RISING TIDES: COOP PHOTOGRAPHER DOCUMENTS LOCAL CLIMATE RESILIENCE

October 17, 2023



By Leila Darabi

Photography by Caroline Mardok

In this special photo essay feature, longtime *Gazette* photographer Caroline Mardok shares images from two local waterfront communities—one in Brooklyn and one in Queens—that illustrate New York's resilience in the face of rising water levels and efforts to restore the communities hardest hit by Hurricane Sandy.

The NY.gov site recalls the impact of Hurricane Sandy:

Hurricane Sandy hit New York City on October 29, 2012. Over the course of 48 hours, wind, rain and water destroyed approximately 300 homes, left hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers without power, damaged critical public and private infrastructure and left many New Yorkers vulnerable with limited access to food, drinking water, health-

care and other critical services.

More than a decade later, Mardok's images capture the creativity and perseverance of some of the New Yorkers most affected by this superstorm: the residents of Red Hook and Far Rockaway.

> MARDOK'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE RED HOOK COMMUNITY DEEPENED WHEN SHE BEGAN A 100-FOOT MURAL, A PROJECT THAT ENGAGED NEIGHBORHOOD TEACHERS AND YOUTH.

THE BROOKLYN WATERFRONT

Mardok began documenting neighborhood response to climate change in Red Hook during another moment of community resilience: the COVID-19 pandemic. In April of 2020, Mardok started an Instagram account she named "ny.strong." It documented daily life in New York City during a global pandemic. Since then, she has uploaded hundreds of images of NYC and its residents, photographing everything from Black Lives Matter protests to masked neighbors during COVID-19 lockdowns to surfers in Rockaway.

PHOTO BY CAROLINE MARDOK



PHOTO BY CAROLINE MARDOK



Scenes from Murdock's photography, including (clockwise from left) surfers in Far Rockaway; a Black Lives Matter protest; and a masked woman and child during the COVID-19 lockdown.

It was doing this work—photographing and interviewing New Yorkers for social media features—that Mardok met Tiffiney Davis, the managing director and cofounder of Red Hook Arts Project. Launched in 2009, Red Hook Arts Project coordinates volunteers to provide art classes and mentor students in the Red Hook neighborhood of Brooklyn.

Their website states: "Our classes are intentionally small, and we strive to give each student individual attention during each class. Our pedagogical approach is rooted in responding to our students' interests and needs with special attention to activities that build self-confidence and problem solving skills."

During COVID-19 lockdowns, the organization expanded its community work. When in--person art classes were no longer possible, they pivoted to distributing hot meals, diapers, personal protective equipment (PPE), and other necessities to their struggling community.

Mardok's relationship with the Red Hook community deepened when she began a 100-foot mural there: a project that engaged neighborhood teachers and youth, including some of the same young people who participate in Red Hook Arts Project's programs. The resulting mural, titled "American Dream," featured images of the Red Hook Houses housing projects from the 1930s to today, and stood for one year on a wall at 590 Clinton Street. It depicted the waterfront community's resilience in the face of climate change. The nonprofit Artbridge gave Mardok an award for the project.

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PHOTO BY CAROLINE MARDOK



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PHOTO BY CAROLINE MARDOK

Images of Mardok's 100-foot mural in Red Hook.

Her documentation of Red Hook's resilience in the face of rising water levels and exposure to the elements didn't stop there. Mardok discovered that the Red Hook Arts Project had helped to design a ship for the annual Barnacle Parade, a community gathering held on each anniversary of Hurricane Sandy. "We participate as people who are part of the community," Davis said, describing herself as someone who "works in the community, lives in the community and is part of the community." Davis explained that Red Hook Arts Project got involved "to ensure that the Barnacle Parade was accessible to everyone [redacted] lives here."

> THE BARNACLE PARADE USES THE ANNIVERSARY OF THIS DEVASTATING EVENT TO CREATE A JOYFUL EVENT FULL OF COSTUMES AND ART AND TO RAISE MONEY FOR RECOVERY EFFORTS.

Organized by a network of local volunteers, the Barnacle Parade celebrates the community's resilience to Hurricane Sandy, which in 2012 devastated the neighborhood. According to a report by the Red Hook Initiative, a nonprofit focused on community recovery, the superstorm left thousands of Red Hook residents without power, heat or running water, damaged homes and businesses, and left an impact from which the neighborhood is still recovering.

The Barnacle Parade uses the anniversary of this devastating event to create a joyful event full of costumes and art and to raise money for recovery efforts. In the years since Sandy, the parade has expanded to raise funds for communities facing similar effects from natural disasters.

The 11th annual Barnacle Parade will take place at 4 p.m. on October 29, 2023, at the corner of Pioneer and Van Brunt streets in Red Hook.

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PHOTO BY CAROLINE MARDOK

Images from past Barnacle Parades.

DUNES AND PROTECTIVE PLANTING IN QUEENS

Mardok connected with RISE, the Rockaway Initiative for Sustainability and Equity, through a long-term photo project she has embarked on in the Rockaway neighborhood of Queens. RISE runs a number of programs to engage youth in their coastal community around the looming threats of rising tides.

> WHILE SHE FELT KIDS OF EARLIER GENERATIONS FELT SOME SHAME IN THEIR HUMBLE ROCKAWAY BEACH BACKGROUNDS, PROGRAMS LIKE RISE HAVE INSTILLED A SENSE OF LOCAL PRIDE.

Their executive director, Jean Dupont, explained to the *Gazette* that the block where she lives "was the only block not devastated by Sandy," something she attributes to the protection provided by "a series of dunes created by a community group."

Mardok met with and documented RISE's youth engagement program "Shore Corps," which is part of the Greater Rockaway Coastal Plan. Through this work, RISE hires local youth as gardeners and has built up five miles of sand dunes and local plants to protect the eroding shoreline that has long left the community vulnerable to the elements.

PHOTO BY CAROLINE MARDOK

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PHOTO BY CAROLINE MARDOK

Local volunteers work on the Rockaway sand dunes to protect the eroding shoreline.

“The average kid stays through summers of high school,” Dupont shared. “And they often return during summers in college.” Graduates of the program, she said, have gone on to study marine biology and food systems, with 98 percent of program graduates attending four year colleges.

“We use this land as a living classroom,” she said. “A very large proportion of our students end up going into medicine or biomedical engineering.” She added that while she felt kids of earlier generations felt some shame in their humble Rockaway Beach backgrounds, programs like RISE have instilled a sense of local pride.

For local residents, RISE provides more than paid internships. “Stewardship [of local land] ended up becoming a big deal after Sandy,” Dupont said. When she saw an influx of federal recovery programs in her neighborhood, Dupont asked, “Why are all these government agencies not doing the small stuff, like the planting?” She calls building out the naturally protective dunes part of the “soft infrastructure” needed to complement formal infrastructure projects, such as the construction of jetties.

The results of the program go beyond protecting the physical environment. “The first thing kids say [in program evaluation surveys] is that they made great friends,” Dupont remarked.

Mardok’s images documenting a dune planting last year capture this friendship in action.

Leila Darabi joined the Gazette *as a reporter in 2016. She cohosts the feminist TV podcast Cringewatchers and shares photos of the things she cooks with Coop ingredients via @persian_ish on Instagram.*

WHAT’S GOING ON NEXT DOOR?

October 17, 2023



By Dan Bergsagel

On your way to the Coop recently, have you noticed the building site next door? Ever

wondered what's going on behind that construction fence? Well, I've been digging into the history—and the future—of our neighboring lot.

The short stretch of Union Street from the Coop to the corner of 7th Avenue has been remarkably stable over the last half century, even as the surrounding neighborhood has experienced significant change.

A visitor in the late 1970s would have seen the Park Slope Food Coop, Fire Department Squad Company 1 and Dixon's Bike Shop, with the latter's charming yellow mural painted on the wall directly adjacent to the Coop. Today, everything is largely the same, except that the beloved Dixon's bicycle mural was suddenly whitewashed in summer 2017 to much community furor.

Eagle-eyed members still mourning the loss of the mural may have noticed that the formerly muraled wall itself mysteriously disappeared this spring and was replaced by a construction fence. So what exactly is going on next door?

> CHRIS DIXON, CO-OWNER OF DIXON'S BIKE SHOP, REMEMBERS THE SCHOOL FONDLY—ALL FIVE DIXON SIBLINGS ATTENDED ST. FRANCIS XAVIER.

The lot behind the former mural—between the Coop and 774 Union Street—is part of a larger property owned by the Diocese of Brooklyn that connects through the block to 763 President Street. The Diocese's property forms a large L-shape that wraps around the Coop to the south. Starting in 1914, the site housed the St. Francis Xavier School, teaching local children from kindergarten through eighth grade—until St. Francis Xavier closed its doors in 2018 to merge with the Queen of All Saints Catholic Academy in Clinton Hill.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

A look behind the construction fencing.

Chris Dixon, co-owner of Dixon's Bike Shop, remembers the school fondly—all five Dixon siblings attended St. Francis Xavier. Chris remembers that his first-grade teacher, Sister Kathleen Sullivan, who had become the school principal by the mid-1970s, readily agreed to the Dixons painting and maintaining the mural on the school's wall to overcome issues with unsightly graffiti.

The wall holds particular significance for Chris Dixon, as behind it lay St. Francis Xavier's school yard, located on the lot adjacent to the Coop. After the school premises closed each evening, Chris and his friends would climb back over the wall into the yard to play games like stickball. Some of the newer neighbors objected and would occasionally call the police to clear them out.

COOP STAFF AND MEMBERS HAD EXPECTED A NEW SCHOOL TO OPEN ON THE

SITE IMMINENTLY. HOWEVER, THE START OF THE SCHOOL YEAR PASSED BY LAST MONTH WITHOUT THE ARRIVAL OF NEW STUDENTS.

“We weren’t allowed in the yard after school,” Dixon recalls, “but the cops didn’t want us playing stickball in the street either. So, they would tell us to clear out of the yard just until they had gone, when we would simply climb straight back over again and carry on playing.”

Childhood exuberance in that yard was responsible for the scar Chris still bears on his forehead. At that time, there was not only a school, but also a hospital within a few blocks. Dixon’s misadventures were ably repaired at the conveniently located former Samaritan Hospital in the Skene Sanitorium buildings at 759 President Street (converted to a housing co-op in the 1980s).



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

A bird’s eye view of the construction lot.

General Coordinator Elinoar Astrinsky explains that, since the school's closing, the Diocese of Brooklyn has undertaken a large internal renovation of the school building. As part of this renovation, it completed work on the [redacted]eparating the rear yard of the Coop from the former main school building. This work required the Coop to temporarily relocate our composting and recycling storage area into the adjacent former school yard.

The Diocese completed their renovation work and in March 2022 it leased the building to the New York City Department of Education. Coop staff and members had expected a new school to open on the site imminently. However, the start of the school year passed by last month without the arrival of new students, and if members peek through the construction fencing, they will still see an active construction site.

> ONCE THE MECHANICAL INSTALLATION WORK IS COMPLETE, THE YARD WILL BE REPAVED AND, CRUCIALLY, THE MASONRY WALL WILL BE REBUILT NEXT TO THE COOP ON UNION STREET.

Surprised by the delay, I reached out to Tamar Smith, a manager in the External Affairs department at the New York City School Construction Authority (SCA), to find out what is holding things up.

Smith confirmed that the school is scheduled to open its doors in 2024. It will serve approximately 450 students from pre-K through fifth grade. The school couldn't open this year because the SCA is completing its own renovations after the Diocese's building work.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

Another angle of the lot.

The SCA is renovating interior spaces—installing new flooring, lighting, updated wiring and electrical systems, updated fire alarm systems and additional bathrooms. The SCA hasn't needed to make any major structural renovations to the building.

The construction work in the former school yard lot isn't a major structural renovation, but rather a trench dug directly next to the Coop boundary wall. The SCA began digging this trench in June this year to install underground piping and conduits for a chiller unit that will be placed in the yard to serve the new school.

Once the mechanical installation work is complete, the yard will be repaved and, crucially, the masonry wall will—the SCA assures—be rebuilt next to the Coop on Union Street. As the school opens its doors next year, members can look forward to the Coop's largest neighbor returning to the important role it played in the community back in the 1970s. Would it be too much to also hope that the Department of Education could bring back the Dixon's Bike Shop mural? Fingers crossed.

Dan Bergsagel is a structural engineer from London. He likes to talk about the unexpected things hiding in plain sight.

WINTER SQUASHES FROM LANCASTER FARM FRESH CO-OP

October 17, 2023



Story and illustrations by Valeria Trucchia

Choosing a squash and knowing how to cook it can be intimidating. So many shapes and flavors are available nowadays. Here is a little help with the varieties from Lancaster Farm Farm Fresh Co-op we can see now on display at the Food Coop.



ROBIN’S KOGINUT SQUASH

FLAVOR A sweet mix between butternut and kabocha squash.

ABOUT A “star” squash, born from a collaboration between the renowned Chef Dan Barber of Blue Hill at Stone Barns, vegetable breeder Michael Mazourek and organic seedsman Matthew Goldfarb.

SERVE Absolutely delicious roasted, turns tender, buttery and slightly citrusy.



GREEN ACORN SQUASH

FLAVOR Mild, subtly sweet and nutty flavor.

ABOUT About the size of a large grapefruit.

SERVE Versatile, cook in chunks baked, roasted, steamed, sautéed or even in the microwave.



DELICATA SQUASH

FLAVOR A creamy flesh with a mild flavor similar to sweet potatoes.

ABOUT Smaller than most winter squash, so they’re pretty easy to prepare and cook.

SERVE Slightly sweet, best to slice and roast or to scoop out and stuff.



HONEYNUT SQUASH

FLAVOR Smaller, darker and far sweeter than a butternut squash.

ABOUT A new Cornell University hybrid inspired by the chef Dan Barber of the Blue Hill restaurants.

SERVE Use it the same way you would butternut or buttercup squash; ideal for stuffing, roasting and, of course, for desserts.



SPAGHETTI SQUASH

FLAVOR A mild flavor and stringy texture.

ABOUT Gets its name from the way its flesh forms pasta-like strings.

SERVE Roast or steam it, remove the seeds and eat it as you would spaghetti.



CARNIVAL SQUASH

FLAVOR A flavorsome squash, nutty, with hints of maple, it takes on a buttery texture when cooked.

ABOUT A cross between sweet dumpling and acorn squashes.

SERVE Roasting and baking bring out its natural sweetness; it can also be steamed or mashed.

A list of two detailed articles with great recipes, in case you want to read

more about winter squashes:

- “Know Your Squashes: How They Look, How They Cook” By Florence Fabricant, The New York Times, Nov 2, 2018
- The 16 varieties of Winter Squash You Need To Know by Kelli Foster and Emily Saladino, The Kitchn, Oct 11, 2022

*Valeria Trucchia is a visual artist, illustrator, photographer, designer, and educator**.** She grew up in Paris in an Italian family and has been calling Brooklyn, NY, home for over 20 years.*

A CHEESY REUNION WITH PSFC’S FRENCH SIBLING COOPERATORS

October 17, 2023



By Hayley Gorenberg

“Created by a group of crazy people in Brooklyn in 1973, the Park Slope Food Coop has inspired dozens of similar experiments in the United States and elsewhere,” the French *Le Journal Minimal* remarked in October 2020. One of those experiments, La Louve food cooperative, thrives in the 18th Arrondissement in Paris, after the Park Slope Food Coop (PSFC) helped its founders launch in 2016.

Having written about La Louve while situated in the PSFC’s native Brooklyn, I made sure to seek out our sibling food cooperative when I had the good fortune to visit Paris this summer. Its founders happily connected me with Jean-François Herry, who welcomed me on a Sunday before La Louve’s inventory. Proudly self-identifying as La Louve’s “first salary”—its initial staff member—Jean-François guided me through La Louve.

La Louve cooperative operates on a membership model similar to PSFC's. Members invest in the coop by purchasing a share and are required to contribute their time by working in the store.

"All you have to do is become a cooperator, that is to say participate in the financing, governance and operation of La Louve," the coop advertises, welcoming Parisians to join in focusing on providing fresh, locally sourced and sustainable products to members.

LIKE THE PSFC, MEMBER PARTICIPATION IS A FUNDAMENTAL ASPECT OF LA LOUVE. MEMBERS ARE ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN THE DAILY OPERATIONS OF THE STORE, WHICH HELPS KEEP COSTS LOWER AND PROMOTE COMMUNITY.

It offers a variety of food items, household products and more. Like the PSFC, member participation is a fundamental aspect of La Louve. Members are actively involved in the daily operations of the store, which helps keep costs lower and promote community. Like its American counterpart, La Louve engages in community-building activities and education, as well as promoting a sustainable and socially responsible approach to food.

With early closing for coop-wide inventory just hours away, the store was purposely relatively low on produce. Jean-François showed me a storeroom with remaining crates of Valencia oranges, bright kumquats and roly-poly mini-watermelons.

THE MEMBERS WORKING TO SLICE AND PACKAGE WEDGES AND BLOCKS OF CHEESE PEERED OVER THEIR MASKS AND UNDER THEIR HAIR NETS, A TABLEAU VIRTUALLY INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM THE ONE OUR MEMBERS RENDER IN BROOKLYN.

His tour was tinged with unnecessary apologies for the understandably low pre-inventory stock, and he became downright emotional when we encountered the coop's cheese area, seemingly reflecting a French person's cultural and culinary proclivity and pride.

The members working to slice and package wedges and blocks of cheese peered over their masks and under their hair nets, a tableau virtually indistinguishable from the one our members render in Brooklyn. But the cheese storage room itself elicited by far the strongest expressions from my host.

We stood amidst boxed and labeled Dutch cheese, a massive quarter-wheel of hard-rinded cheese bumping up against a plank mazed with picturesque holes, a trio of soft-rinded cheeses, trays of tanned and twisted cheese knobs and a fleet of wood--cased Camembert.

Cheese blocks proclaimed they hailed from Bergers du Larzac, a group of "20 producers from Larzac and the Levezou mountains [who] have come together to create a range of sheep cheeses with character!" The Larzac cooperative's members mature their cheeses in four levels of natural underground cellars, imparting "a unique taste and floral crust" to 26 cheeses, including nine organic cheeses.

> LA LOUVE'S CHEESE ROOM PROVIDED A PORTAL INTO FRANCE'S CENTURIES OF CHEESE HISTORY, WITH PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES DEVELOPED THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY BY MONKS AND FARMERS ALIKE.

I spied boxed Soignon goat cheeses and learned later that the brand dates to 1895, when it was founded in the Poitou-Charentes region of France. Soignon is noted for logs of thick, smooth-textured cheese with an "aroma that complements its fresh creaminess," often packaged in delightful chestnut-leaf wrappings.

The Parisian coop stocked hundred-gram packages of Vrai fresh, organic sheep's milk cheese advertised as "made in the traditional way, hand-molded and just drained," yielding a cheese that is "light, soft and melting in the mouth," alone or cooked, mixed into spreads or gratins. In short, the La Louve cheese room provided a portal into France's centuries of cheese history, with production techniques developed throughout the country by monks and farmers alike, yielding more than 1,000 different types of French cheese.

But Jean-François radiated unease in this space. Shifting his weight, he confessed himself deeply "uncomfortable" at the day's relatively low stock of cheese. The coop's inventory processes were about to start, and it was time to go. I heaped effusive Brooklynite appreciations on my sibling cooperator for his hospitality, deployed my most heartfelt "merci!" and bid him a practiced "au revoir!"

Hayley Gorenberg has worked in environmental justice and trained this spring with the Climate Reality Project.

IN MEMORY OF JOSEPH OCCHIOGROSSO

October 17, 2023



By Thomas Rayfiel

Joseph Occhiogrosso, who joined the Coop in 1987 and was a squad leader for over ten years, died on August 20, 2023. He was 60 years old.

Maria Treglia, a member of his squad—a Friday night receiving shift—remembers him as:

An amazing guy. I used to wait for a cab in front of the Coop at the end of the shift, and he offered to drive me home. Our ride became a way to catch up about our lives and a way for Joseph to reflect on how smoothly the shift went. He was concerned when someone was absent and didn't call and often asked me about my feedback on ways to improve the efficiency of our squad. He was a kind squad leader who took on the task with care and understanding. I never saw him get uptight or argue with anyone. He never enmeshed himself in personality conflicts but made everyone feel comfortable and asked folks to do jobs they felt comfortable with. Shifts were pleasant and there was a strong sense of camaraderie. We got things done because we worked as a team.

> "HE LOVED BEING A SQUAD LEADER AND THE CLOSE CONNECTIONS HE'D BUILT WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF THE TEAM. JOE LOVED THE COOP AS AN INSTITUTION. HE WAS VERY PROUD OF HOW LONG HE'D BEEN A MEMBER."
>
> *JOSEPH'S WIFE, SUZY BORDEN*

Joseph taught English for 30 years at John Dewey High School in Gravesend, Brooklyn. Testimonials from friends and colleagues mention his commitment to education, his passion for the Italian language and culture of his ancestors (from the Puglia region of Italy), as well as for music, photography, bicycling and the Mets. A student, Hryzoleta Ciercierka, wrote: "He was such an amazing teacher. Pushed me so hard and saw so much potential in me and my writing. To this day I think about how encouraging he was."

Joseph is survived by his wife, Suzy Borden, and their adored cats Jasmine and Calypso; his loving sisters Joanne (Rob) and Marie (Steve); his niece Jessica (Jason); nephews Jeremy and Michael; grand-niece Avalee; Aunt and Uncle Carmela and Angelo Silecchia; Aunt and Uncle Angela and Stanley Pearlstein; and Aunt Connie Marzella, as well as many cousins and their children.

Suzy, his wife, recalls:

He loved being a squad leader and the close connections he'd built with other members of the team. Joe loved the Coop as an institution. He was very proud of how long he'd been a member. I came along much later, and Joe liked to correct me: When I'd ask if "they" carry a certain item, Joe would say, "you mean if we *carry it!"*

Member Thomas Rayfiel is the author of eight novels. He has also written "living obituaries" for VICE TV.

FILM NIGHT: ALL THE BEAUTY AND THE BLOODSHED

October 17, 2023



Join us for a screening of a documentary about the artist and activist Nan Goldin and her fight to hold the Sackler family accountable for the opioid epidemic.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 18, AT 7 P.M., SCREENED ON ZOOM

The film's editor, Amy Foote, will be present for a Q+A after the screening.

WATCH ON ZOOM, 7 P.M. OCT 18

Directed by Academy Award-winning filmmaker Laura Poitras, *All The Beauty And The Bloodshed* is an epic, emotional and interconnected story about the internationally renowned artist and activist Nan Goldin told through her slideshows, intimate interviews, groundbreaking photography and rare footage of her personal fight to hold the Sackler family accountable for the opioid epidemic.

Amy Foote is an Emmy Award-winning documentary editor based in Brooklyn, NY. Some of her editing credits include Laura Poitras's Oscar-nominated film *All The Beauty And The Bloodshed*, *Father Soldier Son*, *Hail Satan?*, *The Work*, *Mavis!* and *Fauci*. She lives in Sunset Park with her wife and daughter and has been a Coop member for 22 years.

To be added to our email list for future screening announcements, please send a request to jlymiller@me.com.