If being strictly essential was a good enough reason to axe the Nonbinarian, you may as well get rid of bookstores altogether.)

In any case, according to its district profile, the residents of Community District 9, composed of both the aforementioned "locals" and more recent arrivals, could use more affordable housing, more resilient infrastructure, and less trash on the streets. The community (the one that's tapped in enough to be on the Community Board's radar) has articulated its greatest desires and those desires aren't about interpersonal relationships. The community is asking for more of its systems and institutions.

The Nonbinarian is not writing the housing policy that makes half the residents of Brooklyn Community District 9 "rent burdened." But the store *is* actively inserting itself into system-level conversations. In addition to the shop's *raison d'etre*: "Everyone deserves to see themselves on the shelf," painted above the cozy corner, I could piece together a list of left-of-liberal political stances through the flags, flyers, and posters displayed around the store. Some takes were local—New York City needs to "FREEZE THE RENT" and elect Zohran Mamdani as its next mayor—others international in scope—Free Palestine.

It also turns out the world's shortest ramp is actually wheelchair accessible. The bathroom and Wi-Fi are free for anyone to use. Also free: binders for trans masc individuals. Business cards informing people of their rights. COVID tests. Masks. The Nonbinarian also published a thoughtful and detailed statement (re-)committing to disability justice vis-a-vis ironclad COVID precautions in February 2025.

But even though I can find Black books and tarot cards on the shelves and a true but nonetheless trite Instagram caption reading "Just as there is no LGB without the T, there is no queer history without Black history," what I've looked for and cannot find, is any engagement with its own status as a white-conceived, (partially) white-owned business in a neighborhood that's hemorrhaging Black people. That conversation—one that would probably involve words like "displacement" and "pricing out" and "racism,"—is a bigger ask than carrying *Black on Both Sides* by C. Riley Snorton. According to Kerimian, it *is* an ongoing conversation amongst the staff, one that has manifested in actions such as training volunteers as notaries and platforming events led by people of color. But it's nonetheless unfolding in private, safe from scrutiny.

A sample of the offerings at the Nonbinarian bookstore in Crown Heights. Photo: Ekemini Ekpo.

Before it became a largely benign, voweled alternative to an acronym with four consecutive consonants, and after the apex of its usage as an outright slur, the word "queer" implied a certain political orientation. Being gay was not enough to make you queer. To earn that title, you needed to reject assimilation and adopt a politics that challenges power in all forms. There are people whose response to the store is informed entirely by homophobic sentiment. But there are others who may be alienated by what they experience as a furthering of white gentrifier encroachment…which is another way of saying that they're put off by a store that doesn't *feel* queer in the late 20th century sense of the word—whether or not that's the language they'd use.

It's not the language *I'd* use, mostly because the language I'd use is "unsure." My feelings for the Nonbinarian can best be described as a massive metaphorical question mark, hanging in the air above 1130 President Street and held aloft by mercurial sentiment and bald contradiction. The latter is why I can pine for the attention of my local bodega cat and still write something as dramatic as "perhaps the Horseman of Conquest (read: Gentrification) doesn't ride atop a white horse; he rides a mini schnauzer rescue named c.k. dexter haven." (I'm mostly joking, but to the extent I'm serious, it's because the aforementioned c.k. dexter—the official shop dog of the Nonbinarian—followed me around the store during one of my visits). I can stare at a "Gay It Forward" pay-it-forward wall for folks who might be otherwise unable to purchase a book, see that it's a good thing, and still speculate over whether this lefty oasis exists for the Crown Heights of right now, or for the Crown Heights of 2030, a neighborhood that could very well have lost another 19,000 Black residents. I'm not sure if I'll be one of them.

The Nonbinarian is a capacious container for these emotions. They're feelings about this particular store, sure, but they're really about whether or not there's any hope of building community in spite of circumstances, like racialized gentrification or latent queerphobia, that seek to undermine that effort. And even underneath that, they're really *really* about my own desire to be a net good, and my fears of being seen as an outsider. If nothing else, I'm grateful that the Nonbinarian can hold all this alongside its many, many books.

CHISHOLM TOWN

By Daphne Lundi

There are ten monuments dedicated to Black people in New York City, and only one is dedicated to a Black woman: Alison Saar's monument to Harriet Tubman in Harlem, completed in 2008. The Women's Rights Pioneers Monument in Central Park, where Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Sojourner Truth confer around a table, doesn't count. The original proposal only featured Anthony and Stanton. Truth was added only after public outcry in 2020 over the whitewashed suffragist history. If monuments were our only public records, you'd think mermaids had more influence on American history than Black women.

Shirley Chisholm is the rare Black female figure who takes up public space. Her political trajectory in the 1960s and '70s was unprecedented: A schoolteacher born in Bed-Stuy and raised in Brownsville with Bajan and Guyanese roots. An educator turned civic leader turned elected official. The first Black woman elected to Congress, the first Black woman to run for President on a major party ticket, the first woman to run for the Democratic nomination for President, and a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus.

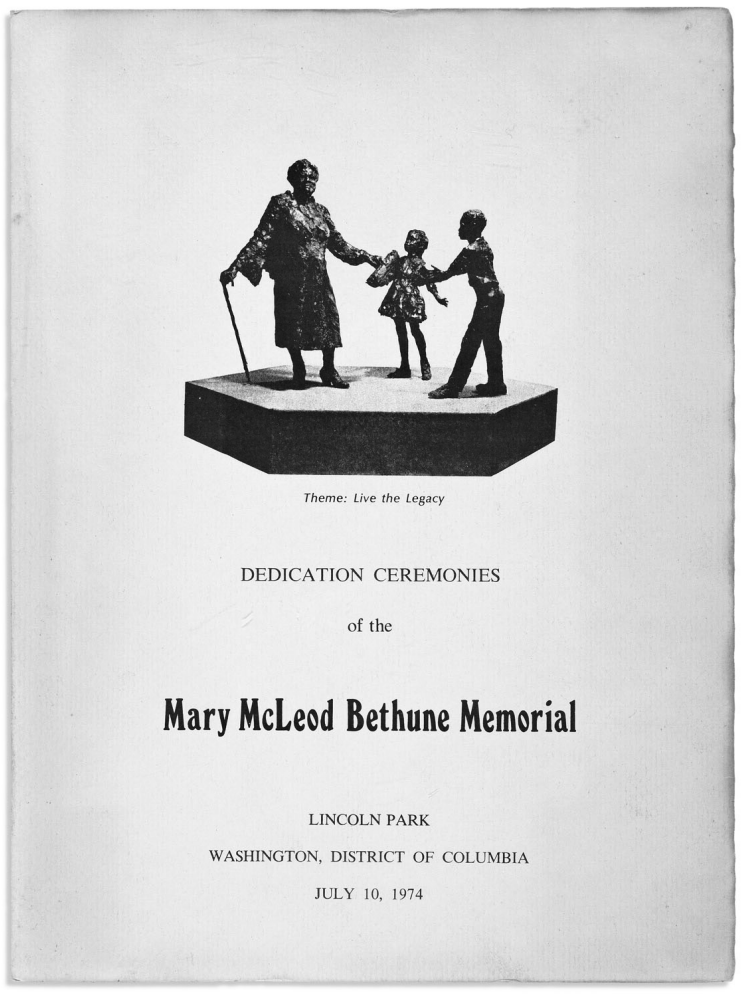
All of those firsts—combined with the sartorial sharpness of a dressmaker's daughter unafraid of prints—made Chisholm hypervisible in the halls of Congress and on the presidential campaign trail. Photographed at a *Meet the Press* interview in 1972 with Democratic presidential hopefuls, like so many other images of her, she disrupts the sameness: four white men in suits of varying shades of blue and gray, and her in the foreground, draped in a navy cape with white piping along the edges, gold jewelry, and red nails. She has the look of someone well acquainted with other people's doubt and condescension but who remains undeterred. Her politics also set her apart. She was laser-focused on policies that supported people living at the margins: expanding the federal minimum wage and unemployment benefits to include domestic workers, establishing SNAP and WIC. She even championed a bill for a nationwide network of free and low-cost 24-hour childcare centers. If we were living in Chisholm's childcare utopia, we might have avoided adding "urban family exodus" to the doom-loop dictionary.

In the twenty years since her passing, it seems like everyone has finally caught up to Fighting Shirley Chisholm. Her name shows up in all kinds of civic spaces: a state office building, a post office, a street, a middle school campus, a daycare center, a terrace in a city park, a state park. Her archives at her alma mater, Brooklyn College, have become a repository not only for her records but also for women's activism in Brooklyn over the past 80 years. An exhibit dedicated to her life is currently up at the Museum of the City of New York. Soon, that commemorative landscape will expand even further. A recreation center in East Flatbush bearing her name, one of the largest investments in social infrastructure in Central Brooklyn in decades, will open this year. A monument in Flatbush, the first built in honor of a Black woman in Brooklyn, is set to be installed in early 2026. Chisholm's presence in public space is all the more outsize given the dearth of monuments dedicated to Black women, not just in New York City but nationwide.

Mary McLeod Bethune was the first Black person and the first woman to have a monument erected in Washington, DC, in 1974. She stands twelve feet tall, sculpted in rough-cast bronze that almost looks like clay. She gazes into the future, holding a scroll in one hand and a cane in the other. The base of the monument, a stone pedestal, is inscribed with excerpts of her last will and testament: "I leave you love. I leave you hope. I leave you the challenge of developing confidence in one another. I leave you a thirst for education. I leave you a respect for the use of power. I leave you faith. I leave you racial dignity. I leave you a desire to live harmoniously with your fellow men. I leave you a responsibility to our young people." Two children stand by her side, ready to receive her legacy.

There was immediate mobilization to erect a memorial in Bethune's honor following her death in 1955. It took 14 years of fundraising and advocacy from the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), which she founded, to ensure that her impact as a pioneering educator,

civil rights leader, presidential advisor, and the first Black woman to lead a federal agency was publicly preserved. One of the most vocal advocates for the monument was Shirley Chisholm. The newly elected congresswoman from New York championed a bill to erect the monument and co-chaired the Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial Committee.



Program for Mary McLeod Bethune memorial ceremony "Live the Legacy" (1974) from archives of the National Council of Negro Women.

At a time when Black communities across the country were facing police violence and struggling to access quality housing and jobs, some asked what good a monument to a fallen Black leader was. How did Black memorialization serve Black advancement? In a letter to the NCNW in 1970, Chisholm defended the monument against its critics: "The Memorial will serve as a manifesto that Black Americans have not only earned the right to the necessities of daily living, but to their heritage as well." Her assertion that monuments can be manifestos of Black life feels all the more salient if we think of them as projections from the past into the future, above-ground time capsules. The closest thing we have to time travel, they let us receive messages from our ancestors about what mattered to them and how they wanted to be remembered.

When it is completed next year, Chisholm's monument (the first of five in the works to honor women of color across New York City) will be the central node in a network of projects celebrating her life. Following her death in 2005, commemorations began to trace the contours of her congressional district, which stretched from Fort Greene to Midwood, capturing most of Brooklyn's Black Belt. A long, low brick building with rounded corners topped with barbed wire in Bed-Stuy bears her name in thin metal letters, easy to miss beneath the bold United States Post Office sign.

A 13-story state office building in Fort Greene, home to congressional offices and state housing and community development services, once looked like a typical century-old government building with decades of deferred maintenance. A recent facade renovation has added some civic polish. Chisholm's name looks like it's been there forever, in large, gold, Federal-style letters that sit above a cast-stone entrance with gold doors. A small black plaque with gold-embossed lettering and a raised portrait of Chisholm features one of her quotes: "I am, was, and always will be a catalyst for change."

A section of Park Place in Crown Heights near her family home is co-named Shirley Chisholm Place. A paved circular path in Brower Park, where she once taught classes, is now called Shirley Chisholm Circle, marked by one of the Parks Department's signature green signs. A nearby boulder holds another plaque, echoing many of the oft-repeated accolades but featuring a different quote.

Beyond gestures of dedication to a prominent civic leader, the symbolism of many of these projects was coterminous with Barack Obama's election. Electing the first Black president was a moment to reflect on the multi-decade project of shifting public imagination about what a president could look like—a project that began with Chisholm.

A second wave of commemoration began in 2019, 50 years after Chisholm became the first Black woman to serve in Congress. The idea for a monument to Chisholm had been floated around, but the pandemic combined with a change in mayoral administration would shift the timeline. A long-delayed city project became the site of one of the largest investments in community space in her part of Brooklyn. The Shirley Chisholm Recreation Center at Nostrand Playground is set to be completed by the end of the year. In 2012, then-Council member Jumaane Williams pitched the project to Mayor Bloomberg, who funded a feasibility study. Mayor de Blasio later committed $40 million. But it was not until 2020, amid calls to defund the police, that $141 million reallocated from the NYPD budget kicked the project into gear. Once home to the park's synthetic turf ball field, the three-story, 62,000-square-foot space will feature a competition-sized pool, basketball courts, workout rooms, a media lab, spaces for teenagers to hang out, a teaching kitchen, and a flexible community space for programming and events. Her name will be inscribed in metal letters on the building's brick facade.

In conversation with Weston Walker, Design Principal and the Partner in Charge of Studio Gang's New York Office, he described the project referencing an iconic Chisholm quote: "It's literally the place where you could bring a folding chair. It's the place where you come and sit and you carve out space for yourself." The design team was inspired by Shirley Chisholm's aesthetic sensibilities for the interior color palette: marigold yellow, a color she used in her campaign materials, appears throughout. Circular windows are a nod to her campaign badges: *Chisholm: Aim High. Shirley Chisholm: Unbought & Unbossed. If I Was 18, I'd Vote for Chisholm. Chisholm Now. Take the Chisholm Trail to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.*

The masonry facade responds to the brick buildings that surround it, including Flatbush Gardens, one of the largest housing complexes in Brooklyn. In recent years, it has become a prime example of slumlord tactics and the aftereffects of the pandemic. By 2022, nearly a third of the 2,500 rent-stabilized households in the complex were facing eviction. At the same time, the landlord, Clipper Realty, had accumulated nearly 3,000 housing violations. In 2023, the city reached an agreement with the company: a $191 million, 40-year tax abatement in exchange for renovations and long-term affordability of the units.

A state initiative funding housing and community development in Central Brooklyn helped bring to life the largest commemorative space dedicated to Chisholm: a 407-acre state park along Jamaica Bay. Although the park had been in development for decades, the state program, Vital Brooklyn, provided the final push. Chisholm's face is one of the first things you'll see biking into the park along the Jamaica Bay Greenway. Painted on a storage shed, her mural is larger than life, surrounded by butterflies and flowers, her gaze directed toward the city. On the other side of the building is another one of her quotes: "Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth." Fifty years after her time in Congress, her constituents and their descendants are still in need of that kind of service.

The monument represents Chisholm the person. Someone who moved through the world audaciously, unafraid to take up space or make space. Maya Angelou said of modesty: "I have no modesty. Modesty is dangerous, it's a learned affectation." If Chisholm had moved through the world modestly, there would have been no path for her to elected office. She might have succumbed to the sexist critiques leveled at her during her political career, about her appearance, her accent, her lisp, the way she moved through spaces as a political aberration.

Olalekan Jeyifous, who designed the monument with Amanda Williams, explained, "We wanted to be larger than life, because we felt she was larger than life." The monument will stand 32 feet tall at the southern tip of Prospect Park where Parkside and Ocean Avenue intersect, the decidedly Caribbean side of the park. Today the entrance is not much more than a pair of overgrown pergolas set in a plaza with missing cobblestones. The installation early next year will be paired with a plaza renovation with new trees and planters.

The monument is wrapped by two semicircle inscription elements that, when viewed together, give the structure the appearance of a kinetic sundial. One half is composed of stone pavers representing the 435 seats in the House of Representatives. A gold bronze plaque represents New York's 12th Congressional District, the seat Chisholm held for fourteen years. Another well-known Chisholm quote follows the edge of the opposite half of the circle, carved in stone. The structure itself consists of two intersecting steel profiles. The primary face, visible from the park entrance, shows Chisholm's silhouette over the Capitol dome, painted tropical green and edged in gold-patinated bronze. As you move around the installation, the silhouettes merge and separate, revealing the Capitol and her profile interwoven with flora from Brooklyn and Barbados, both rendered in shimmering bronze. Parts of the monument's base are open—a door left ajar, inviting us in. Her size makes her feel less like a structure to stand before and more like one to find comfort under. "She's a beacon, bringing you to this space," says Amanda Williams.

Chisholm experienced multiphasic commemoration that spanned her life and death. She even presided over a park dedication in her name while still serving in Congress. I wonder if, in her advocacy for Bethune's bronze figure, she was driven by a need for permanence, a guarantee that future generations would not only know someone like Bethune and Chisholm existed but also be reminded of the work that's left to be done.

The Washington Post interviewed teenagers hanging out in DC's Lincoln Park the night before the unveiling of Bethune's monument. One interviewee shared mixed feelings about the statue, pointing out that, due to rising housing costs, "Black people are being pushed out of the neighborhood every day." Before Bethune's arrival, Lincoln Park was run down; community members and the NCNW successfully advocated for its renovation as part of the monument's unveiling.

Even before the statue was installed, it became a social totem for the broader issues Black residents in DC were already facing, police violence, displacement via urban renewal and housing costs, and a lack of investment and maintenance of public services.

The movement to celebrate historical figures beyond just white men is now going head-to-head with the current Trump administration. The "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History" executive order, released in March, explicitly criticizes efforts to confront the selective histories represented by bronze men on horseback. It even directs the Secretary of the Interior to reinstate any monuments or memorials that were removed in 2020, as municipalities across the country faced pressure to reexamine which histories were being glorified in public space. We're living through a time-traveling battle, waged with stone, bronze, and steel.

When an administration can erase a website, report, dataset, or archive in an instant, creating a physical declaration in public space feels like the closest thing to permanence. Your eyes cannot deceive you when you gaze upon Bethune—or when a future version of yourself gazes upon Chisholm as you make your way to Prospect Park. And perhaps in that moment, you've received their call to action: reminded of the future they imagined for us, and what it will take to get there.

THE SPORT THAT ASKS NOTHING OF US

By Anoushka Mariwala

It was still cold at 7 am, but it would later turn into that one perfect late April Saturday. I got off the 1 train above ground at 242nd Street, to a steady hum of activity on the grass below. It was a quiet and sustained movement of bodies, set against the quiet of a day only just beginning. The Parade Ground of Van Cortlandt Park is a low, sunken field off Broadway. I descended to the spotty grass, where an occasional appreciative shout of "Baaaa-aall!" emitted from the various cricket games underway on the field.

The matches had just begun, each in a playing oval delineated by a ring of plastic cones. The fields were organized at a right angle: five parallel games and two more set off to the side. At the center of each field was a pitch—a long jute mat nailed to the dirt. From the street, this spatial logic was apparent, impressive even, but the closer I got, the harder it was to tell if I was traversing playing, or spectating territory. Neither the improvisation nor my own uncertainties seemed to deter the players: 13 on the field and nine more grouped around the boundary line were all studiously following their team's game. This was the first day of the Cricket Clubs of Westchester's T10 Premier League, and teams were paired off for the first two games of the season.

Nobody gave me a second glance. It was assumed, I think, that amongst the mass of brown bodies that absorbed me, I was someone else's daughter, partner, sister. A tacit question surfaced with increasing frequency: "What are we even doing here, so far away from home?" Despite my deep feeling of outsideness to this world, an improvised belonging naturally explained away my presence. This was familiarity born of a civil carelessness: the match on Pitch number eight was not being performed for me, and its participants remained inattentive to their sole spectator.

To say I grew up watching cricket would be a major exaggeration. It was there, always, as it pervades any life in Mumbai. I knew its contours without ever stepping inside of it: the highlighter green grass on a TV, the cadences of a radio commentary in a language I had too poor a grasp on to follow a whole game. Cricket permeated most things—the street, the billboards, the seasons, the birthday parties—and so made itself impossible to not know. By contrast, I have found that in New York, cricket exists with quiet privacy and clean self-assuredness. It is not marred by paraphernalia. That day in the park, I was forced to confront the game, rather than all of its accoutrements and spillages. This version of the sport—unlike the larger-than-life Mumbai counterpart—is not trying to get bigger, more organized, or even to accrue an audience at all. The amateur, motley group of players seem only mildly interested in improvement, and in each other. They are just trying to be at home. And so, I think, am I.

It was my first time in Van Cortlandt Park, which stretches 1,000 acres beginning at the northern fringes of the Bronx. The wide expanse of the Parade Ground—accessible by car or train, easily reserved online, and relatively large and flat—is a favored cricket playing field for the amateur leagues of New York and New Jersey. Every summer weekend, it is here that players descend from Westchester to the north, the five boroughs to the south, and New Jersey to the west. But the grounds weren't always recreational. In 1639, the Dutch West India Company purchased this land from the Wiechquaeskeck tribe of the Lenape people, who used it as a planting field and a burial ground. After it was bought by the Van Cortlandts in 1699, it served as the family plantation, where farm animals roamed and rye, wheat, and corn filled the fields. In 1888, the City bought the plantation and the fields gave way to a flat Parade Ground, used as a training facility for the National Guard. Several afterlives on, it is a recreational ground, its histories buried beneath layers of soil underfoot. And so, every summer weekend morning, against the backdrop of horse-chestnut trees and the Horace Mann School, are crisp knocks of a wooden bat against bright red ball. The shared descendants of the Commonwealth gather on yet another contested ground that was, for much of the Revolutionary War, held by the British.

I sat on the grass off to the side to watch them play. "They're cheaters," I hear. It was dismissive and defensive, but a sign of being truly in the game. The stakes could not be lower, but the spirit rivaled any professional gameplay. Scorekeeping, I soon realized, was an endlessly negotiated aspect of these morning games with each team keeping their own version, which they checked against each other every few overs. The scores never matched, and yet despite this the game never stopped. "They're cheating." It was unclear whose side the umpire (paid between $70 and $100 for the match, split evenly between 22 players) was on. "What's Saketh's password?" the newest scorekeeper would ask. Saketh was on the other end of the field. Sriram uncle shrugged, "As if my son would tell me his password," without taking his eyes off the ball.

The cricket pitch at Van Cortlandt Park. Photo: Anoushka Mariwala.

Sid and Saketh Anand established the Yorktown Titans when the pandemic left them with few other excuses to be outdoors and keep talking cricket to folks other than each other in a quiet Westchester suburb. They had returned from Bangalore only a few years before, following a circuitous childhood dictated mostly by their father, Sriram uncle's job. Bangalore is where they learned to play and watch cricket, to find fluency in its vocabulary and its cadence. The return to Westchester and the start of high school meant that cricket slowly receded to the background of their suburban lives and shared determination toward achieving Americanness. In 2020, something changed. They began playing again with some high school friends and their dads in the town baseball field, a ground they found most closely approximated the bounce afforded a red season ball on a clay cricket pitch. The Anand brothers discovered that there were already some amateur cricket teams in Westchester, all loosely formed around the town's India Center. "The Kerala Giant Strikers are entirely Malayali, they all go to church together," Sid informed me, referring to another team playing on a neighboring pitch, where the South Indian team was preparing for the next inning. The geo-cultural alliances that were so familiar at home extended all the way to Westchester: a South Indian church team, a Bangalore-Mumbai-New York tech pipeline contingent, a team made up entirely of those who ran cultural programming at the India Center. The motley Yorktown Titans, made up of Westchester Indian Americans and various college friends now working in the city, were soon initiated into the Cricket Clubs of Westchester T10 Premier League, and members found themselves carpooling to the Bronx.

On the field, it seemed that nobody was in charge, but somehow everyone knew their place. My varied attempts at conversation were quickly and politely declined. Everyone was here to play or talk about the last match they livestreamed on Willow TV. The depth and precision with which team members described each other's personas on the field stood in stark contrast to how little they spoke about each other's lives outside the sport: a video of a baby daughter, an offhand comment on the latest on tariffs. Sid recalled every one of Chandra's match-winning innings of the last season but wasn't quite sure what he did for work.

The Cricket Clubs of Westchester are part of a long, albeit sequestered lineage of sport on these lands. The world's first international cricket game was hosted in Manhattan in 1844. The three-day affair was played between the United States of America and the British Empire's Canadian Provinces. This was nearly 50 years before the

Van Cortlandts sold their plantation to the City, back when the privately owned St. George's Cricket Club at West 30th Street and Broadway was the prime place to play cricket in the city. The year 1844 was before India, Pakistan, or Bangladesh existed as established nations. Today, it is this trifecta on the other side of the globe that dominates the sport.

Yet less than one percent of American residents play, or otherwise actively engage with cricket today. The sport pales in comparison to the universes and deep pockets of professional baseball and basketball. But for those that do play, the pitches at Van Cortlandt Park despite never having hosted an international game—resolutely remain the nation's cricket epicenter. "I've seen Steve Bucknor umpire here," I was told in revered tones. This was holy ground, if you cared to stay long enough.

"Can you even imagine," said Sriram uncle, gesturing toward the expansive Parade Ground field. "All of this would have just disappeared." He was referring to New York City's bid to host the 2024 Cricket World Cup at Van Cortlandt Park. In 2022, Eric Adams' administration developed a proposal to create a modular cricket pitch to seat 34,000 spectators where I now stood with Sriram uncle and his team. The five days of gameplay, the administration claimed, would bring in $150 million of economic activity to the city.

This plan for a private takeover of the land for a whole playing season faced significant opposition from the amateur cricketers. Where would they play? Would the park ever be returned to its original condition? Their love for the sport did not extend to fantasies of New York's ascension to a global cricketing capital. Why spend $20 million to make Van Cortlandt Park a cricketing outpost when it already is one, for free?

Combined resistance from the amateur leagues and the Van Cortlandt Park Alliance succeeded in the City's eventual withdrawal of the bid (it was awarded to Eisenhower Park in Nassau County, Long Island). The opposition framed an argument on the grounds of infringement of the Public Trust Doctrine (PTD), a principle originating from English common law that establishes the park as a natural and cultural resource that must be preserved for public use. To allow the private International Cricket Commission to take over the park for six months would violate the PTD, which applies to all New York State parkland. In this instance, even the glamor of international championship play had little appeal for the 100-odd New Yorkers that only wanted sporty summer weekends and a place to feel like home, even if just for a few hours.

Cricket is a slow game, designed more for players than spectators. Its rules have barely changed since the 19th century. Like most sports, it is held together by a suspension of any interrogations of purpose. A question as vast and unwieldy as "What's the point?" simply has no place in the procedures that regulate this universe. It is a game that is disinterested in beating time, especially in this amateur iteration, which occurs entirely for pleasure. Twenty-over games last the length of a good morning, or a slow afternoon. In contrast, the languid test match so relished by the traditionalist draws out over a full weekend, with a lunch break at the peak of noon's unbearable heat.

Each moment is savored: the slow lead-in to bowling a leg spin, the measured arc of a ball crossing a boundary, an umpire ambling away from the pitch for a cigarette and a piss. By all accounts, this is a game that insists on taking as long as it needs. We are occupying a different space now, distant from the onslaught of images and three-second videos of a superlative life. Rather, every act happens in real time: the fastball, the clean taking of a wicket, six smooth runs in a single ball. Every unit is a discrete arc that begins and ends with the red ball back in the bowler's palm, rubbed clean from what it has just endured. During a match, the only place one can occupy is deep in the match. So, I was quiet, and I watched.

This sport, a wholly inoffensive and insular pursuit, does not ask anything of us. Its purveyors do not even ask for us to watch or pay attention. This morning's game closed at 10:45 am. The scores were uploaded to the League website. The players gathered the yellow plastic cones that mark the boundaries of the field. The jute mat was dusted and rolled up. The shared bats exchanged enough hands to eventually make their way back to their owners. Trash was collected, and the equipment was placed in the rented locker nearby. Cricketers headed down to Manhattan on the 1, or back up to Westchester in their cars. As the day turned, the field was peopled by other New Yorkers—runners, dog walkers, picnickers, a soccer team.

THE INVISIBLE ARCH

By Philip Poon

Everyone knows the story of Maya Lin, the 21-year-old Yale undergraduate architecture student whose minimalist design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the National Mall in Washington DC won out over 1,420 other submissions, including that of the professor who gave Lin a B grade for the same design in his class. It's a classic American underdog story about how the best idea will prevail regardless of who it comes from. And in 1981, it came from the most unexpected person: a young, Asian American woman.

A simple "cut" in the earth revealing two reflective black walls lined with the names of the fallen soldiers, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial has since become one of the most visited and celebrated memorials in the world. But the minimalist design belies the sophisticated selection process that produced it. In an anonymous design competition that was open to any US citizen over 18 years old, all entries were judged solely on their design, rather than the credentials of the person behind it. Anonymity was intended to prevent racism, sexism, and ageism from influencing the selection. The jury of architects, landscape architects, and artists chose an abstract design that completely departed from the figurative and didactic representation that people expected of memorials—a design that many non-experts would have dismissed. This process—esteemed arts professionals reviewing anonymous entries—is what produced the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Given how successful the memorial has been, one might think that subsequent public projects would have employed a similar selection process. The recently announced call for artists to design a "Chinatown Welcome Gateway" in Manhattan's Chinatown, however, reveals a stark contrast. Artists are first asked to submit their qualifications in the form of a resume, written statements, and work samples. The application emphasizes that this initial vetting will be based on preexisting qualifications only: "Proposals are not requested and will not be reviewed by the panel."

Versions of this two-part process have been used to commission hundreds of public art projects throughout the city. It is adapted from Percent for Art, a program started in the 1980s and administered by the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA); designed to engage the community in which the art will be placed through active participation in the process and shared decision making. This is reflected in the jury who will choose the artist for the Gateway project: a voting panel and an advisory panel made up of government representatives, arts professionals, community groups, and civilians.

Attendees add Post-it note comments to a board at a Chinatown Connections Public Workshop in March 2025. Photo: Philip Poon.

None of these panelists have been named yet. There will be representatives from city agencies (DCLA, Percent for Art, Economic Development Corporation, Department of Transportation), a representative from the architecture firm responsible for implementing the gateway, Marvel, and "representatives of the public who are arts professionals—knowledgeable about public art, the project, and the community in which the project will be located." But they will not be identified until later this summer.

The advisory panel is also yet to be named. It will be composed of an unspecified number of representatives from 19 Chinatown organizations, program staff from city agencies, elected officials, other local organizations and community groups, and members of the public.

The voting and advisory panelists will identify together which artists will move on to the second phase of the process, a public design charrette with Marvel. There, the artists will "discuss their creative practice, working process, and artistic approach and brainstorm possibilities for the project." So even in this second phase there will be no gateway design. Instead, it will assess the artist's compatibility with the architects and what approach the artist *might* take to create a gateway design. At the end of the charrette, all the panelists, Marvel, the city agencies, and members of the public will decide collectively on an artist.

A document which describes the guidelines and goals for the project written by the Welcome Gateway Subgroup (a subcommittee composed of four leaders from local community organizations, one artist, and one lawyer) lays out the criteria for choosing an artist and what their design should accomplish. It starts unambiguously: "The artist should show a meaningful connection with the Chinatown community through personal or professional ties, and demonstrate a thorough understanding of the neighborhood's cultural, social, and historical context." The document outlines four design guidelines, with bulleted suggestions for how to accomplish them. For example, artists should avoid the use of "design elements based

on oversimplified representations of Chinese American culture" and instead using ones that are "deeply researched" and "respectful of the community's cultural heritage." The design should "reflect on Chinatown's past while celebrating its present and future" and "celebrate the diversity within Chinatown, including its various stories, languages, dialects, foods, and experiences." The gateway needs to "embody an authentic representation of the Chinatown community."

But what is "authentic" for a community that has been around for more than 150 years, and whose residents, storefronts, and cultures are constantly changing? Is the Taishanese community around Mott Street more authentic than the Fujianese one around East Broadway? Are new immigrants who don't speak English just as authentically Chinese-American as those who have been around for generations and don't speak Chinese? And do all of these people share a single "authentic" culture?

The emphasis on "authenticity" and "pride" in the design brief is the direct result of an attempt to build a Chinatown gateway in 2017. In a design competition spearheaded by the DOT in collaboration with the Chinatown Partnership and Van Alen Institute, entrants were asked to submit full designs for a gateway. Half of the evaluation was based on the actual design proposal, while the other half was on the entrant's experience. Submissions were not anonymous—prior experience and qualifications mattered a lot.

But the jury itself was anonymous. The only information the City gave was that it was composed of "a minimum of three persons qualified" and included representatives from the DOT and possibly other city agencies or approved parties.

More than 80 proposals were submitted, with four finalists selected. The finalists presented their designs behind closed doors in a DOT meeting room. According to two of the finalists, they were prohibited from knowing who the jurors were, despite the fact that they were right in front of them. And none of the jurors appeared to be Asian, besides one: Wellington Chen, the executive director of the Chinatown Partnership.

More than a year later, a winner was suddenly announced: a proposal called "The Dragon's Roar," designed by Australian artist Lindy Lee and New York City-based architecture firm LEVENBETTS. The winning design was a small tower composed of overlapping metal cylinders punctuated by circular holes of varying sizes. The cylindrical tower form was a reference to the generic water towers in the city and also an Italian Campanile, with the latter reference a way to relate to Little Italy. The pattern of circular holes represented Confucian beliefs around harmony, unity, and "universal collectivity."

The process dictated that the winning design be presented publicly. At subsequent community board meetings, members of the Chinatown community voiced strong opposition to the design. Some community members compared it to a stack of tin cans, while another said the pattern of circular voids looked like bullet holes. Almost everyone failed to see anything Chinese or Chinatown-related. As negative criticism mounted, the city had no choice but to cancel the project in 2019, without an official announcement.

This is the history that weighs on the current gateway project and explains the repeated insistence that the future design embody "an authentic representation of Chinatown." Will Chinatown get a gateway this time? Can this process produce one?

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) hired a professional advisor to organize and oversee the management of the 1980 competition. Paul Spreiregan had been the director of urban design programs at the American Institute of Architects as well as the first director of architecture programs at the National Endowment for the Arts. In his book, *Design Competitions*, Spreiregan compared holding a competition to launching a rocket: "Everything has to be thought out and in place before the launch button is pressed."

Who would be on the jury was crucial, and itself highly contested within the VVMF. Some believed that the jury should be made up primarily of veterans, while others thought that a mix of veterans and arts professionals would be best. The VVMF Board decided on a jury of only highly regarded professional artists and designers, with the understanding that they had the best expertise to envision how two-dimensional drawings would be experienced in real life. Spreiregan and the VVMF Board interviewed potential jurors and scrutinized their compatibility with each other, ultimately selecting two architects, two landscape architects, three sculptors, and the editor of *Landscape Architecture Magazine*. Their names were included in the competition brief. Neither Spreiregan nor any other VVMF board members were part of the jury, nor were any government officials. Nor were any Vietnam veterans or members of the general public.

After spending five days in a military hanger looking through the submissions, the jury chose submission #1026 and unsealed the entrant's name. "It was the most thoughtful and thorough discussion of design that I have ever heard, and I have heard many," Spreiregan recalled.

But even this process, that produced such a celebrated project, is more complicated than it seems. When Maya Lin's design, and her identity, were revealed, there was tremendous backlash. Some responses were racist and sexist, and others demanded a more traditional memorial. One of her most vocal opponents saw Lin's design as a "black hole," a sadistic reward for the veterans' sacrifices. "Why can't we have something white and traditional and above ground?" Tom Carhart asked in a New York Times op-ed. "Insulting Vietnam Vets." "The jurors know nothing of the real war in Vietnam," he wrote.

There was so much controversy that Interior Secretary James Watt would not issue a building permit for the construction of Lin's design until a compromise was reached to add a figurative sculpture of three soldiers and a flagpole. Two years after the memorial was finished, the *Three Servicemen* sculpture was erected about 150 feet away from Lin's abstraction.

The figurative soldiers were not the only addition to the memorial. Because a Vietnam War army nurse campaigned to honor the more than 11,500 American women who served primarily as nurses during the war, the Vietnam Women's Memorial was built in 1993. Like the *Three Servicemen*, it is a figurative statue that depicts three nurses tending to a wounded male soldier. Then in 1995, a woman whose brother died of non-Hodgkins lymphoma because of his exposure to Agent Orange initiated The Vietnam War In Memory Memorial Plaque Project to honor veterans who died from Agent Orange exposure, PTSD, or other illnesses. So in 2004, a small memorial plaque was installed on the ground next to the *Three Servicemen* statue.

This landscape is a more complete monument, one that captures not just the people memorialized by it, but also the complex, contentious, and imperfect process by which it was realized. All four components of the memorial—designed by different people, in different styles, and dedicated at different times—reflect the underlying complexity of the Vietnam War itself.

Is creating the "physical manifestation of heritage and cultural tradition"—an "authentic representation of Chinatown"—any less complex?

In the process designed by Percent for Art, a panel made up of both government representatives and artists selects finalists from an open call to produce design proposals or to go through "design charettes." The public is allowed to submit comments, after which the city makes its final choice. This process was recently used to commission a sculpture for a Chinatown community center, and a variation of the process was used for the Shirley Chisholm monument currently being built in Prospect Park. The city of Newark employed a similar process to build a monument to Harriet Tubman.

But the process has also failed. In 2019, the City sought an artist to replace a statue of J. Marion Sims, the "father of gynecology" who experimented on slaves. When the voting panel of "art experts" chose artist Simone Leigh's proposal, activists and community members protested because they believed they should be the ones who chose the artist, not the panel. A highly charged public meeting involved shouting, crying, and even the use of racial slurs against members of the jury. Attendees decried what they perceived as a failure of process. Tom Finkelpearl, the commissioner of the DCLA at the time, retracted the judges' decision, calling it "advisory," after which Leigh withdrew her proposal, writing in a writing in a statement: "I greatly appreciate that my proposal was selected by the committee. However, I am aware that there is significant community sentiment for another proposal. Since this is a public monument in their neighborhood, I defer to them."

Will the Chinatown Welcome Gateway process be smooth like the Shirley Chisholm monument, or catastrophic like the Beyond Sims open call? An anonymous group of panelists with unscrutinized credentials is expected to reach a consensus about who is best positioned to make a truly "authentic" design that "celebrates heritage" and "generates a true sense of pride." But there is no way to evaluate whether the panelists possess the requisite understanding of Chinatown, Chinese-American culture, art, architecture, or design. Will a random DOT representative help determine what is "authentically" Chinese-American? Because nobody knows who or how many people are on the panels, there is also no consideration for how they will deliberate. Will the arts professionals clash with the government representatives on the voting panel, or with the members of the public on the advisory panel? What if older and more conservative community groups want a more traditional artist, while younger panelists prefer a less conventional one?

Rather than a request for proposals, as dictated by the Percent for Art template, should there instead be a *request for process*? Should the process itself be open to critique and redesign? Should the City hire a professional advisor who has experience successfully facilitating difficult public projects? Should those responsible for designing the process be held to the same standard and scrutiny they use for the artists? Should their qualifications be examined, and should they be required to have a demonstrated track record of executing complicated cultural projects?

In my opinion, the Chinatown gateway already exists. It's invisible. It is a monument to the *lack* of process that has dictated the previous, failed efforts; the inability of those spearheading the project to design a process that successfully integrates competing interests of a diverse community into something physical. The process is the project.

This invisible arch can paradoxically be interpreted as the best possible monument to Chinatown's diversity—the same diversity the current call wishes to celebrate. Chinatown's true "authenticity"—its past, present, and future and all the people and histories within it—cannot be captured in a *single* object, a single gateway. The invisible arch poses complicated questions around culture, representation, and community. The absence of the gateway is the most "authentic" representation of Chinatown to me.

CEREAL AND MILK

By Shirt

To read this city. To know what may look like some scribbles on buildings are actually markings from humans who live full lives, when they're not cut short. These deliberately bootlegged pronunciations, though stuttering, though maybe muddily articulated, are a kind of record-keeping. Like a stunning melody coming through bad wifi in the crib. Those markings could've been made this morning by someone watching you admire their work right now from across the street or they could've been made by someone decades ago. Maybe someone dead and celebrated now. Or just dead and forgotten. People do disappear around here. Jail bids are interesting 'cause it could take a three-to-five just to realize you haven't seen someone in a while.

I'm not from Bed-Stuy but have lived here for five years now; my girl has been here eight. We moved in together during the pandemic, and it's about the longest I've lived somewhere since moving out of my mom's apartment in Astoria, Queens when I was 17. Not knowing how long we'll eventually get to have here, I can't ever front on how special and formative this time and place has been. In the beginning it took some getting used to, I felt out of place walking around, hanging out on the block. Are Bed-Stuy secrets for me to know and keep? When we think about gentrification and people being displaced, how do poor Black and brown people moving from one inner-city neighborhood to another factor in? Am I part of the problem, too? Does it change because we pay some relatively decent rent, while others on the same block paid millions to be in the mix? I felt uncomfortable not being able to tell you with any certainty who or what was here, what was lost, what left an impression. There were times early on I wondered what I'd say if anyone stopped me in the street asking where I was from. I don't have a cousin from two streets over or an opinion on what your man is up to now. I live on this map of all I'll never see or be privy to. But maps are always redrawn.

> "*draw me a map of what you see*
> *then I will draw a map of what you never see*
> *and guess me whose map will be bigger…*"
> – Kei Miller, *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion*, 2014

Walks are really our new shit. I rap, "sometimes walking feels like I'm driving my body." "Free Palestine" and "Black Lives Matter" written on infrastructure the concepts themselves lack. I don't care what dumb viral tweets tell me about these strings of words together, I know what they mean and know what they represent. Walking and mapping is how we stumbled onto the makeshift koi fish pond in the street last summer, before it went viral. It's how we know the sun setting bends these long shadows down the block through the trees and over our favorite cars: the brown pick-up truck with the flower logo on the license plate, the sick Toyota Prado or blue Benz from the other night, the blue and silver Montero Sport. "Love is you" is spray-painted on the side of the building over there. Walking around is how I found the guy with a printing shop and notary public he operates out of the window of his living room. One sunset, we came upon a basketball game with guys silhouetted, playing in the dark; the Elements of Life song *Balance In All Things* wafting out of someone's big speakers from across the park.

My man Coop and I took a walk to my favorite Lester's Fabric store some weeks ago. Visiting from LA by way of the Nati, Jerald "Coop" Cooper teaches an evolving course on Black Modernism and runs the Instagram account @HoodMidCenturyModern. He might not even call it "modernism"—that's y'all word. While on the surface it feels like his IG centers our built environment, the design of our surroundings, it's just as much or more about designing ourselves. *SelfhoodMidCenturyModern*. The structures we live and work in and the personas we build are reflecting and refracting each other all the time. "Us and architecture as iconography, (a fake case study)" as Coop puts it in a recent post. Or on another: "Something bout the scale of the city in our aesthetic... Or how we bigger than the city. You know how tha dogg pound did in the New York New York music video?" Rendering oneself in art, as big or bigger than the buildings. Because the landscape isn't what it is without us.

I think about what it means to know the ins and outs of a world never really designed with us in mind. What if I could identify the structures and institutions built up around me with the same precision I give to how my sneaker meets the pant? What if *all* this shit is my style? I know it may be dangerous to think of the projects—or the Section 8 housing I grew up in—as *my* style. But I'm saying whether my people owned it, designed and built it, or not, once you get a hold of this shit it's yours to take with you. Making something your own has little to do with any piece of paper saying it's yours. What if, like the style and presence we craft for ourselves, we saw the ways our vision shapes these neighborhoods too? Not only with hands but with lore. In years of people playing the block, holding court. Years mapping. Years plotting. (We use the same words for cultivating land as we do for professional development.) Every rap video framed just so, every iconic photo stamped into our collective memory. Every block party in streets made the people's own, every nook and cranny co-authored a thousand times. It's ours or can be, everywhere that meets the eye. Originally, and iteratively as time goes on.

Walking to the train one day through the park, I noticed there were these indents in the ground every ten feet or so—animal shapes, stars, etc. I started to think about these drawings I could do by pressing paper on top of these indents and going over it with charcoal. Another kind of impression made. This rendering of some of the actual ground covered. I thought about it and watched the ground for months before going to do it.

I've been thinking about how every day, our next-door neighbor Mr. Rick, himself dying, asks me how my dad's health is, because one day years ago I mentioned my old man had a bad heart. I know for a fact that architecture in our lives is more than rows of homes. I think about soft infrastructure. The quiet systems of care housed in gestures, where love can look like someone checking in again, just to make sure.

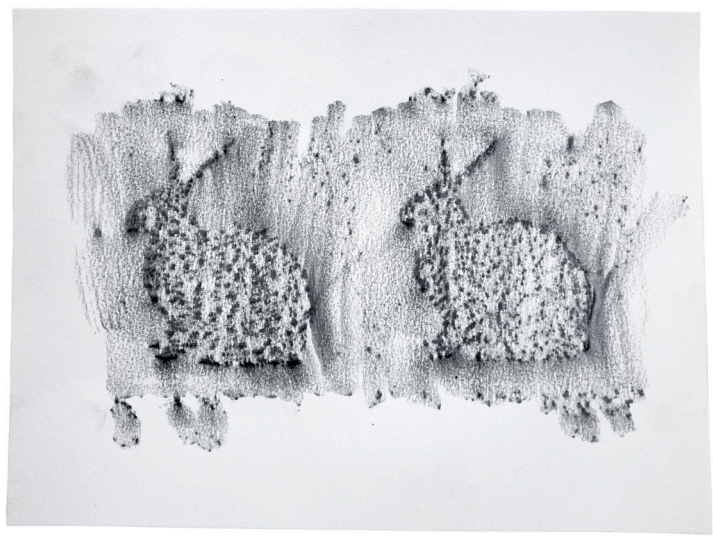
One day, sitting outside down from the crib some, I watch someone walk up the stairs of our place, sit on the stoop nonchalantly, and start putting packages from outside our building's door into their big bag. I immediately walk up to confront them and see that it's a frail woman with bad teeth. She starts to cry, saying "I'm just trying to feed my baby," and I say something like, "I understand but you can't steal our packages," and start taking the packages out of her bag. She's backing down the stairs, crying, whispering she's sorry, and disappears down the block. Writing it now, I hate the memory if this is really how it happened. I'm haunted by the interaction, it happened too fast. My gut reaction was to not let someone steal our packages, which had happened before. Still, what did we even get from Amazon that day?

More days out the week than not, Mr. Rick sits in his car and just plays song after song you know and love for hours—loud—on what sounds like a surprisingly decent sound system in a shitty car. Of course, one never just hears the music, but the environment the music soundtracks. Some nights we get to listen to Stevie Wonder reverberating off 100-year-old brownstones.

Coop and I walked the long way to Lester's that day, probably talking Ma$e songs. I told him I had in mind to buy some yellow fabric for a work I wanted to make, that referenced a photo of the late artist Pope.L. In *Times Square Crawl a.k.a. Meditation Square Piece* (1978), the artist crawled on his hands and knees through Times Square wearing a suit and tie. While there is no mention of why exactly Pope.L sewed the yellow square onto the back of his jacket, the artist has described how his professional attire aimed to "underscore the deep rift between aspirations of upward mobility and the absence of opportunity for many dispossessed communities in America." In otherwise normal circumstances, this yellow fabric then becomes a signal for something awry. For something is awry here.

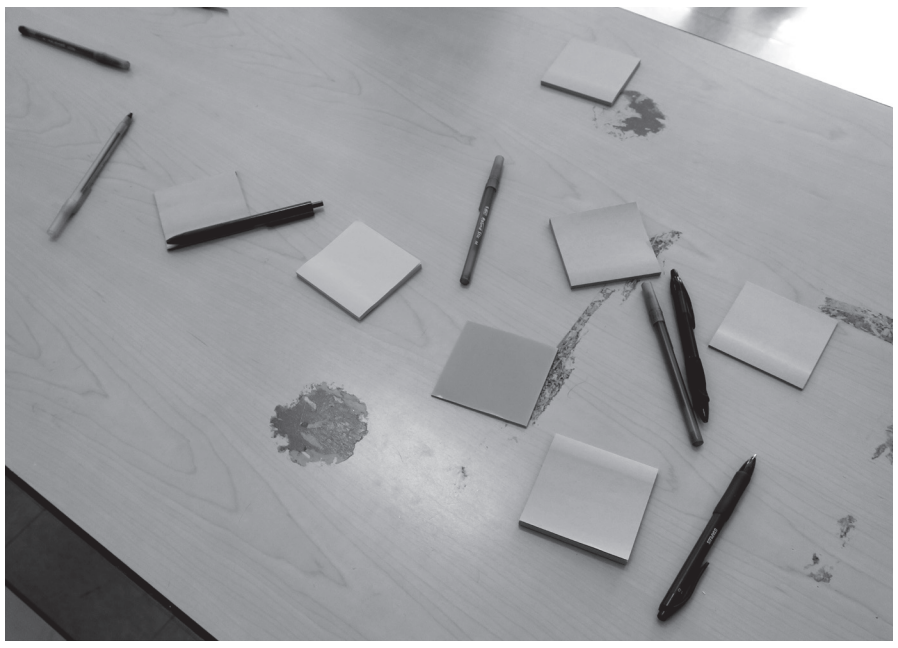
I think about who has time and energy to think about the history of a place, while passing through that place. Maybe I should ask, What sort of power is possible to tap into when people have the space to think about the history of a place, while they are passing through that place? In real time. How to slow down? We don't have to subscribe to this timeline others invented.

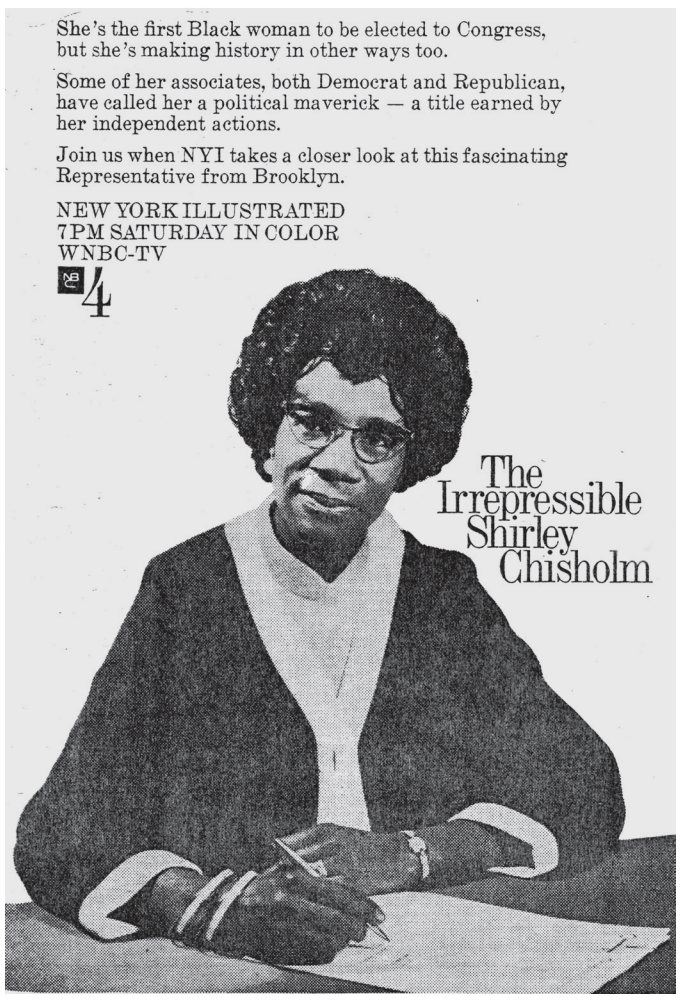
Let's stay on this place for a minute. There's a man who sits on the corner day in and day out—rain, snow, or shine. He wears layers of large clothing and sits still for what seems like hours at a time, presiding over the sidewalk. There's rumors he's not houseless he just likes to be there. There's a rumor of this and that. I think the truth is you can die in a place and stay alive. My man is a fixture on the corner like the light post, illuminating what's around him.



Rabbits (2025), charcoal rubbing by Shirt.

I feel like it's the Billy Joel song I don't remember the name of. I feel like the man at the end of *Sinners* playing music for a couple of people in a club somewhere. I play the keys on my MacBook here like a piano. Hands guided. The tap-tapping from my fingers on the keyboard a music. Maybe I can make the music fixed in a way. Like forever playing on a loop when you visit. We did the neighborhood history map thing and looked at our block. The store on the corner has been a store on the corner for 115 years. Someone could've bought some cereal there, come back the following century and bought the milk.





Ellie Botoman is an environmental art historian researching the impact of climate change on cultural heritage preservation and possibilities for multisensory and multispecies collaboration in the design of exhibitions and institutional architectures. They have previously held roles at the Cooper Hewitt and the Center for Architecture, among others. Their criticism and poetry can be found in The Long Now Foundation and *The Brooklyn Rail*.

Ekemini Ekpo is a journalist, researcher, and theater artist seeking to catalyze intellectual and emotional inquiry through these forms. She is currently a resident actor at Mercury Store, a theater development lab in Gowanus and has previously participated in the Vox Media Writers Workshop. She was born and raised in Texas, and her people are from Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Daphne Lundi is an urban planner, policymaker, and artist. She currently runs an independent consultancy where she works with cities, non-profits, and universities on climate and urban planning initiatives. Her work has been shaped by the impacts of climate change. First and foremost as the child of Haitian immigrants, as a native New Yorker who experienced Hurricane Sandy, and as a former New York City public servant working on extreme heat policy and flood resiliency programs.

Anoushka Mariwala is an architectural designer, researcher, and writer from Mumbai. She is interested in considering the body as a site, producer, and interpreter of place and object. Most recently, she has been thinking about land history, property formation, and its entanglements.

Philip Poon is an architect, artist, and writer. Informed by his background as a Chinese American from New York City, his work as a registered architect, and his engagement with art and activist movements in Chinatown, his projects materialize issues at the intersection of space, race, and class. As Dimes Square Tourist, he leads walking tours of Manhattan's Chinatown.

Shirt is an artist working across writing, rap music, performance, video, photography, painting, and sculpture. Using a bricolage of language, sound and object, he considers ways of unlearning as a means of creating a more expansive readership. His work was recently published in *Unlicensed*, a volume on bootlegging as creative practice.

2024-25 Fellows Playlist:

Left images:
(top to bottom)

Colored Post-it notes and pens on a lunchroom picnic table at PS1 at a Chinatown Connections Public Workshop. Photo: Philip Poon.

Ad for TV special "The Irrepressible Shirley Chisholm" (1969) from the *Manhattan Tribune* archives.

The cricket pitch at Van Cortlandt Park. Photo: Anoushka Mariwala.

A mushroom at the Queer Ecologies Garden at the Alice Austen House. Photo: Ellie Botoman

Back images:
(top to bottom)

A sample of the offerings at the Nonbinarian bookstore in Crown Heights. Photo: Ekemini Ekpo.

Sidewalk pavers with rabbit reliefs in Bed-Stuy. Photo: Shirt.