This proposal brings Rockaway’s diverse community together to learn and explore rich coastal plant ecology. With playful analysis and artful documentation this installation will inspire residents to become dedicated stewards of the waterfront.

A Collaboration between:
Jonathan Chesley
Alexandria Donati
Andrea Parker

We are all based in New York City and have spent much of our summers in Far Rockaway surfing, gardening, and exploring. Our previous collaborations include a number of prior and current projects for the Gowanus Canal Conservancy as well as articles published in CLOG journal.

Image List:
1 - Photographic examples of landscapes, plants and people. 2014, Shot on film and scanned, unprinted.

2 - “Making Gowanus - What’s next,” 2014, large printed banners hung on industrial fence, 4 @ 7’ x 4’, poster project describing the history and postulating a positive future for the gowanus canal

3 - “Wildflower Corridor,” 2015, wood planters and native wildflowers, 4’ L x 2’ W x 3’ H, To create a corridor for native pollinators from the Gowanus Canal to Prospect Park by building and installing wildflower planters between 2nd and 5th Ave on 9th street.
Once populated with summer escapists and year round residents, the bungalows lining beach 32nd - 56th streets were raised after a long period of disinvestment and decay. As a result, there has been a long absence of human intervention on this site allowing another kind of population to thrive, a rich habitat of coastal plants. This highly visible stretch of vacant land directly adjacent to the beach is a condition of special importance within an urban context like the Rockaways.

Since hurricane sandy, huge engineering projects have been implemented on the beach to attempt mitigating the increase in erratic and aggressive storm events. These extensive efforts of technological sophistication have ironically ignored the natural defense systems growing less than 100 feet away. As a society we feel that the earth is to be shaped like a sculpture but in fact the ocean will always shape the beach. Therefore, exploring this landscape more carefully will offer many secrets for the longevity of the Rockaways ability to be inhabitable.

This project proposes to turn these 24 blocks of vacant land into an educational site to research plant species and their relationship to the local ecology. These findings will then be presented to the rest of the community through a series of photographic/textual murals along the elevated. This will be done in two ways:

- use youth identified through one of RWA’s programs to explore, identify and map the various plant species, locations and densities within the site
- create a visual and textual catalogue of the work to be displayed along the elevated as an educational tool for the rest of the community.

While cataloging the flora and fauna, youth will learn the importance of being stewards of the land and instill in them a sense of responsibility for how their “natural” waterfront is shaped. During these explorations the children will playfully pose with their favorite plants, representing the symbiotic relationship humans must regain with their environment. Alongside these visions of metamorphosis will be taxonomic photos describing the intricate anatomy of the same plant. The only costs will be the printing of the murals and hanging them on the building.

This proposal is the start of a larger research project to create a Rockaway Beach field guide, a handbook similar to that published for the High Line Park for local residents and visitors alike. The importance of this archive is increasingly clear in the face of rising popularity of New York City’s closest beach and proposals like that for Arverne East being approved by the city. By increasing the community’s knowledge of this coastal environment the project will create active stewards to become larger stakeholders in the dialogue of the future development shaping the Rockaways. It has the potential to create a counterpoint to the typical development promoted by articles in the NY Times, Curbed NY and other publications for this area, an atypical urban “growth” model to best serve the community.

As artists, architects and landscape architects, our collaborative efforts are focused on the relationship between natural and urban environments and teach those who inhabit them to cherish and steward the land.
HUMAN PORTRAIT

STYLISTIC EXAMPLE:
Norway / Agnes II
Eyes as Big as Plates
By Riitta Ikonen and Karoline Hjorth

PLANT PORTRAIT

STYLISTIC EXAMPLE:
ROSA RUGOSA
Native
Pollinator
Host
Medicinal
Density: 16
per acre
Location: Lot
1-12, 17-26
Edible

ART INSTALLATION CONTENT
Large printed photographic murals hung on building facades
Photos erected in a line along the elevated creating a gateway to the coastal plant communities
WORK EXAMPLES - 1

PHOTOGRAPHY

Location: Far Rockaway Beach, New York
Source: Original Photography

Location: Mexico City, Mexico
Source: Original Photography

Far Rockaway Beach, New York
Source: Original Photography
MAKING GOWANUS
INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE, ART AND ECOLOGY

“A streetside exhibit and graphic guide - interpret the dynamic processes that have formed the landscape of the Gowanus Canal, currently facing significant change through Superfund remediation, long-term gentrification and rising sea levels. This exhibit communicates the beauty and complex history of the Canal in order to enrich the community's appreciation for the ground beneath their feet, the productive landscapes that have preceded them, and their potential role in determining the neighborhood's future.” - The Gowanus Canal Conservancy

Collaborators: Andrea Parker, Gena Wirth, Julia Price, The Gowanus Canal Conservancy
9TH STREET WILDFLOWER CORRIDOR
POLLINATOR HABITAT, EDUCATION, STEWARDSHIP

“The 9th Street Wildflower Corridor is about bringing beauty to the community,” said landscape designer and volunteer coordinator Alexandria Donati. “The corridor will provide a dynamic, connective path of native plants and pollinator habitats.”!