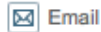


NY CULTURE | MAY 14, 2011

Far Rockaway's Far-Out Art Scene

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By PIA CATTON

A once-derelict marina in Far Rockaway is becoming fertile ground for experiments in the arts and sustainability.

Now used primarily by fishing boats, Marina 59 on Jamaica Bay near Beach 59th Street in Queens will be the summer home of ArtBloc, a nonprofit that creates mobile art units out of shipping containers.



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Krisanne Johnson for The Wall Street Journal

Marina 59 owner Ari Zablocki discusses his plans for bringing in new attractions to the marina in Far Rockaway this summer, including a container converted into an arts space.

It will also host a houseboat turned floating environmental lab dubbed Jerko the Gowanus Water Vacuum, and will become a location for Sea Worthy, a multifaceted project encouraging artistic boat-building and the use of New York's waterways.

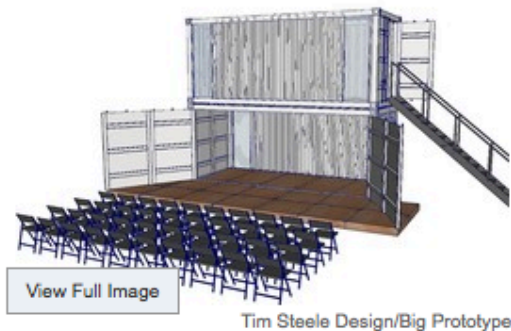
The marina's profile boost comes at the hands of owner Ari Zablocki, who committed to cleaning up the property in 2009 in an effort to reverse the area's decades of neglect. Prior to his arrival, the marina was a graveyard for decayed, abandoned boats; until last summer, its only amenity was a bait shop.

Later this month, two steel containers—20 feet long, 8 feet wide and 8 feet, 6 inches tall—will arrive at the marina courtesy of ArtBloc, founded by the husband-wife team of Angus Vail and Julie Daugherty. The containers can be set as a stage, gallery or general-event space, and the couple expects to host events such as concerts, art exhibitions and cooking demonstrations to bring more culture to Far Rockaway.

"It's an underserved area," Mr. Vail said.

Because this is ArtBloc's first venture, the kick-off date will be announced later, to allow time to deal with hiccups along the way.

Mr. Vail isn't worried: "The Clash didn't know how to play the guitars when they started," he said.



Blueprint for a performance space made from shipping containers.

Based in Jersey City, Mr. Vail and Ms. Daugherty aren't curators, but they are on the arts scene: He has managed the business affairs of rock bands (including INXS) since 1988, and she's a physical therapist for American Ballet Theatre. Their idea for ArtBloc came in Jersey City, where they had hoped to establish an art gallery. The property they wanted wasn't available, but on it sat a container.

"I thought, we could cut this open and use it as a stage in the summer," Mr. Vail said.

Manhattan-based designer Tim Steele produced renderings in collaboration with Big Prototype, a design firm in Red Hook, Brooklyn. Flexibility and mobility were the priorities, said Mr. Steele, who designed cut-outs that can be fitted with pop-in windows or used as walkways depending on the configuration. TRS Containers of Avenel, N.J., implemented the designs.

"We cut out openings and welded in a structural frame," said Frank Staropoli, the special-projects manager for TRS, which has transformed containers into climate-monitoring labs and pop-up stores. Prices for used 20-foot containers run between about \$3,300 (for those with doors at the narrow ends) and \$6,000 (with doors along the wide side, too).

The two containers will be delivered to Marina 59 via truck. Arriving by sea will be Jerko the Gowanus Water Vacuum, the houseboat renovated by Adam Katzman, coordinator of Expedition Gowanus, a group of creative environmentalists.

Mr. Katzman purchased the boat for \$1 at the 79th Street Boat Basin, then moved it to Gowanus and developed solar-energy and rain-water projects on it. "It started out as an experiment in building off-grid systems," said Mr. Katzman, who had co-owned a solar-energy company. "I'm now into low-tech, do-it-yourself projects and doing more educational work."

The move to Far Rockaway will allow the lab to be more accessible to the public than it was in Gowanus. Workshops on rain-water harvesting and building solar panels are planned, but in July and August, Jerko will primarily host a residency program that invites applicants (deadline is May 20) to try out sustainability projects—and possibly live—at sea.

The challenge is transporting the hulking boat to Marina 59 from Gowanus. "The currents between here and there are really strange," Mr. Katzman said. "This boat has had so many additions, it doesn't sit in the water as it was originally designed to."




In addition to Jerko and ArtBloc, the marina will host boats created under the auspices of Sea Worthy, a joint project of Flux Factory, the Long Island City-based art collective; the Gowanus Studio Space, a workshop for creative types; and EFA Project Space, a program of the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts.

Sea Worthy is in part an exhibition—of installations, models and more—that will open June 10 at the EFA Project Space on West 39th Street in Manhattan. It is also a series of workshops and excursions encouraging the use of the water. About 30 artists will create work inspired by the water, including actual vessels. "They're art boats, essentially," said Flux Factory's artistic director, Jean Barberis.



Among the Sea Worthy projects at Marina 59 will be a renovated houseboat that can be rented like a hotel room. Mr. Zablocki also has plans to convert more abandoned boats into a "Boatel." "Right now," he said, "there is no place for people to stay."

The bay-side marina is positioned along a key corridor: It is a short walk from the subway (at Beach 60th St.) and the beach. And with these newcomers, this corridor could be more active than it has been in years.

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