

# *Life Between Buildings*

Inspired by the history of community gardens in New York City, *Life Between Buildings* explores how artists have engaged the city's interstices—"vacant" lots, sidewalks, traffic islands, and parks, among others—to consider the politics of public space through an ecological lens. It looks beyond a history of artists transforming buildings (such as PS1) to their involvement with the areas in between, turning negative spaces into sites for life in common: gardens, installations, performances, and gatherings.

During the New York City fiscal crisis of the 1970s, grassroots groups began converting lots that had been left abandoned by landlords and the city into gardens and communal spaces—especially in the Lower East Side (Loisaida), where overlapping communities of activists, artists, squatters, and Puerto Rican and Nuyorican residents led these efforts. Compelled to step in due to the absence of public services, guerrilla gardeners unleashed new possibilities for reenvisioning the city as a commons. Similarly catalyzed by the changing built environment, artists were also moving beyond the studio and gallery out into the city, taking up the politics of urban space itself as their medium. At times, these approaches intertwined: artists made work in conversation—and sometimes in collaboration—with gardeners and community efforts. *Life Between Buildings* highlights select moments from the 1970s through the present day that distill the entanglements of these histories.

Questions of access and stewardship of public and green space remain salient, heightened by the effects of the pandemic and rising rents. Today, artists work under very different spatial conditions than they did in the 1970s: the question now is not what to do with available space, but where to find it. Issues of property law, housing, and climate crisis embedded in any conversation about community gardens continue to be pressing. The intergenerational group of artists in this exhibition ask us to rethink how human and nonhuman life can thrive in a city where space is increasingly scarce and nature progressively imperiled.

Jun 2, 2022–Jan 16, 2023

**Gordon Matta-Clark**

American, 1943–1978

**Rosebush** 1972

Gelatin silver print

Courtesy The Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark and David Zwirner

Artist Gordon Matta-Clark took the spatial conditions of New York City in the 1970s as inspiration and material for his work. Though best known for large-scale sculptural cuts into buildings (including one at PS1 in 1976), Matta-Clark was also interested in undeveloped pockets of urban space—the “metaphoric voids, gaps, leftover spaces”—and what might grow from these interstices. In this early work, titled *Rosebush* (1972), Matta-Clark planted a rosebush in the courtyard of St. Mark’s Church in the East Village and enclosed it in a gridded metal cage. The work, which still exists in the church’s courtyard, hints at tensions between emptiness and plenitude, human control and the unpredictability of organic life, which continued to inform his practice. Some have said that Matta-Clark proposed building a six-story version of *Rosebush* in Abe Lebewohl Park, a small triangular plaza across the street from St. Mark’s Church.

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**Gordon Matta-Clark**

American, 1943–1978

**Tree Forms** 1971

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Ink and graphite on paper

Courtesy The Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark and David Zwirner

In the early 1970s, Gordon Matta-Clark began exploring how trees impact urban ecosystems. These drawings sketch ideas for what he termed “hit-and-run gardens,” compositions of fantastical topiary he dreamed of planting overnight in vacant lots. Matta-Clark’s ideas developed in tandem with the rise of the community gardening movement, and as the 1970s progressed he began collaborating with existing community groups to transform underused spaces. In 1976, he proposed *A Resource Center and Environmental Youth Program for Loisaida*, which would teach Lower East Side youth the skills needed for homesteading abandoned buildings and turning lots into gardens—activities already prevalent in the neighborhood. This work, he wrote, “would no longer be concerned with just personal or metaphoric treatment of the site, but finally responsive to the express will of its occupants.” An early facet of the project involved working with the activist group CHARAS to construct an amphitheater in a lot at East 9th Street and Avenue C that was being turned into a community space. The lot later became La Plaza Cultural de Armando Perez, a community garden that still exists today. Photos in the adjacent gallery depict Matta-Clark’s early work on the garden. He passed away in 1978, before the *Resource Center* could get fully underway.

## **Gordon Matta-Clark**

American, 1943–1978

### **Reality Properties: Fake Estates, “Jamaica Curb,” Block 10142, Lot 15**

1974

Collaged silver gelatin prints, deed, silver gelatin print, and three maps

Courtesy The Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark and David Zwirner

Gordon Matta-Clark acquired fifteen slivers of land from New York City municipal auctions in 1973 and '74 for between \$25 to \$75. Fourteen of these *Fake Estates*, as he called them—including the 3-foot-by-230-foot strip of grassy curb documented in this work—were located in Queens. In the early twentieth century, Queens rapidly transformed from farmland to city; the process of imposing urban street plans atop rural property lines resulted in small, oddly shaped leftover lots. Matta-Clark was introduced to the auctions where such lots were sold by Alanna Heiss, the director of the Institute for Art and Urban Resources. In 1976, Heiss went on to found PS1 in the city-owned building you are standing in.

Matta-Clark was interested in these “gutterspaces” precisely because they were often inaccessible, weed-ridden, and “useless” for development. “What I basically wanted to do,” he stated, “was to designate spaces that wouldn’t be seen and certainly not occupied. Buying them was my own take on the strangeness of existing property demarcation lines. Property is so all-pervasive. Everyone’s notion of ownership is determined by the use factor.” By decoupling ownership from use value, Matta-Clark parodied the absurdity of property ownership while nodding to the hidden value of typically overlooked spaces.

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## **Cecilia Vicuña**

Chilean, b. 1948

### **Sidewalk Forests** 1981 (printed 2022)

Archival inkjet prints

Site specific performance installation by Cecilia Vicuña. Photos by Cesar

Paternosto

Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, Seoul, and London

### **Sidewalk Forests, Weeds (Quotes from John C. Kinder)** 1981

Text on bark paper

Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, Seoul, and London

Cecilia Vicuña moved to New York City in 1980, having been exiled from Chile following the US-backed overthrow of Salvador Allende’s government in 1973. She settled in Tribeca and began wandering the nearby riverside, streets, and vacant lots, where she created small, site-specific performance

installations she called *Sidewalk Forests* (1981). Vicuña has brought awareness to the intertwining of humanity and the earth since the mid-1960s; in her *Sidewalk Forests*, she brought this ecological perspective to bear on a neglected urban environment. She saw these works, in which bits of thread and dashes of chalk highlight weeds bursting through the pavement, as “small altars on the streets of New York, air vents for the earth, pasture born in the gutters.” These ephemeral actions exist today in photographs and an accompanying poem that Vicuña wrote on the back of one, which translates to, “the earth breathes through the pavement’s cracks.” Drawing on Indigenous knowledge and her ecofeminist work from the ’60s, *Sidewalk Forests* distill an awareness of the fragility and persistence of nature in the face of human intervention. Around the time of this series, Vicuña became a member of a community garden founded in an undeveloped lot in Tribeca.

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### **Becky Howland**

American, b. 1951

#### **Tied Grass 1977**

Site-specific installation on traffic island bounded by Franklin Street, Varick Street, and West Broadway. Photos: Becky Howland  
Courtesy the artist

#### **Portrait of a Gas Station 1977–c. 1998**

Site-specific sculpture on traffic island bounded by Canal Street, Sixth Avenue, and West Broadway. These images show two versions of the sculpture, both 13 in. tall: version 1 (plaster, 1977) and version 2 (cement, 1978–c. 1998). Photos: Becky Howland  
Courtesy the artist

#### **Handmade announcement cards for Portrait of a Gas Station 1978**

Color xerox glued to index card, with ballpoint pen, and crayon  
Courtesy the artist

In 1977, Becky Howland began renting a basement studio in Tribeca that later became her home. She started creating quiet interventions into the surrounding cityscape, which served as an extension of her studio. These photographs by Howland document two such interventions: In *Tied Grass* (1977), she bent and tied together the long grass growing wild on a nearby traffic island. In *Portrait of a Gas Station* (1977 – c.1998), she installed a small geometric replica of an actual gas station that was located at the intersection of Canal Street, Sixth Avenue, and West Broadway. A monument in miniature, *Portrait of a Gas Station* played on shifts in scale, from model to traffic island to the island of Manhattan. Howland replaced the original plaster version with a concrete one that remained there for nearly two decades, surreptitiously embedded into the sidewalk with the help of filmmaker Charlie Ahearn.

Around the time of these works, Howland became involved with Collaborative Projects Inc. (aka Colab), a collective interested in exhibiting art in public and nontraditional spaces. In 1980, the group turned a city-owned space on Rivington Street into the alternative art and music venue ABC No Rio. Howland cleared a pile of bricks from the backyard and built a large-scale fountain called *Brainwash* (1981–83) among the Ailanthus trees growing there. When the reins of ABC No Rio were turned over to Peter Cramer and Jack Waters (whose work is exhibited to the right) in 1983, they organized performances and dinners in the backyard area around Howland's sculpture, calling their venue the Fountain Cafe.

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## **Becky Howland**

American, b. 1951

### **Adam Purple's Garden 1979**

Cut and collaged paper, with pastel and ink  
Courtesy the artist

The streetscape of New York City inspired Becky Howland's work in myriad ways: not only were its public spaces sites for intervention, but she was also a keen observer of how others reclaimed urban space, including community gardeners. In this collaged drawing, Howland documents the Garden of Eden, whose green growth seemed particularly hopeful amid the devastation of buildings abandoned by their owners. The garden, created by Adam Purple, grew across five lots in the shape of concentric circles with a yin-yang symbol at its center. It was bulldozed in 1986 by the city to make way for public housing. Government officials often pitted gardens and housing against each other, though numerous architects submitted plans to show how they could coexist.

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## **POOL (Performance On One Leg)**

est. 1981

### **POOL At The Pool 1983**

Video (color, sound)  
35 min., 35 sec.  
Courtesy Allied Productions, Inc.

### **Archival materials related to performances by POOL 1982–83**

Courtesy Allied Productions, Inc.

POOL (Performance On One Leg) was a collective convened in New York City by dancers Peter Cramer and Jack Waters and core members Christa Gamper and Brian Taylor from 1981–85. Fixtures in the downtown performance and queer club scenes, Cramer and Waters brought together the shifting members of POOL as an early facet of their ongoing exploration

of how sexuality, race, class, and urban ecology intersect. POOL frequently performed in public and semi-public spaces such as parks, pools, streets, construction sites, and nightclubs. These archival materials relate to performances staged at Hamilton Fish Pool, a public pool near where they lived in the Lower East Side; the empty landfill that would become Battery Park City (as part of Creative Time's *Art on the Beach* series); Federal Plaza, a public square then home to Richard Serra's controversial sculpture *Tilted Arc* (1981); and the backyard of ABC No Rio. POOL used the city as a stage out of economic necessity, but also to challenge ideas of propriety and explore ancient rituals tied to communion with the seasons and environment. At this moment, the city was recovering from a recession: buildings were being constructed, class divides sharpening, and space becoming increasingly monitored.

In 1983, Cramer and Waters became the directors of ABC No Rio, a venue that had opened in a foreclosed building on Rivington Street in 1980 and became a legendary space in the art, punk, and hardcore music scenes. In 1996, they turned a lot on East 2nd Street into a community garden called Le Petit Versailles—yet another instance of the duo finding pockets of wildness in the city. The garden remains an active space for experimental art, performance, and gathering. It is highlighted in Aki Onda's installation in the adjacent gallery.

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**David L. Johnson**

American, b. 1993

**Adverse Possessions** 2022–ongoing

Removed property plaques

Courtesy the artist

The legal concept of “adverse possession” has origins in English common law of the Middle Ages and remains part of property law in the United States today. Known as “squatter’s rights,” adverse possession allows someone to gain legal title to land if they have demonstrated continuous occupation of that land for a set period of time—in New York State, ten years. This occupation must meet specific criteria, including that it is “hostile” (against the permission of the owner) and “open and notorious” (commonly known to the owner and others).

In this work, David L. Johnson explores a visual manifestation of “adverse possession” as it operates in New York City. Many owners of buildings with seemingly public but privately owned spaces—such as sidewalks and plazas—install metal plaques that mark the edge of their property line. By visually declaring their ownership, they grant tacit permission to anyone who crosses their property line, thereby negating potential claims of adverse possession. The plaques in this work were used by buildings in the Financial District and Midtown Manhattan to protect against adverse possession. The artist’s ongoing removal of these plaques opens these spaces to other forms



of activity and stewardship. Adverse possession has also been deployed to protect community gardens from threats of development. For example, in 2018, the Children's Magical Garden in the Lower East Side successfully used adverse possession to prevent developers from destroying the garden in a legal battle that continues today.

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## **Aki Onda**

Japanese, b. 1967

### **Silence Prevails: Lower East Side Community Gardens During the Pandemic 2020/2022**

Field recordings, videos, text, map, and historical photos

Courtesy the artist

Project assistance: Marco Lanier, Jonah Max, Makiko Onda, Satomi Shirai

This project explores the past and present of twenty-four community gardens in the Lower East Side, pairing archival materials with photos and audio captured by Aki Onda from April to August 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 closures. Onda's recordings archive a rare moment in which the sounds of these small gardens overtake those of the surrounding city. Interested in reverberations of the past, the work asks: How does history suffuse a space? How can memory be distilled?

In the 1970s, the Lower East Side became a locus of community gardening in New York City, as members of overlapping communities—Puerto Rican migrants, artists newly moved to the neighborhood for its cheap rent, and anarchist squatters—came together to occupy and transform empty lots into green spaces for gathering, making art, and political organizing. The movement arose in response to the increasing number of unbuilt lots in Lower Manhattan: with industry and wealth leaving the city, real estate prices dropped, and landlords often found it more profitable to abandon or even burn down their buildings (in order to collect insurance money). Planted on land technically owned by the city or private landlords, many gardens have faced constant threat of demolition—especially as the land began to regain value. In 1994, Mayor Rudy Giuliani decided to auction off the gardens to private developers, leading to a struggle documented in a number of the archival materials displayed here. Despite the destruction of some gardens, the Lower East Side continues to have the highest concentration of community gardens in New York City.

Viewers are invited to take a brochure, which offers a more detailed history of the gardens as well as Onda's reflections on them.

**Mel Chin**

American, b. 1951

**Garden Where the Wild Grass Obscures the True Pearl 1987**

Graphite on drawing paper laminated on plywood

Courtesy Amanda Wiles

**Origin and Obscurity Revealed and Aligned 1987**

Pencil and watercolor on paper on board, wood frame

Courtesy the artist

These drawings document Mel Chin's proposal to adapt a small triangle of land at the foot of the Manhattan Bridge into a park, which he submitted for the 1988 exhibition *Public Art in Chinatown* at the Asian American Arts Centre. His design arose from conversations with an elderly Chinese man who lived in a labyrinthine shelter on the site, as well as other Chinese-speaking members of the neighborhood. Chin decided to use the practice of feng shui to transmute the parcel into a landscape culturally legible to the Chinatown community, working with feng shui practitioner Thay Boi Trung and writer Sarah Rossbach. The resulting design took the shape of an oyster, a species native to New York City's precolonial landscape and used in Chinese alchemy. The title, *Garden Where the Wild Grass Obscures the True Pearl*, references a saying from the villages of Southern China, where Chin's family is from. In Chin's words, it is "a witty retort to someone of class and wealth who has denigrated [one's] appearance or poverty. In this case, the homeless, voicing their value and humanity in the face of increasing societal neglect and hostility."

The "pearl" marks where debris of the existing shelter would be ceremonially buried, paying respect to the one who lived there. As Chin developed his proposal, the site, known as The Hill, became home to a larger community of unhoused people, and he became increasingly invested in drawing attention to their need for housing. Chin's plan was never realized, and The Hill was forcibly bulldozed by the city in 1993, displacing those that lived there. In 2016, the city turned it into a park marketed as "Chinatown's mini High Line."

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**Margaret Morton**

American, 1948–2020

**Photographs from the series *Transitory Gardens, Uprooted Lives***

1989–1993

Gelatin silver prints produced for the book *Transitory Gardens, Uprooted Lives*, by Margaret Morton and Diana Balmori, 1993

Courtesy The Estate of Margaret Morton



In the late 1980s, Margaret Morton began photographing the dwellings of unhoused people in Tompkins Square Park, near her home in the East Village. When the city evicted the park's residents in 1991, Morton continued to befriend, photograph, and interview them as they dispersed to nearby lots. She became particularly interested in the gardens they established there. Often temporary, composed of found materials, and growing in harsh conditions, she saw them as expanding the definition of gardens beyond "the domain of settled or prosperous individuals only" and began documenting them alongside the larger ecosystem of gardens in the area.

In *Jimmy's Garden* (1989–93), a local unhoused man relaxes next to his goldfish pond. The city bulldozed his garden a week after Morton took this photograph. After razing gardens like Jimmy's, the city sometimes turned the lots over to official community gardens. Eighth Street Garden, for example, was started on a lot from which people had been evicted. Morton writes, "There were complaints from homeless people, including Pixie, who had been thrown off the lot. The city, they said, cared more for plants than for people."

Some community gardens began to operate under the protection of GreenThumb, a city agency founded in 1978 that leases land for \$1 a year in exchange for meeting certain criteria, including having a fence. Others, such as Jardín de la 10 B-C, were tended by squatters occupying neighboring buildings. Its hexagonal pavers were repurposed from Tompkins Square Park: they had been pulled up during the "upgrading" that followed the eviction of the park's unhoused residents. In her photographs, Morton captures the ways in which gardens serve as both forms of empowerment and, sometimes, agents of displacement.

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## **Tom Burr**

American, b. 1963

### **A Ramble in Central Park (one) 1992**

### **A Ramble in Central Park (two) 1992**

Wood, model building materials, and plexiglass

Courtesy the artist and Bortolami, New York

The late 1980s marked the height of the ongoing AIDS crisis and a period of increasing privatization and gentrification in New York City. Tom Burr began looking closely at public spaces like parks and public restrooms—sites that were "illustrative both of disappearing public realms as we had come to know them, but also of gay male signification." Wandering Central Park and Prospect Park, both designed by Frederick Law Olmsted in the nineteenth century, Burr noted the ways in which people occupied these spaces against the grain of their state-sanctioned uses.

In these sculptures, Burr focuses on the Ramble, a wooded area of winding paths nestled within Central Park. Olmsted planted the Ramble as a "wild

garden,” dense with foliage approximating his idea of an “indigenous” landscape. This lured migratory birds, which in turn attracted bird-watchers. The secluded area has also served as a cruising ground for queer men since the early twentieth century. The first of these unintended uses became a point of pride for the park, with bird-watching celebrated in brochures Burr collected from the park’s main office; the second was unmentioned and policed. Recreating the Ramble in miniature, Burr’s models recall the artificial nature of the seemingly “wild” landscape. They also trace the unplanned paths worn into the landscape over time: known as “desire lines,” these paths reveal how public spaces can double as zones of private autonomy.

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## **Niloufar Emamifar**

### **Ocean Avenue 2022**

Wood, paint, dirt

This plank of Douglas fir wood was removed from lot 74, block 6739, in Brooklyn. The lot is six inches wide and seventy-one feet long, sandwiched between Shaare Torah, a private Jewish school, and Pescada, a sleek white-tablecloth kosher restaurant. The plank blocked access to the lot, which now exists as the gap between these buildings. Like many sliver lots in New York City, this parcel is thought to be the result of either surveying errors, the subdivision of property prior to sale, or remnants of old roads.

A real estate developer who lived across the street purchased this lot “on a lark” in 1954 at a municipal auction for twenty-five dollars. People had various reasons for bidding on such properties: for some, they were idiosyncratic gifts to buy for friends; for others, it was a symbolic gesture to own a “piece” of New York City; still others hoped for a return on their investment. In many cases, the property taxes for such lots exceeds their monetary value. The owner of this particular lot tried to dump it for years, but since the city largely stopped municipal auctions of such lots in 2010, the value of these parcels has become increasingly contingent on their adjacent properties: if the neighbors do not buy it, the lot holds minimal value and often faces foreclosure. As of February 2022, the owners of the Ocean Avenue lot owe \$1,998.49 in taxes. The lot is in the process of pending foreclosure.

In 1996, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani switched from standard foreclosure to a tax lien process: if you fail to pay property taxes, an individual investor purchases the right to the property and the taxes owed, inviting private speculation on debt. Around the same time, Giuliani attempted to auction off community gardens to private developers.

**Matthew Schrader**

American, b. 1984

**Ensemble 2018–2022**

C-prints, tape, ink, PVC

Courtesy the artist

Matthew Schrader has photographed *Ailanthus Altissima* trees growing throughout New York City since 2018, accumulating a growing archive of images, some of which are presented in this installation. The *Ailanthus* species (commonly known as “tree of heaven”) first came to the Americas in 1784, imported from China as sought-after decorative foliage for private gardens. Its reputation shifted over the ensuing centuries as the trees took root in new habitats, following the pathways of colonization and industrialization. Flourishing in disturbed and depleted soil—such as rubble-strewn lots and sidewalk cracks—able to clone themselves indefinitely, and almost impossible to kill, they are now regarded as weeds endemic to urban environments.

The same shallow root structures that allow *Ailanthus* trees to thrive in neglected areas also make them well-suited to the active construction sites of those targeted by development. Schrader tracks these dual forces in his photographs, which form a constellated record of his encounters with the tree. The ongoing project records how the trees archive both disinvestment and areas of rapid expansion and gentrification—such as Long Island City, among the fastest growing residential neighborhoods in the US, and the nearby Greenpoint waterfront.

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**Danielle De Jesus**

Nuyorican, b. 1987

**Jose and Gina 2022**

Acrylic on U.S. currency

Courtesy the artist and Calderón, New York

**We plant too 2022**

Acrylic on U.S. currency

Courtesy the artist and Calderón, New York

**Momma's garden 2022**

Acrylic on U.S. currency

Courtesy the artist and Calderón, New York

**Capicu 2022**

Acrylic on U.S. currency

Courtesy the artist and Calderón, New York

**Casita 2022**

Acrylic on U.S. currency, and table cloth fabric

Courtesy the artist and Calderón, New York

**7 stops to Manhattan from Jefferson Street 2022**

Acrylic on U.S. currency

Courtesy the artist and Calderón, New York

In this series, Danielle De Jesus reflects on the role of community gardens in Bushwick—where she grew up—as sites of communion, celebration of Nuyorican culture, and where longtime residents can “reclaim spaces that are being constricted by new developments.” These works are based on photographs taken by De Jesus largely between 2009 and 2013, before her family was priced out of the neighborhood. In them, she captures varied kinds of gardens: the makeshift green space of her mother’s fire escape; a garden where elders gathered to play dominoes; the casitas, small structures based on those commonly found in Puerto Rico, that dot many gardens in Bushwick; and the improvised garden of a nearby public housing complex. De Jesus also charts the ways that community gardens intersect with gentrification. In *7 stops to Manhattan from Jefferson Street* (2022), a young girl peers apprehensively into a community garden that has been marketed as an amenity to new residents. In *Jose and Gina* (2022), De Jesus depicts a couple who have been tending to La Finca, a garden behind her childhood home, for decades, even as the neighborhood has transformed.

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**Becky Howland**

American, b. 1951

**Airwell with Mirror 2007**

Watercolor on rice paper

Courtesy the artist

An interest in the ways that art and nature can thrive in the city’s overlooked spaces continues to inform Becky Howland’s work. This drawing was made in Howland’s basement apartment in Tribeca, which she has occupied since the 1970s. It depicts a view of the building’s air well, where she has created a miniature, semi-private garden. At the bottom of the airwell, Howland depicts a curved shard of mirror that she found on the street and incorporated into the first sculpture she made in her Tribeca studio in 1977. It is a sculpture with a purpose: placed in the air well, it reflects light from the sky into her basement premises, a portal onto the changing seasons. Her work from the 1970s to today tracks the increasing spatial constraints felt by many New York City residents, and the creative ways that artists find space for their practice.

**David L. Johnson**

American, b. 1993

**Snow** 2014

Video (color, sound)

8 min., 49 sec.

Courtesy the artist

**One Liner** 2013

Video (color, sound)

2 min., 14 sec.

Courtesy the artist

David L. Johnson makes work inspired by frequent walks throughout New York City, observing and documenting moments in which typically invisible structures of power gain legibility. In *One-Liner* (2013), shot on Johnson's iPhone, an NYPD officer paints a yellow line on the street, sequestering a portion of pavement for NYPD use, while an off-duty officer stops to question him about the origin of his painting job. In *Snow* (2014), a maintenance worker sweeps snow in front of a commercial building during a blizzard. Inside the building's lobby, real estate developer Edward Minskoff and celebrity artist Jeff Koons inaugurate the installation of Koons's sculpture of a red balloon rabbit. The focus of the video moves between these two scenes until Minskoff and Koons exit the building, walking to a car parked directly in front. In both videos, the lines and barriers that choreograph access come into relief.

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**David L. Johnson**

American, b. 1993

**Warbler** 2019

Video (color, no sound)

35 min., 26 sec.

Courtesy the artist

This video documents a black-and-white warbler moments after it collided with a building in the Hudson Yards development on the West Side of Manhattan, while anonymous passersby walk in and out of the building's nearby revolving door. Hudson Yards is the most expensive private real estate development in US history, and part of an increase in large-scale luxury buildings—often clad with sheets of glass—being constructed in parts of New York City. This video is on view as part of *Life Between Buildings*, located on the museum's third floor.

## **Poncili Creación**

Puerto Rican, est. 2012

### **Dwellers 2022**

Discarded upholstery foam coated in paint

Courtesy the artists

Influenced by a legacy of street theater, Poncili Creación infiltrates public space and fosters community through their performances, puppetry, and sculpture. As they state, “These gnomes are monuments to the countless squatters of time immemorial that have made creative use out of the surplus of capitalist rubble. May these objects, contemporary as they may be, serve as decentralized shrines to honor human resilience against the pre-established norm.” You might catch a glimpse of them throughout PS1, as well as scattered along gardens and secret locations in New York City. We invite you to keep an eye out for them.

*Dwellers* is presented as part of *Life Between Buildings*, on view on the third floor.

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## **jackie sumell & The Lower Eastside Girls Club**

**Growing Abolition** 2021–2022

Courtesy the artists

*Growing Abolition*, a multipart project by artist jackie sumell and girls from The Lower Eastside Girls Club (LESGC), will unfold gradually in PS1’s courtyard from spring to fall 2022. The installation emerges from a collaboration between sumell, LESGC, and MoMA PS1 that started in 2021. The multipart project, through which the girls explore connections between ecology and abolitionist thought, centers on this greenhouse, titled *A Solitary Greenhouse*. The greenhouse is scaled to the footprint of a solitary confinement cell in ADX Florence, a federal Supermax prison located in Colorado. More than half of the prison is located underground, depriving those incarcerated of access to sunlight and the earth’s circadian rhythms. The architectural plans for the greenhouse were informed by the lived experience of a man named Jessie, who is incarcerated at ADX. sumell has been collaborating and growing with Jessie for seven years as part of *Solitary Gardens*, an ongoing project in which incarcerated people design gardens that sumell and volunteers grow in beds scaled to the footprint of their prison cells.

Transforming a space of confinement into one of possibility, the greenhouse offers occasion for both growing and learning. Through plantings, conversations, and workshops, sumell and the girls pose questions such as: What can plants teach us about abolition, healing, and expanding our horizons of possibility? What does abolition have to do with natural building? How can gardens make space for regeneration and imagination? Reflecting on the history of community gardens in New York City, the project also



considers how urban gardens can exist as expressions of love, as much as resistance. In sumell's words: "Abolition, like growing a plant, requires daily attention and care. Love, hope, compassion, social equity—like a garden—need time, patience, practice and nurturing to fully blossom."

Each plant grown by sumell and the girls carries with it history and politics—symbolisms, medicinal uses, and cultural legacies—that teach us about the persistence of radical ecology. Planters surrounding the greenhouse offer snapshots of collaborations with local grassroots groups and gardens, unfolding over the course of the summer and fall.

To learn more about how these plants speak to abolition, visit:  
[www.growingabolition.com/plants](http://www.growingabolition.com/plants)