

THE ART SCENE IN LONG ISLAND CITY, 1987

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Long Island City is coming into its own as an art community, beginning with the studios of artists, an increasing sense of art destiny, and several institutions of art spectatorship and commerce.



View of Long Island City, with Manhattan Skyline and Queensboro Bridge in rear. Photo courtesy D. Rosenstein.

The time was a cold winter evening in 1987. The place, Long Island City, a section of the borough of Queens in New York City. Studio K, a small art gallery, was hosting a restaurant party in honor of its Second Annual Long Island City Artists Exhibition. This was the first such party, and what was unusual was that so many local artists actually showed up. Some knew each other, others met for the first time, but there was a strong sense of camaraderie and some heated artistic exchange. One local artist turned to me and said, "You were looking for the art community in Long Island City. This is it. But this could never have happened a year ago. If there had been a party, no one would have come." He was probably right. As an art community, Long Island City is just coming into its own.

Long Island City is one of the most recent and prominent manifestations of a very New York phenomenon: the emergence of a thriving art center in the midst of a run-down industrial area. SoHo and Tribeca in Manhattan led the way. Williamsburg and Greenpoint in Brooklyn are following suit, and no doubt others will come along, spurred on by the unrelenting search by artists to find affordable space in which to live and work.

Because of SoHo and Tribeca, we are now alert to these new communities, to the way they develop and even to the long-term issues they raise for New York and other art centers. For this reason, the communities themselves are worth documenting, and Long Island City is particularly noteworthy. It boasts two world-class art institutions, P.S.1 and the Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum; established artists like Noguchi, Mark di Suvero, and Romare Bearden have studios there; and one of New York's most respected art dealers, Richard Bellamy, has recently relocated his Oil & Steel Gallery to the area's waterfront. Other major arts organizations have also moved in, including The International Design Center, and Creative Time. And, because of the availability of space and materials and the public-spiritedness of Noguchi and di Suvero, Long Island City is also fast becoming one of the best places in New York to view large-scale outdoor sculpture.

Although a few artists have actually lived and worked in Long Island City for years—Noguchi, for example, came in 1961—the community has only recently come to the attention of a larger public. Buses of art lovers and sightseers now regularly include Long Island City in their tours of the New York art scene. The opening of the Noguchi Museum in May 1985 and the more recent opening of Socrates Sculpture Park in September 1986 have had much to do with that. Just as significant, however, is the fact that more and more artists are working in

Long Island City. The exact number is uncertain, but it is between two and four hundred and steadily increasing. For the first time, we can actually speak of an art community.

Long Island City is sometimes called the East East Village, but the resemblance is limited. Like the East Village, most of its artists (despite the presence of Noguchi and di Suvero) could be called "emerging." But unlike the East Village, there is no gallery and restaurant scene, little street life, no readily identifiable "look" to the art, and until recently, little interaction within the art community.

One reason is that many artists only *work* in Long Island City and commute from other areas. As one Long Island City artist put it, "I can afford to live in Manhattan, I just can't afford to work there." Even those who want to live in Long Island City, however, are hampered by zoning restrictions. Much of the area is zoned commercially, and the number of "legal" residential units for rent is limited. As in other industrial neighborhoods in New York with large artist populations, this is a heated and complicated issue, which is now being addressed city-wide.

Until now, this has mitigated the development of an art community. There was no time, no place, and no inclination to linger and exchange ideas. But several things are causing changes. Most significantly, Studio K, owned by Ken Bernstein, himself an artist, has stepped into the breach and is starting to serve as a community focal point, organizing exhibits of local artists, arranging for local sculptors to exhibit large-scale works in public parks, and providing a place to congregate.

In addition, the presence of at least three large, subdivided artists' lofts: I.S.1, Artspace, and L.I.C. Artlofts, each with ten or more artists working (not living) in them, has created smaller communities of artists. In turn, the prevalence of subletting spaces in those lofts to other artists on a regular basis (more on this later) enlarges the web of interconnecting figures.

Thirdly, a small community of young sculptors has formed around Mark di Suvero's studio. They, in turn, not only know each other but, partly through Studio K where they've exhibited, have made connections with other sculptors in the area, thus enlarging the circle and creating if not a distinct artists' community, then at least the beginnings of one.

Geography has a lot to do with the emergence of Long Island City as an art center. Located just on the other side of the Queensboro Bridge from Manhattan (in Queens it is *never* called the 59th Street Bridge), and stretching along the East River waterfront from Hunters Point and Newton Creek on the south to Astoria on the north, Long

Island City is very convenient to Manhattan. It is only one stop from midtown Manhattan on three subway lines and is also easily accessible by car. In many respects, in fact, Long Island City is more convenient to midtown Manhattan than SoHo or Tribeca are. Magnificent views of the Manhattan skyline dominate the Long Island City waterfront and are visible from many of the artists' lofts.

Despite its proximity to Manhattan, however, one of the things to keep in mind about Long Island City is that it is *not* Manhattan. In many respects, the artists there don't want it to be. It has light, space, air, views, and, for the time being at least, reasonable rents. Yet, paradoxically, many of its artists—though certainly not all—would move to Manhattan in a minute if they could afford to. In part, their reason is psychological. Manhattan is where the action is. In part, however, it represents what, until now at least, was a realistic assessment of the New York art world. Critics and collectors don't often venture outside Manhattan. As one young artist complained, "Until recently, Long Island City might as well have been in Timbuktu. Collectors would simply not come here."

Long Island City is bisected by the Queensboro Bridge. The area south of the Bridge is generally called Hunters Point, and it is here that the majority of Long Island City artists live and work. P.S.1 is here, along with Studio K. Here, too, is the huge, recently opened International Design Center, more than four million square feet of interior design showrooms and office space, and the Silvercup Studios, the largest production facility (television and advertising) in New York.

North of the Bridge and just on the border with Astoria are Noguchi's Museum and studio, Mark di Suvero's studio, the Oil & Steel Gallery, and Socrates Sculpture Park, all on the waterfront. From one end to another, P.S.1 to Socrates Park for example, is about a forty minute walk, ten minutes by car. Hunters Point is more convenient to public transportation, and that accounts, in part, for its greater concentration of artists.

Long Island City is a gritty neighborhood of warehouses and factories, mostly light industry and manufacturing. Its nonartist residential population, particularly in Hunters Point, is small and ethnic—mainly Italian and Hispanic. North of the Bridge there are two low-income projects, with a large black and Hispanic population. Closer to the Astoria border, the ethnic mix changes to Greek. One local resident was recently quoted in the *New York Times* as saying that, with the influx of artists, the area now had four ethnic groups: "Italian, Spanish, Greek, and artist." There is little interaction between the artists and residents, however, and some disagreement as to whether there's actual ill-feeling, a subject we will return to later.

Its industrial character is one of the major appeals of Long Island City. Not only does it offer expanses of factory loft space with high ceilings and large windows, but it is also, in the words of one P.S.1 sculptor, a "raw material heaven, surrounded by steel and electrical places. The raw materials are all over the streets as well." Hardware stores also abound, all contributing, perhaps, to the prevalence in Long Island City of steel sculpture, frequently with a high-tech look.

It was the availability of raw materials that attracted the first, and still most prominent, artist-resident to Long Island City—Isamu Noguchi. Long Island City was where Noguchi came to purchase his stones, which at that time were hauled in barges to sheds along the river. (Remnants of the unused sheds can still be seen, and two particularly run-down examples were converted in 1980 by Mark di Suvero into what is now his studio/residence and the Oil & Steel Gallery.)

When Noguchi moved to Long Island City, he converted an old warehouse into a studio. Then, in 1974, he purchased a two-story former photoengraving factory across the street from that studio and converted it into a warehouse for his heavier sculptures and also additional office space. He subsequently enlarged the second building, and in May 1985, it became the site of the Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum, an understated and serenely elegant building filled with almost five hundred works spanning the sculptor's long career. An adjacent lot, once a foul-smelling factory loading area, was converted to a tranquil garden, replete with pine and cherry trees, rough-hewn stone carvings from the '70s and '80s, and a wonderful stone sculpture/fountain. It is a welcome and unexpected oasis in this semi-industrial area.

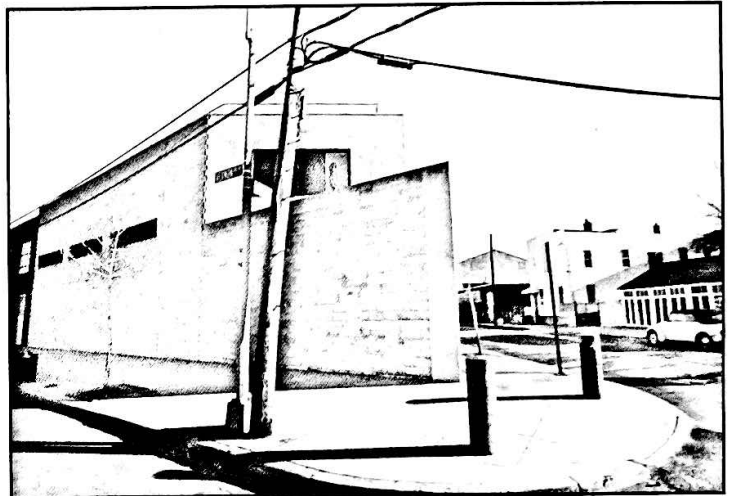
Currently, Noguchi uses the Long Island City complex for his architectural and landscape projects, on which he collaborates with his longtime partner, Shoji Sadao. He sculpts mainly in another studio, in

Japan, where he spends about six months each year. (This is an ironic twist, since it was the stones for his sculpture that initially drew him to Long Island City.) The Japanese studio also has a garden, and one of Noguchi's intentions in creating the Long Island City museum was to unite the two sites and, by extension, the two cultures from which he draws his inspiration.

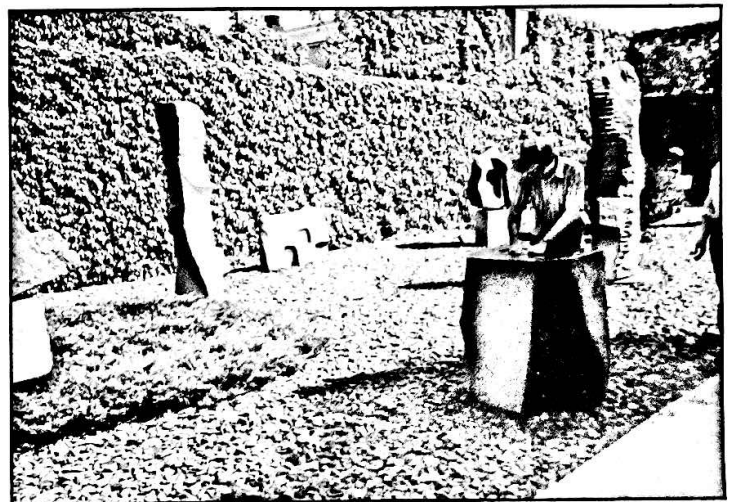
Noguchi's presence, and now the accessibility of his work, has had a strong effect on some of the younger sculptors working in Long Island City. Tony de Varco, for example, a 26-year old sculptor who works in stone and lives near the Noguchi Museum, frequently visits the sculpture garden and draws inspiration from Noguchi's inner strength. "Here's a gentleman," notes de Varco, "who's been working in stone all his life and his output is incredible. His energy and his



Studio K (in original location), Jackson Avenue, Long Island City.



Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum, garden.



understanding and sensitivity of himself is a big inspiration."

But de Varco also draws inspiration from the other great sculptural presence in Long Island City, Mark di Suvero, whose energy, talent, and generosity has attracted an entire group of younger artists. Di Suvero lives and works in a magnificent shed on the river a few minutes walk from the Noguchi Museum. But the shed was not always magnificent. When di Suvero bought it, it was an abandoned, crumbling brick hauling facility that had been used for years as a dump and was actually in the process of being condemned. It required incredible vision, determination, time and cost to convert it to the huge, 27-foot high ground-floor studio and second-floor living space that are now the envy of many, in part because of its commanding view of the Manhattan skyline. The overhead gantry cranes that once hauled bricks from the boats to the shed's interior are still there. Now they are used by di Suvero to hoist the one and two-ton steel beams he uses in his monumental sculptures.

Like Noguchi, di Suvero lives in Long Island City only part of the year. He still spends time (usually winters) in Petaluma, California, where he works on his largest pieces. When visited in Long Island City in January 1987, he was assembling joints and models for a huge sculpture—four steel beams, each 60 feet high—for the city of Pittsburgh. Watching the huge cranes lift the beams and seeing di Suvero at work on his cherry picker is an incredible sight, and one of the reasons why younger artists are impressed by him. As one of them said, "He wields the steel himself. . . . He doesn't have this whole team of people building things. He's still doing it. . . . At night, sometimes Mark's working and you see the blowtorch with the shining lights. It's great to see other people working. As an artist you get very lonely by yourself. . . . But when you see a master still working and he's in his fifties and Noguchi is in his eighties, and he's still going back to the basics, working, working, you say to yourself, yeah, I can do it. You just keep doing it."

Di Suvero is the guiding spirit behind one of the most significant developments in Long Island City: Socrates Sculpture Park, which occupies a 4½ acre strip of land just south of di Suvero's studio. Opened in September 1986, the park is now one of the largest outdoor sculpture spaces in New York City. Formerly a garbage-filled dump, the land was reclaimed through the efforts of di Suvero and others, who donated about \$200,000 in money and materials and also enormous amounts of time. Neighborhood youngsters mobilized by di Suvero helped pull the weeds, plant seeds, and also paint a 30-foot high mural by artist Richard Mock on the side of the Thypin Steel building bordering the park.

The Socrates Sculpture Park site is impressive. Facing the northern tip of Roosevelt Island and upper Manhattan, it looks upon a marvelous view of the New York skyline and has a rough, savage feel to it. Its waterside location is open to the elements, and the winds off the river blow with considerable force. At the inaugural exhibit, a steel and aluminum sculpture by Bill and Mary Buchen, *Wind Antenna*, capitalized on this phenomenon and incorporated sounds generated by the winds.

In addition to the Buchen piece, the inaugural exhibit in the Fall and Winter of 1986 contained works by di Suvero, Paul Pappas, a Long Island City sculptor, Vito Acconci, Sal Romano, and the last large-scale sculpture made by Richard Stankewicz before his death. That exhibition had no particular theme. Many sculptors had been approached to exhibit, but some found the \$1,500 fee for new works or \$500 for existing ones less than inspiring. The lack of a coherent theme, together with the unfinished landscaping of the park, gave the installation a haphazard feeling.

The park's second exhibit, however, titled "Sculpture: Walk On/Sit Down/Go Through," had a coherent theme and site-specific large-scale works by Terry Lee Dill, Robert Stackhouse, Richard Nonas and others, which exploited more fully the dramatic potential of the site. Di Suvero contributed a new piece, since his monumental orange-painted steel assemblage from the first exhibit, "Circle K," had been sold. As this article went to press, the park's third exhibit was being organized. It will consist of works by artists nominated by the participants in the first two exhibits.

Socrates Park already is special and could be magnificent. It is hampered, however, by lack of funds and uncertainty about its future. The land is owned by the New York City Department of Ports and



Two waterfront sheds, Long Island City, Mark di Suvero's studio in foreground, Oil & Steel Gallery in rear.

Terminals. The city granted a lease for \$1 a year to the Athena Foundation, established by di Suvero in 1977 to help young artists. The foundation administers the park. The hitch is that the lease only runs for five years, and the city can reclaim the land any time before then should it decide to start work on a housing development. One is currently being discussed.

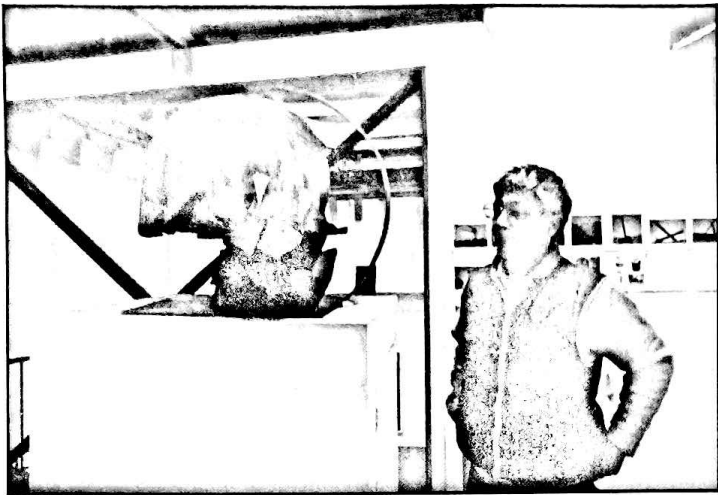
The land, with its million-dollar view, is valuable, and Long Island City is one of the up-and-coming areas of New York. It has not escaped anyone's attention that, as real estate, it is marketable. Everyone involved with the Park, as well as George Delis, the manager of the local Community Board, hopes to convince a developer to build on only two acres and leave the remaining two for a permanent sculpture park. But there is no guarantee that will happen. In the meantime, there are plans to landscape the park with the help of City University architecture students, and contributions (tax-deductible) are sorely needed by the Athena Foundation.

If Socrates Park represents the newest art attraction in Long Island City, P.S.1 (officially Project Studios One) is the oldest. Established in 1976 in an abandoned red brick, neo-Romanesque public school building, P.S.1 is one of the granddaddies of New York's alternative spaces, and still the largest. Its guiding force is Alanna Heiss, who, with the help of a loan from Chemical Bank, transformed the block-long building from a rubble-strewn space into a center for contemporary art.

P.S.1 features exhibition areas, artists studios, experimental installation spaces, and an auditorium for screenings and performances. From its first group show in 1976, P.S.1 was a "presence" on the New York art scene, drawing large crowds and the attention of critics who otherwise rarely ventured outside Manhattan. Today, more than 50,000 people visit P.S.1 each year, and each of its thrice-yearly openings,

Mark di Suvero operating the hoist inside his Long Island City studio.





Oil & Steel Gallery; Richard Bellamy beside di Suvero sculpture, Eterly's Lamp.

always held on a Sunday afternoon, draws several thousand visitors.

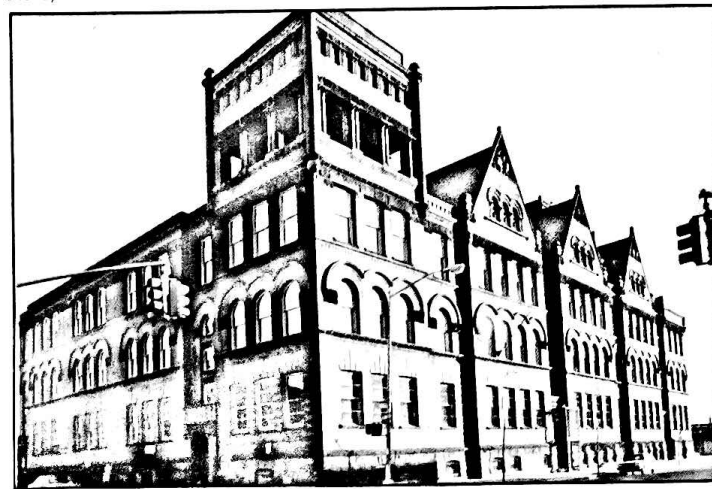
Many of the artists currently working in Long Island City came there originally because of P.S.1's National Studio Program, which each year provides studio space to 20 professional artists from across the United States, who are selected from hundreds of applicants by a panel of art specialists. They rent studio working space—living is not permitted because of zoning restrictions—for a period of one year, maximum two, at subsidized rents, representing about one fourth the market cost. A separate, international studio program, paid for by foreign governments, offers space to artists from Canada, Europe, and Australia.

The programs are a wonderful opportunity, not only because of cost, but because of exposure. Participating artists are expected to keep their studios open on the three days P.S.1 has openings each year, and they participate in an annual exhibit of their works at the Clocktower, another alternative space operated by the Institute of Art and Urban Resources, the nonprofit organization that now runs P.S.1.

P.S.1 has a complex relationship to the Long Island City art scene. In one sense, it *is* the scene. Certainly it is the biggest draw. The other art galleries open to the public schedule their openings to coincide with P.S.1's; the only art-related Long Island City street life is a result of the P.S.1 openings; P.S.1 events are prominently reviewed in the *New York Times* and national art magazines; and it is the one place in Long Island City that outsiders always seem to know about.

Nevertheless, there is resentment, rarely stated openly amongst some Long Island City artists that P.S.1 has turned its back on the local art community in its effort to be international, and that it rarely, if ever, exhibits a Long Island City artist. Other local artists accept that as a given. If anything, they feel disappointment, but not bitterness. In any case, most of the local artists seem to make a point of visiting P.S.1's

P.S. 1, exterior.



shows, if not on opening day, then later, and they admit that they derive nourishment from having a contemporary art showcase in their midst.

More of an issue is P.S.1's relationship to the general community, the predominantly Italian families living in Hunter's Point. This is a sore spot for some community people, and George Dillon, Chairman of the local Community Board, speaks for them when he says that P.S.1 has "done very little to reach out to the community, and it's not going to work like that. They are funded by the Department of Cultural Affairs, and if indeed they're going to be a part of the neighborhood, they have to reach out more ... The people who are in P.S.1 would much rather be in Manhattan." But, at the same time, Dillon is optimistic that recent changes will improve the situation.

P.S.1 acknowledges that its focus tends to be international, or metropolitan, that is, Manhattan. But it can point to a Winter 1987 exhibit, "Out of the Studio: Art with Community," as an example of efforts to address the community. This exhibit, curated by Tom Finkelpearl and Glenn Weiss, featured works by artists whose interaction with their communities is an essential aspect of their work, and included a group of photographs of Long Island City. In addition, P.S.1 is expanding its Education Program and opening its exhibitions, special project rooms, and artists studios to local school groups, senior citizens, and families in an attempt to reach out more to the community.

The problem to a large extent is the same one that faces other arts institutions, namely that the *natural* audience for contemporary art is not the factory workers and lower middle class families who are the bulk of P.S.1's neighbors, and it is not clear how to enlarge that audience. The question of art and audience is not limited to P.S.1 and Long Island City, of course. Scholars and critics have debated it since the mid-nineteenth century. But it has particular relevance for emerging art communities, where social and educational barriers often separate the newly arrived artists and art institutions from their neighbors.

In many respects, Long Island City has more interaction between artists and residents than do most art communities. Some artists, like di Suvero, who is truly committed to bringing art to the people, consciously reach out to the community. Di Suvero not only invited neighborhood children to help clear the ground for Socrates Park, but they use the park as a playground, and they and their families are invited to its openings. Still, it is not clear how they actually "relate" to the art.

Noguchi, too, has welcomed the community to his museum (although it is open only two days per week, by reservation) and had a special "opening" for the community when the museum opened in 1985. The museum's Assistant Director, Alexandra Snyder, notes that "many neighbors come and say, 'I've lived here for fifteen years and never knew that something like this existed here.' One eight-year old boy even comes here regularly to play in the garden."

While many other Long Island City artists have little or no interaction with the community, some of the sculptors in particular seem to feel a special affinity with the local factory workers. "Sculptors have an identification with the industrial, working mentality," one sculptor explained. "In the past, they used to work closely with their foundries, and sculptors, particularly those working in steel, still have a constant relationship with factory types. I find I have more to say to factory men than to most of my clients, since we both get our hands dirty, and we both sweat." To artists like this, living in an industrial community like Long Island City has residual advantages beyond the obvious economic ones.

Besides P.S.1, the gallery scene in Long Island City is limited, and this factor perhaps more than any other distinguishes it from the Manhattan art world. Currently, there are only two galleries, one open to the public, and a second open by appointment only. A third gallery recently closed. Clearly, the gallery that has played the largest role promoting the artists in the area is Studio K on Jackson Avenue, not far from P.S.1. Owner Ken Bernstein has organized several "Long Island City Artists" exhibitions and generally acts as a spokesperson for the artist community.

Bernstein is frank to admit that he could never have accomplished this in Manhattan in only three years. In Long Island City, he required little capital to start and had no competition. Nevertheless, it has not been easy. Bernstein is an enthusiast who really believes in his product, the Long Island City art community, and backs it up.

It is difficult to define Studio K's artistic focus, since its offerings

run the gamut of Long Island City art. Indeed, its Long Island City Invationals, which were held in the winters of '86 and '87, each had works from more than two dozen artists. Many were by artists like di Suvero and Romare Bearden who are not represented by Studio K. Others were by artists who have not yet sold works and have no official gallery.

Even Studio K's less comprehensive shows are broad in scope, devoted to painting for example (but of no particular school) or to sculpture. One exhibition in the Spring of 1987, however, stood out. Devoted to sculpture by Long Island City artists, it contained only a few works—all first-rate—sparingly installed. Noteworthy, was *Moon-skater*, by Mattie Berhang, an evocative kinetic mobile consisting of small pieces of scrap metal suspended from thin, barely visible filaments. Floris Brasser's wood, limestone, and metal sculpture, *Skeet*, also drew attention. Brasser, a Dutchman who lived in Mark di Suvero's shed when he arrived in Long Island City, uses wooden slats often taken from parquet floors and manipulates them in fascinating ways, bending them to their limit, so that the fear that the wood will snap creates a tension and sense of danger that is integral to the impact of the work. At the same time, his work has an elegance and simplicity that is fresh and strong.

Another Long Island City gallery, Discovery Gallery (Metro), opened in January 1987, but closed suddenly in the summer. It was owned by the Hempstead Harbor Artists Association, a nonprofit artists cooperative created five years ago in Glen Cove, Long Island. Having enjoyed success in Glen Cove, Discovery Gallery decided to open a second gallery closer to Manhattan.

Its inaugural exhibitions in January and March 1987 were group shows featuring both Long Island and Long Island City artists. The exhibitions lacked a clearly defined artistic focus, but Lillian Gates, the gallery director, had ambitious plans and was determined to make the gallery a success. Her determination was thwarted, however, by her landlord's refusal to grant a lease or repair structural problems. Ironically, it was the second gallery in the same space to close within a year. There is a possibility, however, that the Discovery Gallery will reopen in another Long Island City location in 1988.

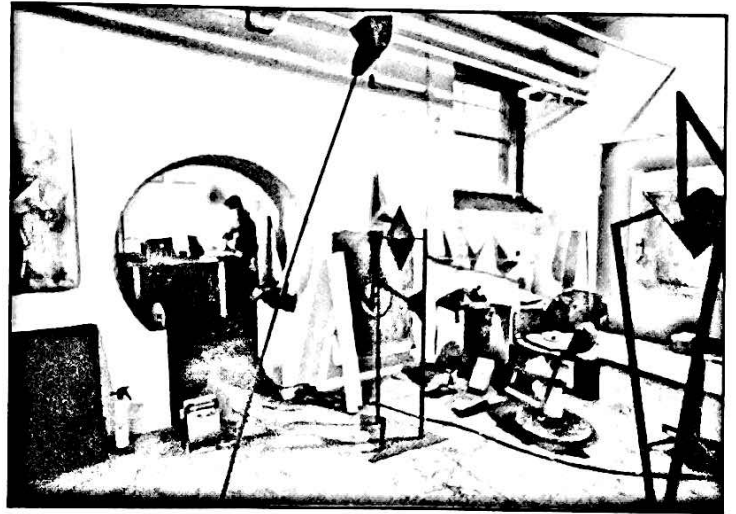
By far the most prestigious gallery in Long Island City is Richard Bellamy's Oil & Steel, which moved to Long Island City in November of 1985. Bellamy has been a major figure in the New York art world since the early 1960s, when his Green Gallery was the showplace for some of the most innovative art of the period and gave the first shows to Rosenquist, Judd, Samaras, and Poons. Now he is a private dealer representing di Suvero, Alfred Leslie, Myron Stout, and others. His gallery is located on Vernon Boulevard, in a waterfront shed adjacent to di Suvero's. The pier behind is filled with huge di Suvero sculptures, and a monumental Leslie mural fills the wall of the shed.

Bellamy, who admits that escalating costs drove him out of Manhattan, says he is in Long Island City for good. He has even chosen to live there, near P.S.1, where he is on the Board. His presence in the area is viewed by many as a good omen since he is said to have "discovered" Tribeca and even Park Avenue South long before they became "in." Although Oil & Steel is open by appointment only, Bellamy hopes to mount a few public exhibitions each year, perhaps even focussing on Long Island City artists. But that is down the road.

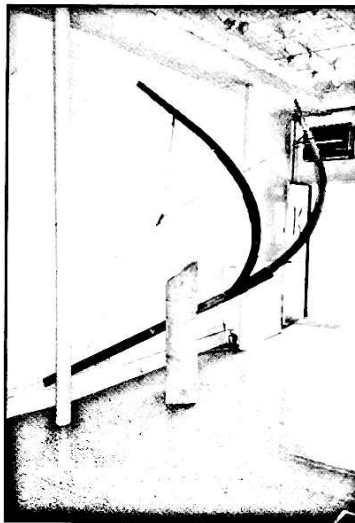
Which brings us to the artists themselves—who they are and what they are doing. As might be expected, Long Island City art defies easy description. One searches in vain for common denominators of style that can be labelled the "Long Island City" style. Because artists have been drawn there for a multitude of reasons, they manifest the individuality and variety characteristic of the contemporary art scene.

That being said, one is struck by the prevalence of sculptors, many working in large-scale with industrial materials. This is not an accident, since the abandoned warehouses and factories in the area, with their large, well-lit, ground-level spaces, lend themselves to the fabrication of steel sculpture, which, after all, cannot easily be welded in third-story lofts with wooden floors.

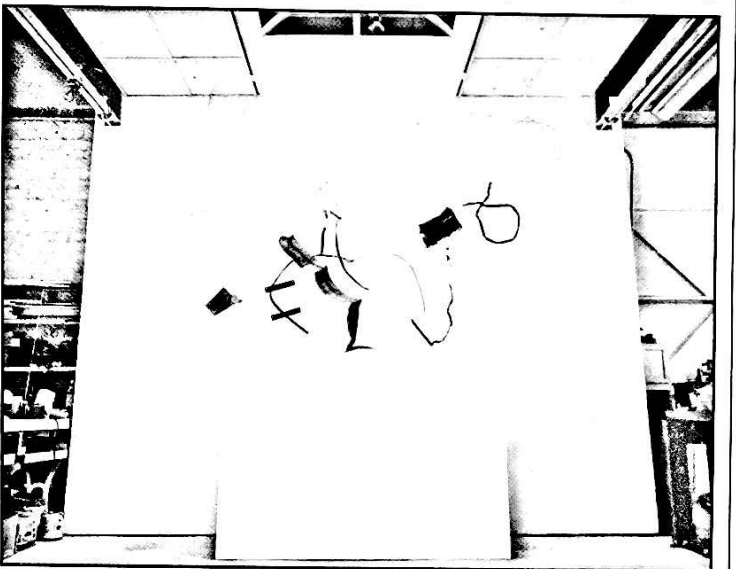
Add in geography, the availability of materials, and the formidable presences of di Suvero and Noguchi, (not to speak of rents generally one third to one half of those in Manhattan), and it is easy to understand why sculptors have been drawn there. Long Island City even boasts an active foundry. Interestingly, the rise of Long Island City as an art community is concurrent with the rising importance of sculpture on



P.S. 1, basement studio, the "Keyhole."
Sculptor Arthur Mednick in rear.



Floris Brasser, *Skeet*, 1987. Installation,
Studio K. Limestone, wood, and steel.



Mattie Berhang,
King of Corona, 1987. Mixed
media. Courtesy Carlo Lamagna Gallery.

the contemporary art scene.

As we have already noted, a small circle of young sculptors has formed near Mark di Suvero. These include Floris Brasser, Tony de Varco, and Paul Pappas. Pappas, who came to New York from Oregon in 1985, is officially the caretaker of di Suvero's waterfront property. In return, he has use of a large studio on the property. He is drawn to abandoned materials, such as steel (industrial waste) and bone, which have evocations of a previous life. He also incorporates into his work stones that he dredges out of the East River. One of his works, a sprawling 40-foot wood, steel, and slate sculpture, was placed for several months in a small triangular park opposite the Long Island City Courthouse.

For some sculptors, like Dan Sinclair, the abundance of hardware

stores in Long Island City is a real advantage. Sinclair, who has worked since 1977 in a converted garage he owns in the Hunters Point section of Long Island City, earns his living as a stone carver, but his inclination is to work in steel, and his garage is filled with polished, small industrial "tool" pieces, which he recently exhibited at the Schreiber/Cutler Gallery in lower Manhattan. His big break came in the Fall of 1986, when the city's Art in the Parks Program offered a space in Murray Playground, opposite P.S.1, for a site-specific sculpture, and, through the efforts of Ken Bernstein, Sinclair got the assignment. He created a large abstract sculpture made of chain link fencing material (donated by a Queens company), and, with a nod to the adjacent playground, called it "Bigger Bird." Originally intended to be exhibited only for six months, the piece still stands a year later, with a magnificent view of the Manhattan skyline as its backdrop.

Mattie Berhang is one of the more established Long Island City sculptors, as well as one of its pioneer inhabitants. She arrived in 1970 a refugee from SoHo's crowds and high rents and found a very different Long Island City than exists now. "There were no artists: there was Noguchi, Roy Gussow, and me. It was fine, you didn't meet other artists. You didn't see the faces you see all over SoHo, Tribeca, and the East Village. I was pleased about that. None of the people in the neighborhood knew much about art or cared much about it, and it gave you the feeling you can often get in California, of being totally removed from the art scene. I liked being able to walk into the art scene when I wanted to and to get on the subway and go home. That's gone now. The art world's moving out here, unfortunately, from my point of view."

Berhang, who works in a huge studio with three skylights and a row of windows that provide the kind of light she knows "she'll never see again" if she leaves Long Island City, incorporates into her sculptures the metal scraps that dot the streets of the area, and in fact titled her first "junk" sculpture *Long Island City*. Working with high-tech materials—like Kevlar and aluminum honeycomb sandwich—as well as scrap metal, she experiments with weightlessness and buoyancy in her suspended sculptures, which she prefers not to call mobiles. Dominating her studio in early 1987 was *King of Corona*, a large piece made of green scrap metal and galvanized elements that came from gridded fencing, all suspended from barely visible threads of monofilament nylon.

Of course, there are dozens of other Long Island City sculptors, from the well-established Roy Gussow, one of the true pioneers in Long Island City (who bought a large house there with an adjacent studio as early as 1964), to Margaret Cherubin, a relatively recent arrival, whose wood sculptures, incorporating parts of trees, branches and a combination of bark and latex she calls tree "skins," suggest interesting directions.

Cherubin's studio arrangement is also of interest, since it is very typical of Long Island City. She rents a room (with a magnificent Manhattan skyline view) in a subdivided 8,000 square foot loft called "Artspace" on the fourth floor of a steel shelving building. Nine other artists have space there, and each pays approximately \$250 per month rent (depending on the size) including utilities, although that figure will, no doubt, go up next year when a new lease is signed, and also does not reflect the considerable amount each artist invested to make the raw space habitable (e.g., walls, electricity, heater). The lease was actually signed by two artists, Pat Walsh and Pat Hammerman, who, in turn, sublet the individual studios. Typical of commercial lofts, there is only one bathroom per floor, and living in the space is prohibited by zoning regulations.

There are two other large subdivided lofts in Long Island City: I.S.1, founded by former P.S.1 studio participants, and L.I.C. Artlofts, formed by painter Margret Dreikausen in November 1985. Dreikausen herself sublet at I.S.1 for two years and also sub-sublet at Artspace (Cherubin's studio) for three months. This is not unusual, and this cross-pollination, as it were, is helping to create a sense of community in the Long Island City art world. When Dreikausen's loft threw an "open-studios" in honor of its first anniversary in December 1986, more than 80 people actually signed the guest book, and many were artists from the other lofts.

Dreikausen recently organized an Open Studios and exhibition that should solidify still further the Long Island art community. Timed to coincide with the Fall opening at P.S.1, the Open Studios took place

on two weekends in October and featured ten Long Island City artists. Concurrently, the same artists exhibited their works in lobby showcases at nearby LaGuardia Community College, and then, in November and December, in a larger space at Queensborough Community College in Bayside. Dreikausen and Jo Yarrington, her partner at Artlofts, selected the artists by means of recommendations and slide viewings. Since the 1986 Long Island City Open Studios (the first ever) did not include any artists from her own loft, Dreikausen included five in the 1987 version. If all goes as planned, the Open Studios will be an annual Fall event, and Dreikausen is already discussing ways to increase participation in 1988.

Dreikausen herself and most of her loftmates are painters, as, of course, are dozens of other Long Island City artists. But if it is difficult to identify a Long Island City sculptural style, it is impossible to isolate a painting style. It runs the gamut from the cubist-inspired collages of Romare Bearden, who has worked out of a Long Island City studio for over twenty years, to the muted, evocative, multilayered canvases of Tobi Kahn, one of the artists selected for the 1985 Exxon National Exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum. There is the usual representation of abstractionists, conceptualists, and word-image painters. Perhaps a dominant style will emerge within a few years, but for now, it is eclectic.

What lies in store for Long Island City? It's difficult to say. Certainly, the area is growing. Not only are more and more artists moving in, but the massive new International Design Center has now opened; Creative Time, forced to leave Battery Park City in Manhattan, has just moved its "Art on the Beach" sculpture exhibitions and performances to an abandoned waterfront lot at Hunters Point; the Museum of the Moving Image, in the Kaufmann Studios in nearby Astoria, is getting ready to open; and most dramatic of all, Citicorp has started to build a huge new office complex near Long Island City's Courthouse Square. When it is completed, it will be the tallest building between Philadelphia and Boston outside of Manhattan. It cannot help but have a major impact on the area. In addition, Hartz Mountain Industries recently purchased a six-acre development site on the Long Island City waterfront, and major developments are also planned for the Hunters Point site currently occupied by Creative Time and also on the site of Socrates Park.

Many Long Island City artists, already alarmed by rapidly escalating rents, are concerned that they will be forced out of another place that they helped "discover." Some even viewed with trepidation the prospect of a favorable article about Long Island City, lest still more people invade their territory. The pattern of SoHo, Tribeca, the East Village, and even Greenwich Village is on everyone's mind. The same economics that caused many artists to move to Long Island City in the first place may eventually force them to leave. Is this to be the fate of all of our art communities?

For now, however, Long Island City is alive with creative activity, and the artists are still moving in. As one artist noted, "I've been here four years, and increasingly when I walk down the street I notice more and more people who look like me. I don't know them, but I know they're artists, and I find myself smiling."

Practical Information

Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum
32-37 Vernon Blvd.
Long Island City, NY 11106
Open by appt. Wed & Sat, 12-5.
April-November
(718) 204-7088

P.S.1
46-01 21st Street
Long Island City, NY 11101
(718) 784-2084
Open Wed-Sun, 12-6PM

Artspace, Inc.
10-20 45th Road
Long Island City, NY 11101
(718) 784-9522

I.S. 1
10-27 46th Avenue
Long Island City, New York 11101
(718) 729-8001

Oil & Steel
30-40 Vernon Blvd.
Long Island City, NY 11106
By appt. only
(718) 545-5707

L.I.C. Artlofts
37-06 36th Street
Long Island City, NY 11101
(718) 784-9624; (718) 784-2935

Socrates Sculpture Park
Vernon Blvd. and Broadway
Long Island City, NY 11106
Open 10 AM to dusk
(718) 956-1819

Studio K
10-63 Jackson Avenue
Long Island City, NY 11101
(718) 784-0691
new address, call for opening date and hours.