

# The Art-Scene in Long Island City

by: Linda Fiddle and Liz Barcia

Long Island City isn't a trendy art community—yet—but it is fast becoming an enclave of international artists. Twenty-five years ago, Isamu Noguchi, the Japanese-American sculptor, crossed the East River, preferring the working-class milieu to the hype and bluster of the Manhattan art-scene. Last spring, the Noguchi Garden Museum, an understated cinderblock structure, opened in Long Island City to house nearly 500 sculptures, models and photographs spanning the six decades of Noguchi's prolific career. The serenity of the Noguchi Garden Museum perhaps typifies what many artists find so appealing about working in Long Island City. The fact that it has not yet been "discovered" allows an artist to work without the social pressure of Soho or the East Village. Here, the only distraction is the magnificent view of the Manhattan skyline.

Other recognized "names" such as Mark di Suvero are Long Island City based and are helping to enrich the artistic landscape of the community. Di Suvero has been the driving force behind the Athena Foundation's development of the Socrates Sculpture Park, a 45-acre waterfront site, now under construction for a 1986 opening. The Athena Foundation helps to promote the arts by giving artists studio space, monetary grants, materials and equipment to undertake large scale projects. Artists are selected by the Athena Foundation through the recommendation of other artists. We recently visited the site for the Socrates Sculpture Park and were entranced not only by the spectacular views of midtown Manhattan, but also by the creative energy that is harboring in the warehouses and factories of the neighborhood. We were told that everyone in the neighborhood is pitching-in, donating labor and supplies to get the park ready.

One person we spoke with, Ken Bernstein, the dynamic artist/owner of Studio K on Jackson Avenue, was perhaps the first person to realize Long Island City's artistic potential. He opened his gallery after relocating from Washington D.C. at a time when there was virtually no art-scene at all in Long Island City. "A lot of artists are living above one another in cheap lofts and run-down manufacturing buildings, and they don't even know it," says Bernstein. The bright orange and blue banner that waves hopefully above Bernstein's storefront gallery, located between a Spanish bodega and a news-delivery service, symbolizes the new artistic spirit of the community.

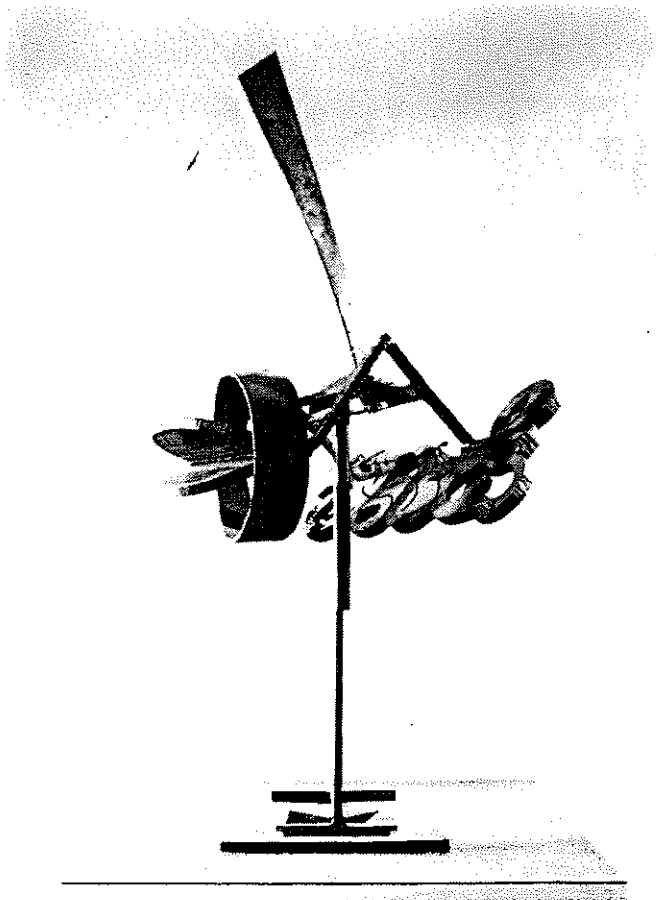
Around the corner from Studio K is The Forefront Gallery, which is located below street-level in a large basement space renovated by the artist/owner William Arvidson. Arvidson was born in Manhattan and has been

painting and drawing since childhood. His pastels of imagined landscapes are often featured in the gallery along with works of other "emerging" local artists.

Dick Bellamy's Oil & Steel Gallery moved from Chambers Street to a huge renovated warehouse right on the waterfront on Vernon Boulevard. Bellamy claims that the first time he laid eyes on the site he never looked back, and decided that this was the place for him. Since Bellamy represents Mark di Suvero (whose studio is right next-door), the Long Island City location is ideal.

In addition to the renovated storefront and warehouse galleries popping-up around Long Island City, existing buildings are also being converted to artists' space. The most outstanding example is P.S. 1, the oldest school building in Queens, which is the home for Alanna Heiss' Institute for Art and Urban Resources. Project Status One, or P.S. 1 as it is referred to, provides galleries, studios and performance facilities for contemporary artists from a

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Mark di Suvero's "African Script" (above) and Angelo Bellfatto's "Night" (next page) are two examples of the diverse works that can be found throughout Long Island City.