

GO Sunset Park: An Emerging Art Community

- by [Allison Meier](#) on September 10, 2012



Brooklyn Army Terminal atrium (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

The waterfront of Sunset Park in south Brooklyn was a major hub for military shipping and related industry from the world wars until its decommissioning in 1960, and, as happens with underused monumental warehouse spaces, artists have now moved into some of these towering structures. This past weekend's [GO open studios](#), organized by the Brooklyn Museum, were all about engaging the borough with its local artists in a community curation project for a December

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group exhibition, so I decided to explore the studios of artists creating work in these relics of industry lining the Brooklyn shore.

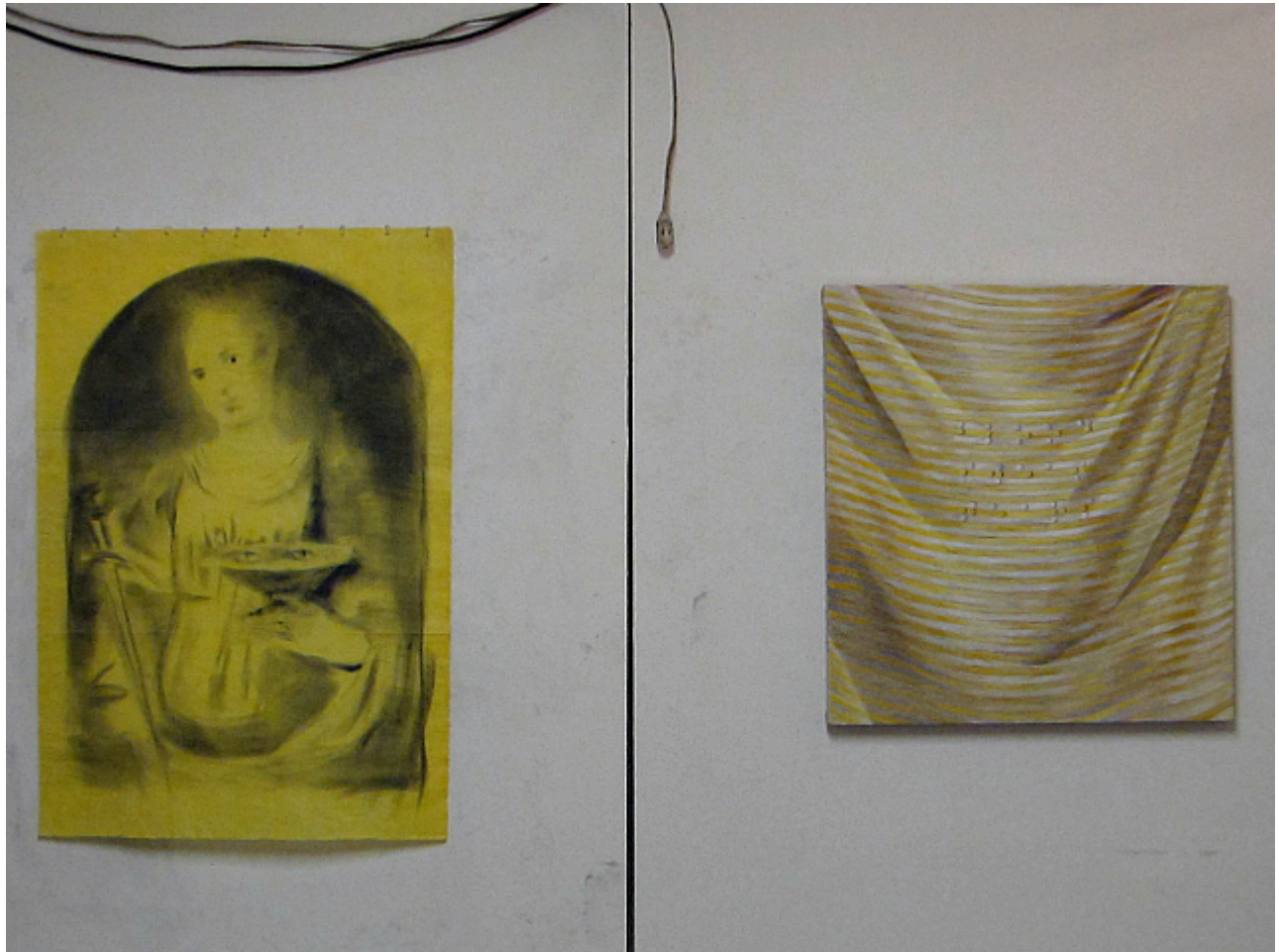
The open studios offered an unmissable opportunity to go inside the Brooklyn Army Terminal, which has a stunning atrium that lets light down onto two train tracks (one of which still has an old train permanently installed in the building), which are lined with loading docks labeled with destinations like “AZORES” or “BALKANS” from military efforts past. On each of the eight stories are platforms staggered out into the cavernous space, which would have been accessed by a crane. The nonprofit [chashama](#) had an astounding 65 artists registered for the GO studios in the Brooklyn Army Terminal, spread out between Building A and B of the complex.



Studio of Jeanne Marie Wasilik

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Art by Jeanne Marie Wasilik, with St. Lucy on the left and a Braille on fabric still life on the right.

I started in Building A, visiting the studio of [Jeanne Marie Wasilik](#), whose current work centers on blindness, which she stated came about after she started to think about what would be her worst nightmare. Naturally, as a visual artist, this would be her loss of her sight, and she's explored this by drawing with the tips of her fingers the image of St. Lucy, the patron saint of blindness who had her eyes gouged out and is depicted carrying them in a dish, using only the light of a projector shining the saint in the dark. Wasilik has also translated Ed Ruscha works into Braille and has a series of still lifes painted from draped fabric onto which she pastes discs that spell out phrases in Braille into a flat code, which can't be felt by someone who is blind or interpreted by someone who is not (unless they like Wasilik have learned the language visually).

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Studio of Athena LaTocha

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Brushes in studio of Athena LaTocha

Nearby was the studio of [Athena LaTocha](#), who is inspired by the unpredictable and powerful forces of nature, which she remembers strongly from growing up in the sprawling terrain of Alaska. Using India ink and an array of brushes, from a raw bundle of sticks to a heavy, stone-handled brush, she creates tumultuous black ink landscapes. She is also exploring the nature of chance in a series where she mixes soap with Sumi ink into a bubble that bursts and drips across the paper. Some of these she then dips entirely into ink creating a planetary effect where only the soap traces are left against the blackness.

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Studio of Abby Goodman

Despite the industrial waterfront's distance from nature, the closest it gets being the concrete pier that stretches away from it lined with people tossing fishing rods, there seemed to be a lot of natural influence at the chashama studios. [Abby Goodman](#) had mash-ups of plastic deer and butterflies on a tree and other mixed media works featuring "beautiful beasts" which juxtapose manufactured items with natural specimens. She will be presenting a shrine called "The Wishing Tree" in the Brooklyn Arts Council Gallery this month, opening for the [Dumbo Arts Festival](#), featuring much of this work.

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Wall piece in duct tape by Tirtzah Bassel

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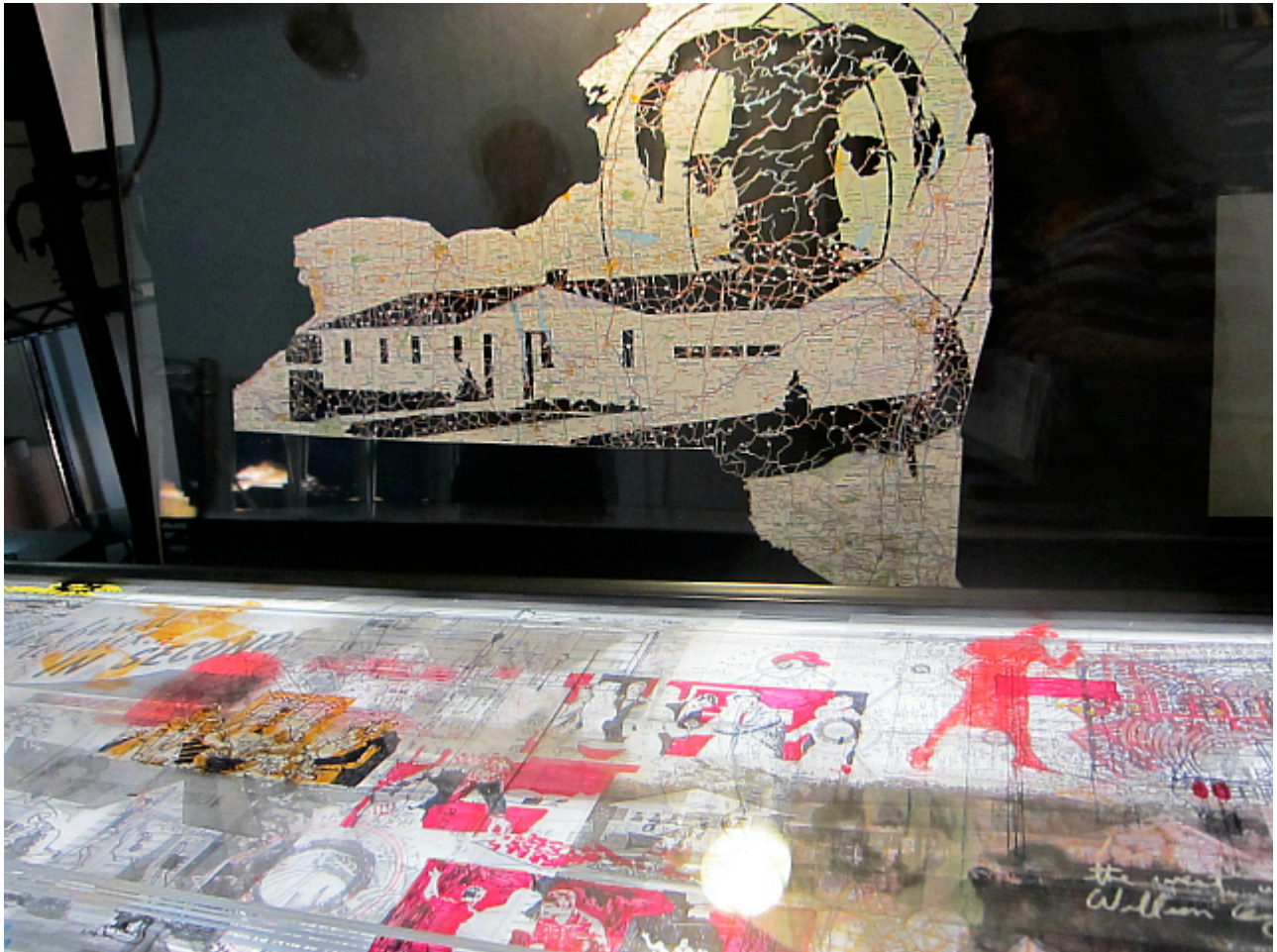


Studio of Tirtzah Bassel

Around the corner [Tirtzah Bassel](#)'s studio was transformed with her installations of duct tape wall art, which the painter is experimenting with after being challenged to work in a new material, as well as being inspired by a mixed media class she was teaching at the 92Y. While she started off with small tape pieces, she's now expanded into these large-scale studies based off her paintings which bring out human figures from the adhesive material.

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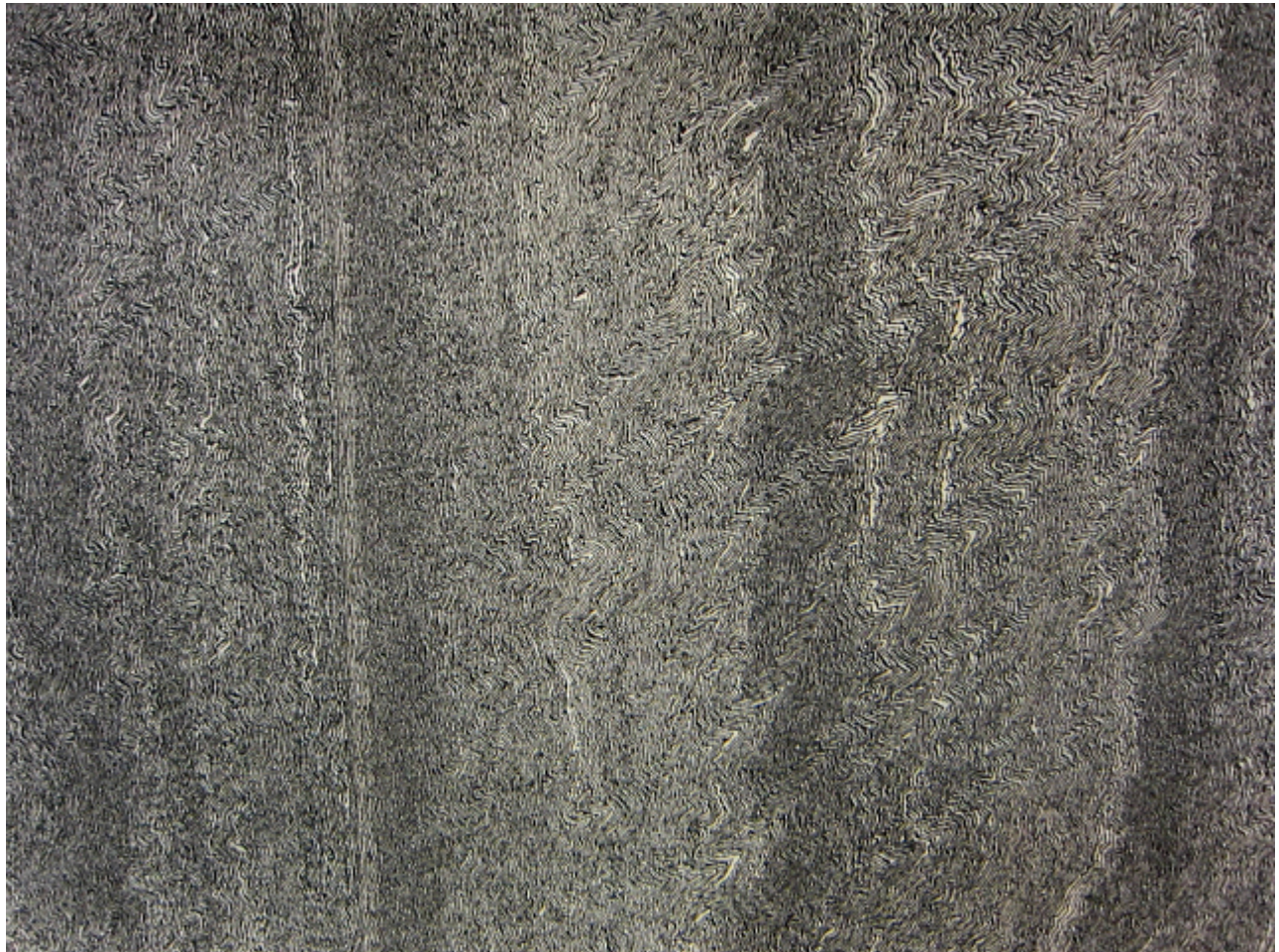


Work by Nick Vaughan & Jake Margolin

After spending around an hour in Building A and then finding out that it was the “smaller” of the two chashama studio areas, I decided to go across to Building B to explore its second hive-like floor of studios. I found myself drawn into the studio of the married collaborative team [Nick Vaughan and Jake Margolin](#) brimming with multimedia work, such as a map of New York layered over a flat screen television showing the couple next to a typically suburban house, part of their ongoing exploration of their “deep ambivalence towards ‘The American Dream’” as part of “the first generation of gay Americans to have grown up with a set of traditionally hetero-normative aspirations as insiders rather than ‘The Other.’”

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Detail of “Commute” piece by Matthew Franklin Wilson

I also stopped in the studio of [Matthew Franklin Wilson](#), who told me about his detailed repetitions in projects like “Commute,” where he works off of a straight line into repeated curves directed by the unpredictable tumult of riding on the subway, the lines going off in both directions from the center to mimic the process of a back and forth commute. He said that one “Commute” work probably takes about 40 hours of transit. Another work-in-progress that he is creating in his studio is several feet high and already dense with a concentrated ripple of black lines he estimates will take around a year to complete. He said he was drawn into repetition as a printmaker, and is also interested in the macro and micro effects of viewing art that from a distance looks like textured shading, but on closer look reveals a dense field of distinct lines.

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Art by Linda Lee Nicholas

A different take on chance and unpredictability was in the process oriented work of [Linda Lee Nicholas](#), who creates ink on paper works using scientific lab instruments that build out in biomorphic shapes from an initial random spill of color. She said that she first became “fascinated by chance” when her parents got sick, and she started to think of the randomness of how a tumor can suddenly be growing from within, and how much chance plays a role in life and its end.

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Entrance to studios on 47th Street

I could have probably spent both days of GO open studios at the Brooklyn Army Terminal, but I wanted to see some other spaces in the Sunset Park neighborhood and set out for a smaller location on 47th street, which despite being adjacent to the rumble of the Gowanus Expressway has a small crowd of artists working within its walls.

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Studio of Kenneth Millington

The first floor I visited had a studio shared by three GO artists: Kenneth and Annette Millington and Nathan Bond. [Kenneth Millington](#)'s watercolors appear at first to be abstract, but on closer look reveal some rather unsettling and vivid post-apocalyptic scenes, as well as images obscured by repeated layers of color built up into what he calls "a purgatory landscape."

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Art by Annette Millington

[Annette Millington](#)'s work was much more playful and vibrant, but also engagingly ominous, with patterns of colorful abstractions inspired by "organic systems, sacred geometry, and mythic traditions."

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Studio of Nathan Bond

On the far end of the studio was [Nathan Bond](#), whose experiments with portraiture have led him to painting the insides of gaping mouths and close-ups of hands in addition to whole figures, as well as a startling fish head portrait that sat in the corner.

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Work by Kimo Nelson

Upstairs in another shared studio were three more painters, including recent RISD graduate [Kimo Nelson](#) whose works in acrylic on linen had a tactile, textural quality in washed out colors.

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Art by Ronna Lebo

All three of the painters in this studio are working with some aspect of abstraction, but each from a different perspective, with [Ronna Lebo](#) having much more movement and some recognizable shapes in the paint, such as in a charming small painting that appears to show a rocket ship in flight.

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Studio of Tiffany Calvert

[Tiffany Calvert](#)'s work also has representational aspects, although her largest work is a swirl of different shapes held together by large drags of paint.

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Studio building on 42nd Street

While many of the studios were in off-the-beaten-path locations (which is most of industrial Sunset Park for most of the contemporary art crowd), all of the studios were easy to find with their inviting trail of GO posters. I made an unplanned stop when I saw this beautiful old building entrance for what once housed a refrigerating machinery company when I saw an open studio sign.

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Studio of Yana Ouchakova

Inside was the studio of [Yana Ouchakova](#), draped in massive painting pieces dominated by red that took up the entire space. It was a great example of how artists in Sunset Park are really taking advantage of the large spaces that are available, although Ouchakova said she is actually looking for an even bigger studio to expand the paintings to greater scales.

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Bush Terminal

My last stop was in Bush Terminal to visit the New York Art Residency & Studios (NARS) Foundation artists. Bush Terminal, like the Brooklyn Army Terminal, was once a major site for military and other industry and now houses many studios and creative organizations in the block-sized buildings that line worn cobblestone streets.

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Studio of Hiromitsu Kuroo

The NARS Foundation had a substantial 35 GO studios, and one of the first I visited was that of [Hiromitsu Kuroo](#), whose impressive large-scale folded canvases, that he states are inspired by the traditions of origami, are worn down with sandpaper to reveal different primary colors.

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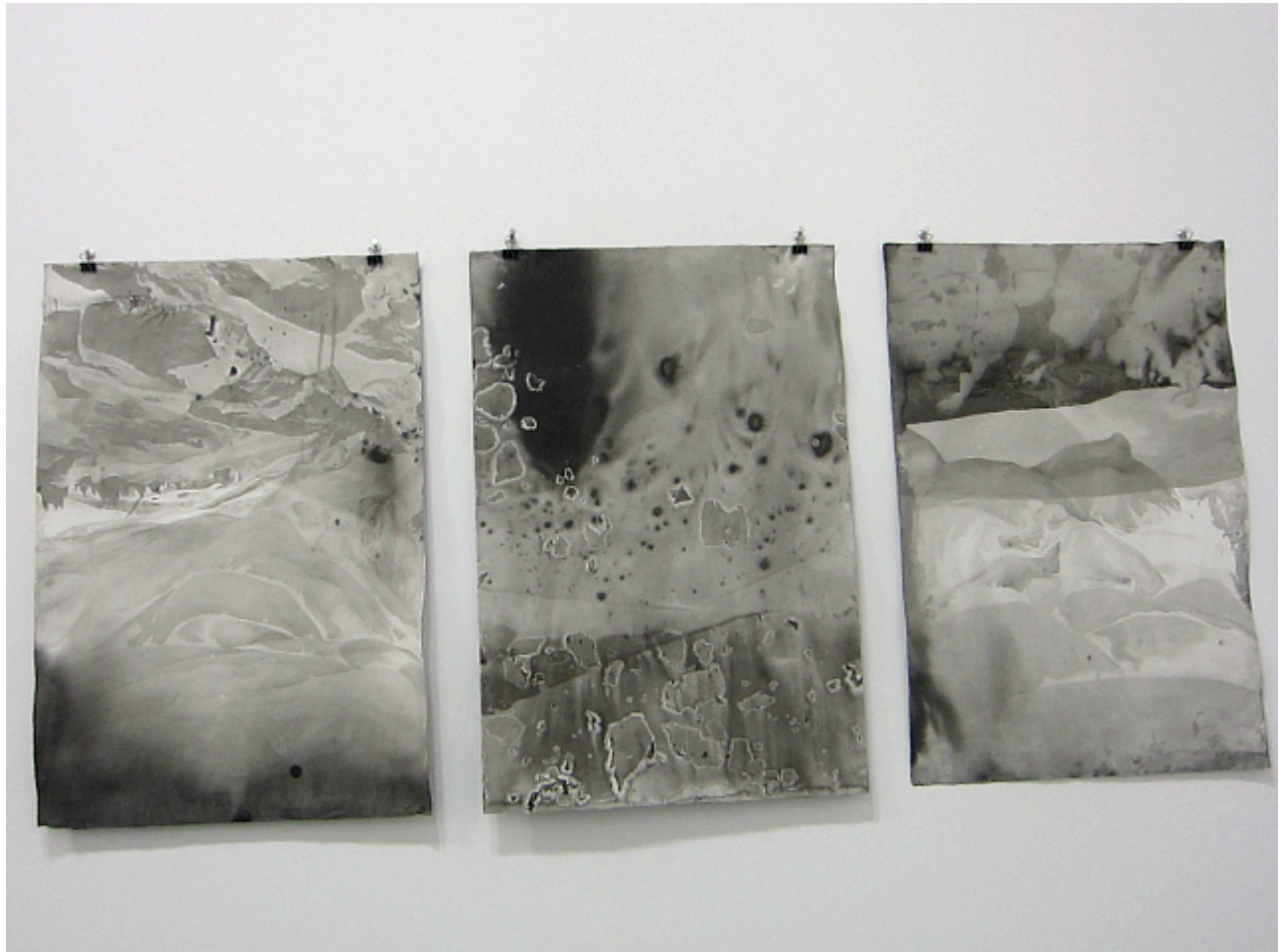


“Homeless Memorial” in the studio of Ellen Coleman Izzo

The studio of [Ellen Coleman Izzo](#) was busy with miniature figures and “environments” made on old refrigerator boxes representing locations the artist saw on a trolley tour of Washington, DC, where she was struck by the homelessness evident on the streets. She is recreating all of the 11 trolley stops in these environments, and adding a 12th called the “Homeless Memorial,” a metal structure that is mobile and can withstand weather, on which metal pigeons and people perch.

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Work by Betty Hart

Chance seemed to be the theme of the day, whether it was in the selecting of which locations to visit on the busy GO Brooklyn map of over 1,700 studios and in the art I happened upon in these studio hubs. In [Betty Hart](#)'s entrancing work, she is using "alchemical tests" and the ideas of painting and photography to let the submerging and drying of her pieces be guided by gravity into their final forms.

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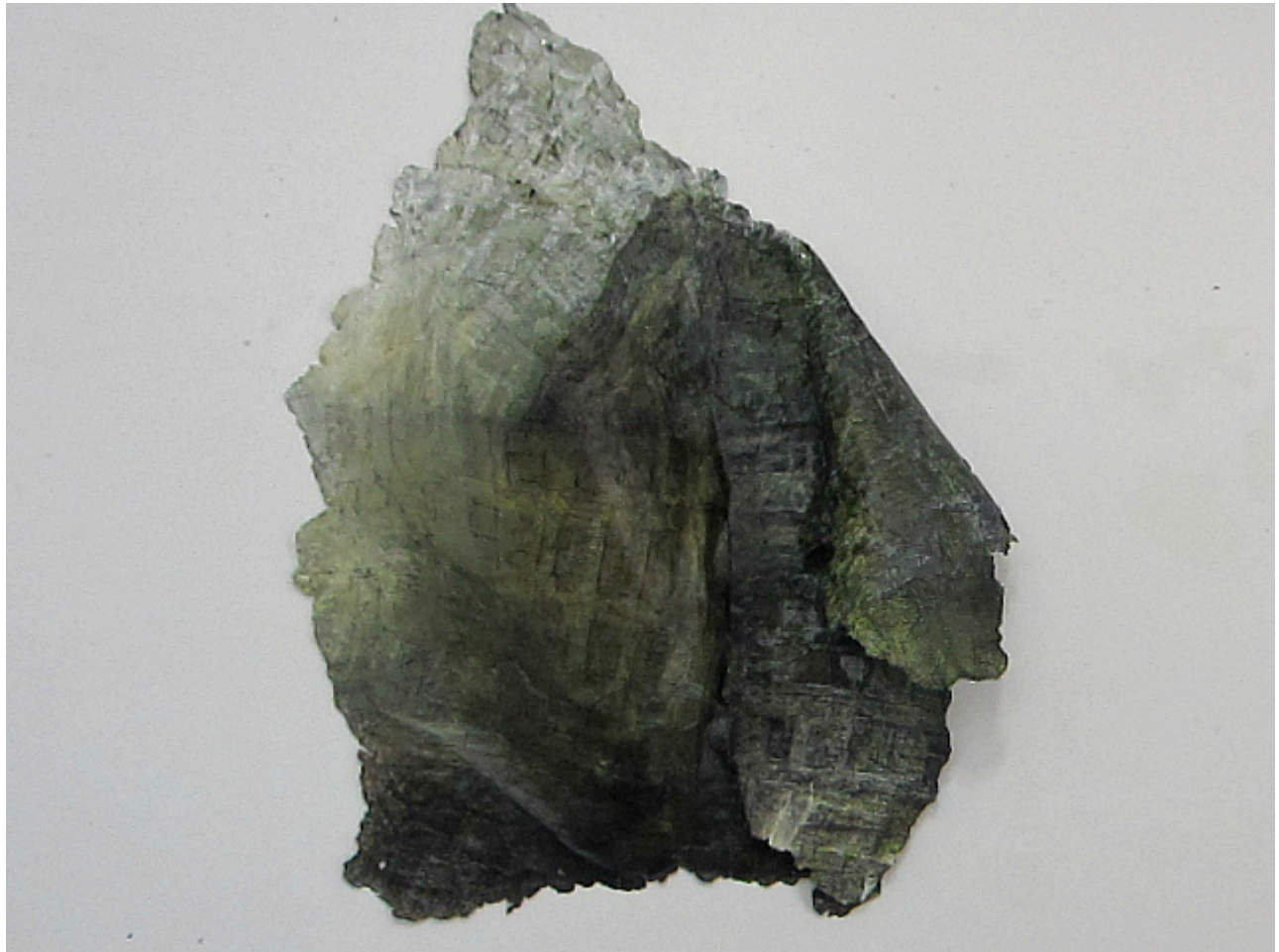


Work by Aaron Hillebrand

Another NARS studio with some intriguing work on the idea of repetition was that of [Aaron Hillebrand](#), who had geometric patterns crossing over large-scale and smaller works that were collaged on the wall with some smaller figurative works, like a skull gazing out from a pink canvas.

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Art by Tempest Neucollins

In the same studio, [Tempest Neucollins](#) had paintings bent against the walls that she uses to try to capture the energy of a place or landscape. The one shown above, appropriately for the day, mimics the borough of Brooklyn in its rumpled form and had the ghost of brownstones in its green shades.

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Sunset Park industrial waterfront

I will be curious to see how all the community curating plays out with the final Brooklyn Museum exhibition, but as a reason to get out and see the artists who are working within walking distance of home, it was a success. Everywhere I went in Sunset Park I was impressed with the work and enthusiasm of the artists based in this neighborhood that can still feel a bit like an industrial ghost town on certain quiet corners on the weekend, but which is really a pulsing source of art for the borough.

[GO Brooklyn Open Studio Weekend](#) was September 8 to 9, 2012.

Tagged as: [Aaron Hillebrand](#), [Abby Goodman](#), [Annette Millington](#), [Athena LaTocha](#), [Betty Hart](#), [Ellen Coleman Izzo](#), [GO Brooklyn](#), [Hiromitsu Kuroo](#), [Jeanne Marie Wasilik](#), [Kenneth Millington](#), [Kimo Nelson](#), [Linda Lee Nicholas](#), [Matthew Franklin Wilson](#), [Nathan Bond](#), [Nick](#)

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[Vaughan & Jake Margolin](#), [Ronna Lebo](#), [Sunset Park](#), [Tempest Neucollins](#), [Tiffany Calvert](#),
[Tirtzah Bassel](#), [Yana Ouchakova](#)